



THE COMMUNITY'S INDEPENDENT VOICE

## Springs Eternal - *Gina Cuclis*

### A human portrait of the Springs

Posted on June 18, 2014 by Gina Cuclis

The Sonoma County Department of Health Services recently released a report that examines data from each of Sonoma County's 99 census tracks to determine how residents are faring in three fundamental areas of life: health, access to knowledge, and living standards.

Called "A Portrait of Sonoma County," the report was prepared by Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council. The health department commissioned the report in order to obtain a holistic framework for understanding and addressing complex human issues facing Sonoma County.

The report ranks each census track from one to 99 according to its residents' overall well-being and access to opportunity. Each census track averages about 5,000 residents.

The Springs contains three census tracks: Boyes Hot Springs West/El Verano; Boyes Hot Springs/Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente East; and Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West.

Before I share how the Springs fares in the "portrait," let me explain how well-being and access to opportunity are measured. They are measured using metrics of the American Human Development Index, or HD index. The HD index combines official government health, education and income data to create a single score expressed as a number between zero and 10. The HD index for the entire U.S. is 5.07, for California it's 5.39, and for Sonoma County it's 5.42.

Now looking at the Springs, the report shows the diversity that we would expect. However, of the Springs' three census tracks, or neighborhoods, one stands out and is of great concern: the Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West neighborhood, which ranks 96th out of 99 with an HD index of 3.41. Trailing behind Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West are the three census tracks of Santa Rosa's Roseland area.

Income and education are the reasons why this area ranks very low. The median household income based on 2012 dollars is \$19,444. A huge 45.4 percent of the adult population has less than a high school diploma, while only 17.1 percent have bachelor's degrees and only 5.8 percent have graduate or professional degrees. Even more troubling, is the low

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school enrollment rate of young people. Only 67.8 percent of residents between the ages of three and 24 are enrolled in school. One reason for low school enrollment is Latino access to preschool. Only 39 percent of Latino three and four-year-olds in Sonoma County attend preschool, while 65 percent of white three and four-year-olds attend preschool.

The Springs' two other census tracks rank above the county, state and national HD index averages. The Boyes Hot Springs West/El Verano neighborhood ranks 48 in the county with an HD index of 5.68. The Boyes Hot Springs/Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente East census track (where I live) ranks 57 with an HD index of 5.55.

Regarding these two neighborhoods' income and educational attainment data: The median household income in the Boyes Hot Springs West/El Verano neighborhood is \$29,824. Twenty-six percent of the adult population lacks a high school diploma, while 29.8 percent have bachelor's degrees and 11.5 percent have graduate or professional degrees. 85.3 percent of three to 24-years-old are enrolled in school.

The Boyes Hot Springs/Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente East neighborhood has the highest median income and adult education levels of the Spring's three census tracks: the median household income is \$30,164, only 14.2 percent of adults lack a high school diploma, 40.4 percent have bachelor's degrees, and 17.3 percent have graduate or professional degrees. The reason why this neighborhood has a lower HD index than Boyes Hot Springs West/El Verano is because its school enrollment of three to 24-year-olds is lower, at 72.6 percent.

There's one other metric used to create a HD index that I haven't mentioned yet: life expectancy at birth. I'm parsing this out, because the data is not what we would generally expect.

Generally low education and low income levels equate to low life expectancy. However, in Sonoma County and in the Springs, we have what the portrait identifies as the Latino Health Paradox. Life expectancy of Latinos in Sonoma County is 85.3 years, which is about a half-decade longer than whites, who have a life expectancy of 80.5 years. The portrait theorizes Latinos have higher life expectancy because of lower smoking and binge drinking rates, and aspects of their culture provide strong social support and family cohesion that help bolster health outcomes.

So, the life expectancy of the Springs' three census tracks is: Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West, 81.8 years; Boyes Hot Springs West/El Verano, 83 years; and Boyes Hot Springs/Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente East, 81.8 years.

You can find "A Portrait of Sonoma County" online at

[Measureofamerica.org/Sonoma](http://Measureofamerica.org/Sonoma).

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**Springs Eternal**

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