

# Downtown targets suburbanites

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Is \$500,000 the cure for an ailing perception of downtown Cincinnati?

The neighborhood's booster group thinks so and plans to spend that much on a new advertising campaign targeting suburbanites who may think the city's urban core is more Sunni Triangle than Queen City urbane.

The campaign was announced at Thursday's annual meeting of Downtown Cincinnati Inc., a nonprofit run by corporate executives and other business leaders. Mindy Rosen, DCI vice president for communications and marketing, said the campaign would probably include TV, radio, newspaper and online ads aimed at promoting civic pride.

In its annual report on progress in the city center, DCI painted a picture of a neighborhood in resurgence. More than 100 new residential units and 26 restaurants and shops opened downtown in 2007, it said. Overall, \$110 million in new construction and renovation projects were completed last year.

Speakers cited an uptick in convention business. The National Baptist Convention and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will hold their annual meetings here in coming months; and last year the economic impact from hotel rooms booked by the local convention bureau increased by 8 percent compared with 2006.

But Mayor Mark Mallory said that's apparently not enough to convince some suburbanites that the urban core is safe.

"There are still a lot of people ... who don't believe that downtown has transformed," said Mallory, addressing the annual meeting.

"I stopped at a carwash out in Colerain Township and a woman out there told me that maybe she would come downtown if there weren't so many bodies piled up in the streets. And I thought she was joking, but she was absolutely serious," Mallory said. The woman later told him she hadn't been downtown in 17 years.

Data from DCI's annual report present a different picture. In an annual survey it conducts about perceptions of downtown, 70 percent of respondents said they felt safe in the neighborhood, 11 percentage points higher than in 2006. The report did not say in what parts of the city the survey was given.

DCI was founded in 1994 and runs programs to bolster downtown by keeping its streets clean and marketing it. It employs "Downtown Ambassadors," the 20 blue jacket-clad men and women who drive a sidewalk sweeper and walk around handing out maps and giving information to those who need it.

The group raised \$2.5 million in revenues and had \$2.4 million in expenses last year.

In his address to the meeting, DCI president David Ginsburg said he hoped the ad campaign would change the opinion of the woman who spoke to Mallory at the carwash. "Those are the people we want to speak to in ways that they can understand," he said.