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Moving to Jersey: What it's like to live in Union City

By KATHRYN BRENZEL

[UNION CITY](#)--Shawn Choi never planned to move to Union City.

He had been living in Jersey City for nine years and commuting to his job in Queens. But with his wife expecting their first child next month, they needed a bigger space than their studio in Newport. They looked in Fort Lee, but were unable to find something that suited their needs, he said.

Then they found a two-bedroom condo in a recently renovated high-rise on Central Avenue. They moved into The Lenox in February.



"It was much better priced than any other location," he said. "With our budget, we're not even able to get a studio in [Newport]."

Gold Coast without a coast

Union City is part of the "Gold Coast"--the roughly 19 mile stretch along the Hudson River that spans several municipalities in Hudson and Bergen counties. Jersey City, Hoboken, Weehawken and Edgewater tend to dominate the discussion when it comes to growing demand for property in the region, and a quick drive along the waterfront partially explains why.

Union City--bounded by Jersey City, North Bergen, Weehawken, Hoboken and West New York--doesn't have waterfront property and doesn't have direct access to a PATH station or ferry. What the city does have is pedestrian-friendly residential and commercial areas that are not only close to transit options, but offer a diverse mix of restaurants, businesses and entertainment.

Tale of two cities



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While Union City doesn't have as many large-scale apartment complexes as its Gold Coast counterparts, there are a few that tower over the edge of the Palisades Cliffs, such as Troy Towers, The Altessa and The Doric. The Thread, a 15-story luxury condominium that overlooks the Lincoln Tunnel helix, opened in 2008, and was touted by realtors at the time as part of a renaissance in the city, or what the New York Times dubbed a possible "[Hobokenization](#)" of the city.

The city also won't likely toss its hat in the ring for the ongoing unofficial race to build the [tallest building in the state](#): Union City dramatically [reduced the height](#) allowed for new construction in 2012, limiting the maximum height to six stories.

The difference in price for homes in different parts of the city is pretty dramatic. The priciest property currently on the market is 308 Mountain Road, which is listed for a whopping \$7.9 million, according to New Jersey Multi-Listing Services Inc. The property, which currently has a six-, three- and two-family homes on it, has a panoramic view of New York City. The least expensive property on the market is a one-bedroom condo on 10th street, which is listed for \$68,500.

The city is a mix of new construction focused on Manhattan views and multifamily homes, said Robert Kohrs, of Garden State Realty Group. The luxury condos tend to draw young professionals, but two to three family homes are the most common, he said.

"Union City is a bifurcated city," he said. "There's sort of the old Union City, which is blue-collar, different ethnicities. If you go down Bergenline on any given Saturday or Sunday, you'll feel all that energy and vitality."

Neighborhood vibe

A bicycle ride north along busy Palisades Avenue from the Jersey City Heights shows off the city's view of the Manhattan skyline, especially in Washington Park. At the edge of the park, pedestrians can cross a bridge over Paterson Plank Road to see the city from a higher angle. The Firefighter's Memorial Park, which includes an Olympic-sized public pool, also offers impressive views to [all Hudson County residents](#) who are looking to escape the heat.

Bergenline and New York avenues are home to a wealth of Cuban, Dominican, Spanish and other Latin American restaurants and small shops, a testament to the city's strong Hispanic community. According to the latest U.S. Census, 84.7 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino. The city is colloquially known as "Havana on the Hudson" for its historically high Cuban population, but the latest Census data shows that Dominicans have outpaced this population, with Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Salvadorians not too far behind.

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The city was also formerly known as the "Embroidery Capital of the World," for the proliferation of textile mills that emerged in the early 20th century. Like much of the county's industrial past, not much remains of the moniker, save for a section of New York Avenue that was [renamed](#) "Embroidery Square" last May.

Some quick facts:

Population: 66,438

Housing units: 24,931

Median household income: \$40,763

Median rent: \$1,172

Median age: 34

Average property tax bill: \$7,456

Average residential sale price: \$274,262

Average residential property value: \$116,971

County taxes: \$16.2 million

School taxes: \$15.4 million

*Information taken from the latest U.S. Census and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs



Transit options

Though Union City doesn't have a PATH station, it has quick (depending on the time of day) access to Route 495 to the Lincoln Tunnel and several NJ Transit bus lines that go directly to Port Authority Bus Terminal. The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail's 9th Street-Congress Street station entrance near the border of Union City and the Jersey City Heights provides a quick elevator ride down into Hoboken, where you can either hop on a light rail train to various PATH stations (Hoboken Terminal and Newport) or the ferry at Port Imperial. Several jitney bus lines are also available.

Apartment complexes in the city also often offer shuttle rides directly to the PATH train. Choi said he took the shuttle offered by The Lenox to Hoboken Terminal the first few weeks after he moved in, but then started taking an NJ Transit bus, which he said makes for a faster commute.

"Everything in our area in New York facing," Kohrs said. "Just about everyone in Union City has a pretty easy Port Authority commute."