

# Community Report Card

*Examining the quality of life in Sarasota County through data and indicators*



The above illustration represents the Natural, Built, Economic, and Social environments. They are represented as a streetscape to highlight that despite being identified as separate environments, they interact to make up the whole of Sarasota County.

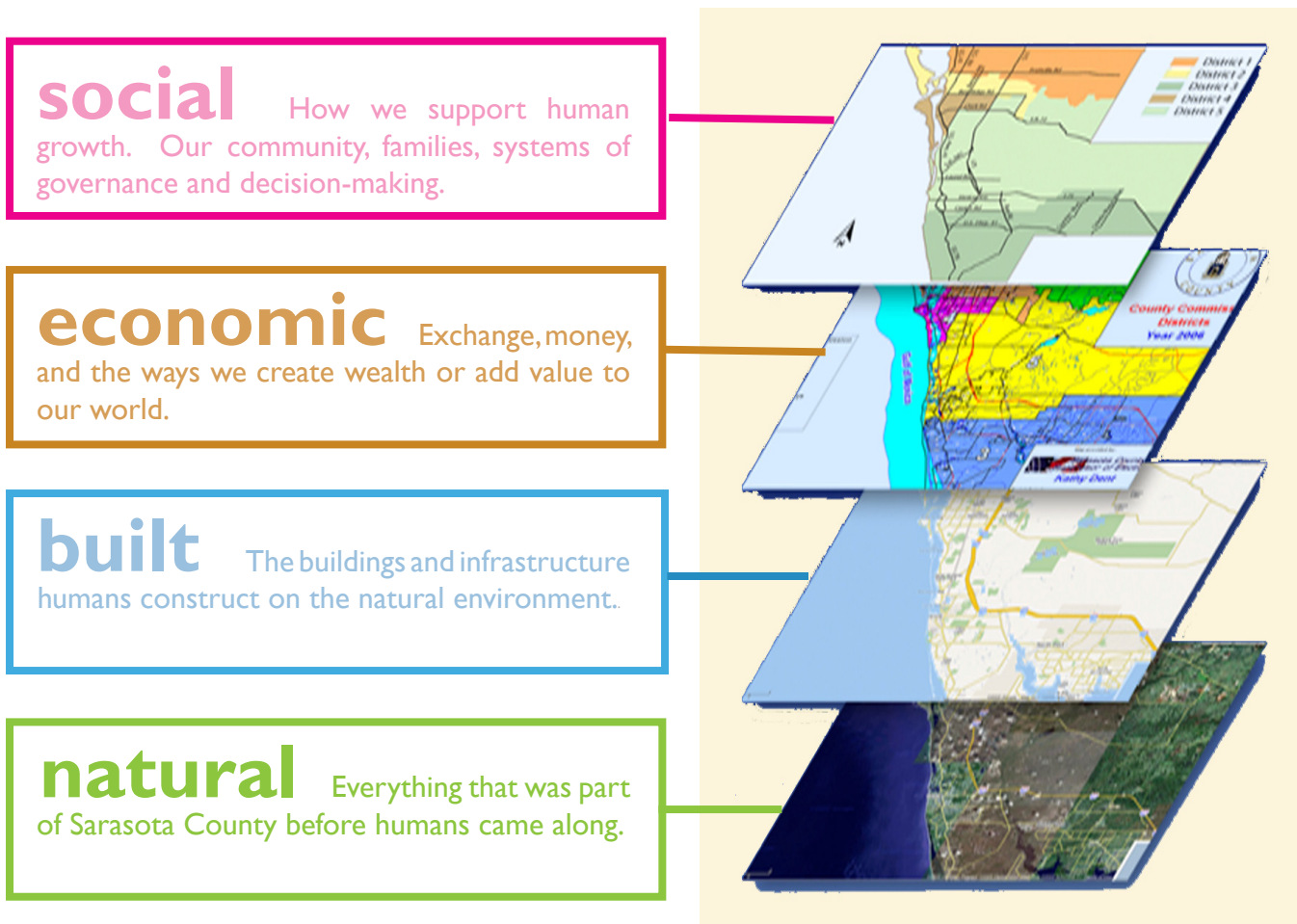
## The Social Environment

*How we support human growth.  
Our community, families, systems of  
governance and decision making.*

## 2007-2008 Community Report Card: Examining the quality of life in Sarasota County

From August 2007 through August 2008, SCOPE's *Community Report Card* will use data about our community to share information about Sarasota County's quality of life. The *Community Report Card* hopes to ask and answer questions about our community and encourages you to do the same.

The next year is split into four sections, or environments: the natural, built, economic, and social. Each environment is highlighted for three months, and each month will focus on a different indicator, or data set, that reveals information about our community. The indicators will use data to tell a story about a different aspect of life in Sarasota County.



Graphic from the Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development

Through learning about these data and what they tell us our community can put together a picture of our quality of life. Throughout the coming year SCOPE will highlight community gatherings and sources of more information on our website. If you enjoy reading the *Community Report Card* and know someone else who you think would as well, please forward this to them! If you would like to learn more, SCOPE encourages you to download these supplements. You can find more information about the supplements and the whole report on our website at [www.scopexcel.org](http://www.scopexcel.org). If you have immediate questions, comments or reactions to what you have just read, please email Kate Irwin at [kirwin@scopexcel.org](mailto:kirwin@scopexcel.org).

## Question:

***“How civically engaged is Sarasota County?”***

**W**e know you have one - we're sure of it. It may be helping animals, ending homelessness, playing on a sports team, bringing history to life, mentoring children, replenishing Sarasota Bay, being active in the political arena, promoting art, building your neighborhood association, advocating veterans issues, volunteering at your child's school or one of hundreds of other activities. What we're sure of is that everyone has at least one.

What is it for you - what is your passion?

This indicator is about bringing passion to life in the public arena. Everyone has something that they care about enough to become active about, and getting active helps to increase our sense of community and belonging. Civic engagement is not only about volunteering, although that is a component. It is also about how connected we feel to our area and neighbors and how involved we are in issues that affect us on a local, national or international scale. This installment of the Community Report Card seeks to look at Sarasota County's level of civic engagement.

## Indicator:

# ***Civic Engagement***

## ***in Sarasota County***

**This indicator measures** how our community behaves civically. Through measures of volunteerism, social connectedness and civic participation the indicator seeks to present a picture of how Sarasota County residents interact with each other and groups in our community.

## VOLUNTEERISM

**These numbers tell us** that 24.1% of people in the Sarasota Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) volunteer an average of 41.5 yearly hours per resident. The Sarasota MSA has an average volunteer rate of 24.1%. Volunteers contribute 18.8 million hours per year and an estimated \$366 million to the local economy.

### How do we compare?

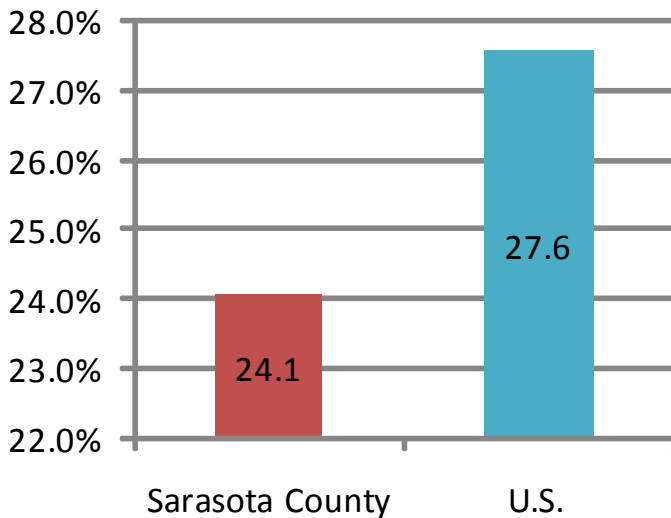
Sarasota residents volunteer at a lower rate than the nation (27.6% of the population) but

each volunteer spends more hours annually volunteering in the Sarasota MSA than in the United States (36.1 annual hours).

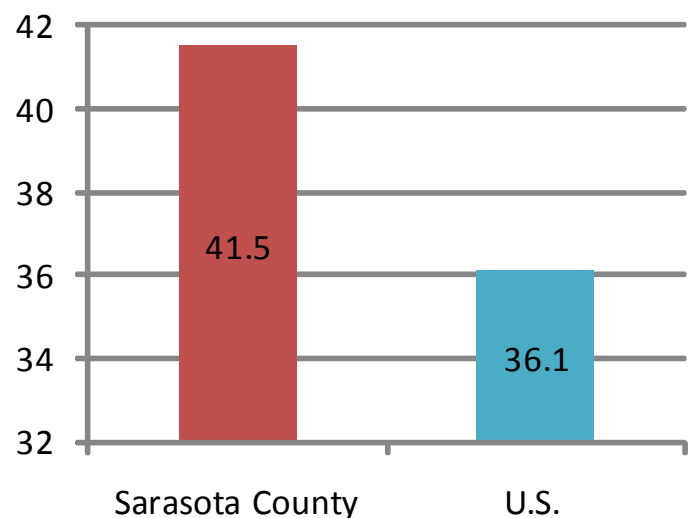
### How is this measured?

The volunteering data were collected in a monthly survey from the US Census Bureau. A volunteer is a person who performed unpaid volunteer activities through or for an organization from September 1st 2006 - September 1st 2007.

#### Sarasota County Volunteer Rate



#### Yearly Volunteer Hours Per Resident



## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

**These numbers tell us** that people 65 and older had the highest level of social trust, with 92% of respondents having a “medium” or “high” level of social trust. People 18-34 had the lowest level of social trust, with 73% of respondents having a “medium” or “high” level of social trust. 86% of residents feel somewhat or very connected to the Sarasota community as a whole and 74% feel somewhat or very connected to where they lived before moving to Sarasota County.

### How is this measured?

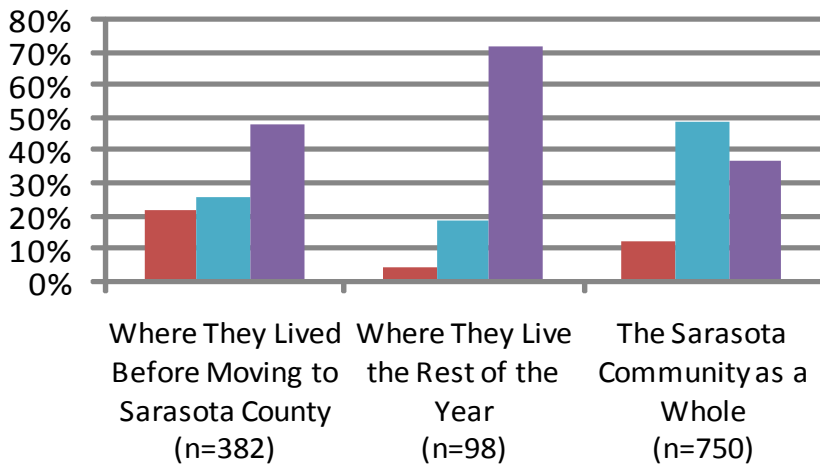
The social trust statistics are from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice’s 2003 Social

Capital Survey. 701 Sarasota County residents were surveyed. The connectedness statistics are from the United Way’s 2008 Philanthropy Report, which consisted of a phone survey of a random sample of 750 Sarasota County residents and a supplement of 68 high wealth residents.

### How do we compare?

Direct comparison data is not available. However, in a 2006 national Social Capital Survey given by Harvard researchers, 44% of people responded “people can be trusted” as opposed to 52% who responded “you can’t be too careful.” This is similar to the 48% of Sarasota County respondents who have a high level of social trust.

## Sarasota County Residents' Feeling of Connectedness



## Sarasota County Residents' Level of Social Trust

	Low	Med.	High
<b>Total</b>	14%	38%	48%
<b>Male</b>	14%	38%	48%
<b>Female</b>	13%	38%	49%
<b>18 - 34</b>	27%	33%	40%
<b>35 - 49</b>	15%	35%	50%
<b>50 - 64</b>	14%	36%	50%
<b>65 +</b>	8%	40%	52%

■ Not at all Connected ■ Somewhat Connected ■ Very Connected

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION

**These numbers tell us** that in the Sarasota-Bradenton Metropolitan Statistical Area, 3.4% of residents worked with their neighbors. A significantly higher percentage (63%) voted in the 2004 presidential election than voted in the 2000 presidential election (56%). Associational involvement is lowest for young adults and highest for 50 – 64 year olds.

## How is this measured?

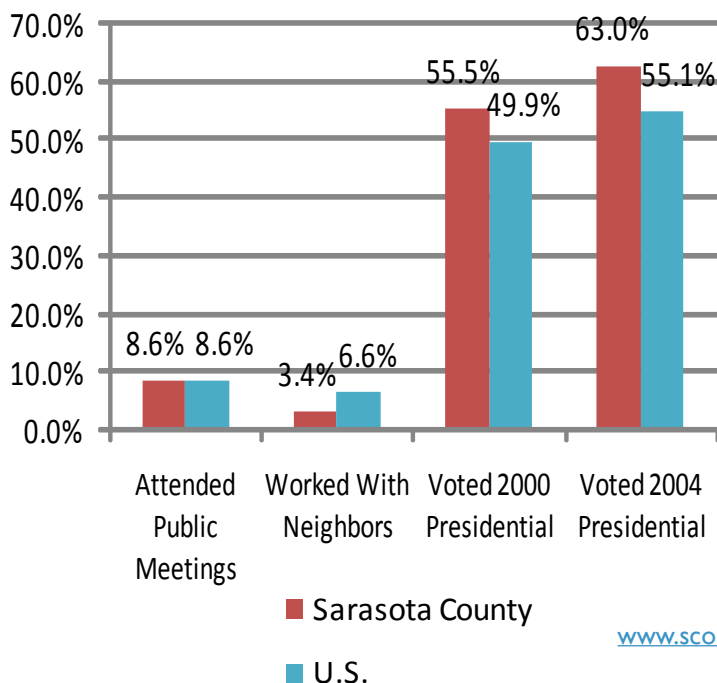
Civic Engagement data were collected via a monthly survey from the US Census Bureau. Respondents were asked about their activities from September

1st 2006 - September 1st 2007. Associational involvement was measured by survey responses from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice's 2003 Social Capital survey.

## How do we compare?

A higher percentage of Sarasota MSA residents voted in both the 2000 and 2004 election than the U.S. average. However, a lower percentage of Sarasota MSA residents (3.4%) than U.S. residents (6.6%) reported working with neighbors in the last year.

## Civic Engagement Activities



## Level of Associational Involvement

	Low	Med.	High
<b>Total</b>	27%	50%	23%
<b>Male</b>	24%	51%	25%
<b>Female</b>	29%	50%	21%
<b>18 - 34</b>	41%	42%	14%
<b>35 - 49</b>	27%	52%	21%
<b>50 - 64</b>	25%	38%	37%
<b>65 +</b>	24%	52%	24%

## Why is this important?

Research shows that joining one group decreases your chances of dying within the next year in half. Joining two groups decreases it by 75%. Overall, a community is stronger if most of its residents play a role in the civic arena. That role may take the shape of volunteer hours, association meetings, knowing one's neighbors, or active voting. Whichever specific activity occurs, the community benefits from another strong and connected citizen. The formal name for this community connectedness is social capital, which is at the heart of this indicator. Social capital is the web of relationships that gives us a sense of connection and belonging in a community. The relationships that create social capital are based on mutual respect, trust and reciprocity. Social capital includes both casual and close relationships as well as relationships among people who have much and little in common.

Both individuals and communities develop social capital, and it can be manifested in any of the ways measured in this indicator. Volunteerism is a significant measure of social capital because it highlights the voluntary ties that exist in a community. Often, these ties are bonding capital, or connections based on people's commonalities.

Both social trust and connectedness measure the 'links' that form the chain of social capital. If one has a high level of social trust, one looks favorably on strangers and acquaintances, believing in the basic goodness of community members. For a person with a high level of self-reported connectedness, the odds are that he or she feels as though they know their community. These people are likely to run into an acquaintance at the grocery store, gas station, or bookstore.

Civic participation also measures the level of social capital – particularly participation in public meetings, associations and neighborhood work. These types of relationships are often bridging capital, or connections with a variety of people who may not have a lot in common. If a person is more likely to participate in the civic sphere, he or she knows more people, has more connections and more of a network to call upon. This network of people is invaluable in times of strife (by helping one find a new job or bringing in food after a family illness) as well as in times of plenty (giving gifts for college graduation or offering to bake a birthday cake).

At the heart, social capital is about the power of people coming together to support others. There are a host of benefits to communities (and individuals) with high social capital. The more connected we are within our community, the more likely we are to have reduced incidences of a whole battery of health problems including colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression and premature death of all sorts. Higher social capital correlates strongly with reduced murders and violent crimes. These same communities also have lower dropout rates, less youth violence and children with higher SAT scores. Representative government is more responsive in communities with more social capital. Blood donations are more abundant and road rage is rarer where citizens are more involved in civic life. The above list includes only a few of the benefits from having a connected community.

## What Can I do?

This month's 'What Can I do' section is a little different. Below, please find some of the Community Building Tips from the Saguro Seminar.

- Bake cookies for new neighbors or work colleagues.
- Register to vote and vote. Call (941) 861-8600 for more information.
- Volunteer some time at a local library. Visit [suncat.co.sarasota.fl.us/Volunteers/Volunteers.aspx](http://suncat.co.sarasota.fl.us/Volunteers/Volunteers.aspx) to find out more. Or volunteer at any local organization that pursues your passion.
- Support local merchants - buy local and form a relationship with our businesspeople.
- Don't go bowling alone - form a team and join a league.
- Donate blood - and bring a friend. Visit [www.scbb.org/drives/default.htm](http://www.scbb.org/drives/default.htm) to search for local blood drives.

## Linkages

### Natural Environment:

There are many ways the natural environment can aid in community connectedness. A local example is the Orange Blossom Community Garden at Orange and 19th street. Because gardeners come from varying areas of Sarasota County, efforts like this promote bridging social capital.

### Built Environment:

How our surroundings are laid out heavily influences our chance for connecting within them. Higher levels of connectedness often start by simply seeing a person often - whether on public transit, walking in a neighborhood, or at a local cafe. Locales that promote this type of interaction help to build engagement.

### Economic Environment:

One of the reasons networking is so important to finding a job is because it works! Social connections can be invaluable to individuals, especially in times of economic hardship. Interpersonal connections can help to secure a job or contribute to helping support oneself in times of stress.

### Social Environment:

Civic engagement plays a part in almost every aspect of the social sphere. When a person becomes deeply connected with his or her community, it becomes more difficult to separate the different spheres of life (social, business, volunteer, etc.) because the people involved often overlap.

## What else would we like to know?

The number of Sarasota volunteers is lower than the US average, but hours volunteered are higher than the US average. This means Sarasota residents volunteer more hours, which may be because our average age in the Sarasota MSA is higher than the national average. However, it would be useful to learn the average age of volunteers as compared to the hours they give.

Also, because all of the data were self reported as part of telephone or in-person surveys, we do not know how accurate it is. However, there are ways to get the same data from another perspective. For example, data on volunteering could be collected from a few organizations that keep that information for their own records, and data about associational involvement could be collected from association records. While this would not exhaustively cover all volunteer hours or associational work, it would help to “fact check” the information gained through self reporting.

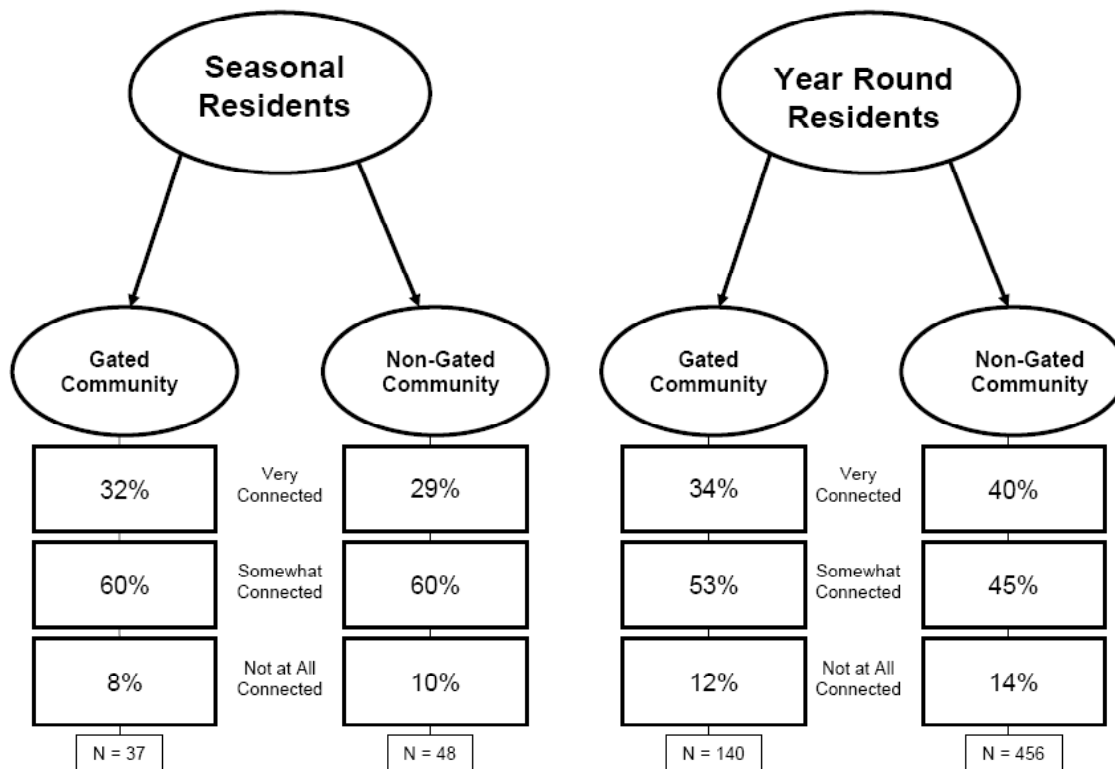
## Reservations and Caveats

The information in the “Volunteer Rate,” “Volunteer Hours Per Resident” and “Civic Participation” graphs are for the Sarasota Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes the following major cities: Sarasota, Bradenton and Venice. All of the other information is for Sarasota County only. Because of this, data from the different sources is not directly comparable.

All of the data for this indicator was collected via self-reporting, which can be inaccurate. Respondents tend to exaggerate ‘positive’ characteristics and deemphasize ‘negative’ characteristics.

**Data Sources:** *www.VolunteeringinAmerica.gov, United Way Philanthropy Study, Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice – Better Together Report, Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey & the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research Data Archive*

**References:** *The Saguro Seminar at Harvard University*  
**Illustrations** by Mark Villarreal



This graphic shows the feeling of connectedness that was self-reported by seasonal and year round residents depending on the type of community they live in. The chart is from the United Way Philanthropy Study.

## What is SCOPE ?

*“To connect and inspire citizens to create a better community.”*

SCOPE is a not-for-profit organization that focuses on building community connections. Our goal is to engage a diverse group of people in conversations to look at what we want our future to be instead of

### Connected communities have:

- Lower rates of school dropout
- An increased ownership of the decision-making process
- Lower crime rates
- Fewer colds and heart attacks

problemsolving the past. In addition to publishing a community indicators report (the *Community Report Card* you are reading), SCOPE conducts studies on topics such as Affordable Housing (2002), Mental Health (2003), and Family Violence (2004). Our two current studies are *Aging: The Possibilities* and *Race and Cultural Relations*.

<b>Indicator Releases</b>
<b>Introduction</b> August
<b>Accessibility</b> September
<b>Water Quality</b> October
<b>Connectivity</b> November
<b>Hurricane Preparation</b> December
<b>Transportation</b> January
<b>Land Use</b> February
<b>Wealth &amp; Income</b> March
<b>Jobs &amp; Industry</b> April
<b>Affordable Housing</b> May
<b>Education</b> June
<b>Health</b> July
<b>Civic Engagement</b> August

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