

Vail is in the Top 50!

By Incorporate Vail AZ

The secret is out! According to SmartAsset, Vail is the 35th best suburb in America, the only Arizona suburb in the Top 50, and the top ranked suburb in the western United States! Rounding out Arizona in the Top 100 are Sahuarita (63rd) and Apache Junction (79th). SmartAsset analyzed 13 metrics including jobs, affordability, and livability and ranked 494 suburbs according to their criteria. Of the top 50, only two suburbs are unincorporated Census Designated Places (CDP), Vail and Hebron, Kentucky. All the others are incorporated villages, towns, or cities.

A Census Designated Place is a statistical equivalent of incorporated places and represent unincorporated communities that do not have a legally defined boundary or an active, functioning local government structure. A CDP can be as few as a cluster of rural houses or as large as Honolulu (Hawaii has no cities, only counties) but the average CDP is about 3,500 inhabitants.

Both the definition and boundary of a Census Designated Place change regularly. They can be reshaped, annexed, incorporated, combined into other CDPs, or dissolved. And if dissolved, they may reappear if the criteria changes. While CDPs are used for statistical purposes, there are no funding mechanisms for them nor do they have any municipal rights. They are amorphous creations of the United States Census Bureau designed to aid the census collection process, nothing more.

This begs two questions: 1) How did unincorporated Vail become the best of the west, and 2) How does Vail protect and nurture this impressive designation? Clearly Vail has roots from Walter Vail, a hardiness from early settlers, an economic boost from IBM, and most recently, a culture fostered by the Vail Unified School District. There are undoubtedly other factors too such as the people of the Shrine of St. Rita, the railroad, Colossal Cave, the National Park, etc. that helped shape our culture, traditions, and ethos. Today Vail is an amalgamation of all of this but also a phantasm of existence because there is no town of Vail.

As communities grow, so must the structure. A cowboy on the range is unconstrained by social norms or societal rules. In contrast, a clerk at the busy bank must follow social protocol and adhere to an plethora of regulations. Similarly, a rural hamlet is very different than an urban megalopolis. Vail yesterday is different from Vail today or Vail tomorrow. As Lauren Bacall, the famous actress, said, "Standing still is the fastest way of moving backwards..." or as the noted actor Will Rogers said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." The same is true with Vail. We may long for yesteryear, we may not want anything to change, we may want to be left alone, but that horse has already left the barn. Vail is changing and it's being recognized.

How do we shape Vail to be the best it can be? Is it by happenstance, by census workers, or by design? Today, Vail is like salt. We can taste it but we can't describe it. Vail is on the invisible map – it has a name but no one can define it. We can continue to be at the mercy of the census bureau or we can design our own destiny. We can argue about the pros and cons of alternatives, but the only way to establish Vail to be what we want it to be, to shape our future with permanence, maintain our

character, celebrate our history, and preserve what we love is to become legitimate – the Town of Vail.
We are no longer our own best kept secret.