



Clockwise from above: 1/8 Pub, Pershing Inn, Joe Vinny & Bronson's, and the new Sun Metro Transfer Center.



Five Points Past, Present & Future

The historic center of El Paso is gaining new luster as a hub for both business and residents

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Photos by Rick Tate



The three lives of Five Points — past, present and future — all have in common the neighborhood's central role in El Paso.

Shortly after the first Five Points business association was organized, one of its members referred to the neighborhood "as near the center of El Paso as it is possible to locate a center," surrounded by what he called the "most thriving residence section" in El Paso.

The heart of Five Points is regarded as the intersection of Pershing, Piedras and Elm Streets, just north of Montana.

Today Five Points is still the heart of what's known as Central El Paso, with new businesses taking advantage of both its location and historic atmosphere. It's home to a major hub of Sun Metro, and city planners point to Five Points as an upcoming center of sustainable residential business and residential development appealing to a variety of ages and incomes.

Life One: A neighborhood with a vision

Neighborhood business has always been an important part of Five Points. When the historic area's first neighborhood association, Five Points Business Men's Association chaired by Five Points baker George W. Weston, was formed in 1917, the El Paso Times called the group "a second El Paso Chamber of Commerce."

"The Five Points Business Men's association will boost El Paso at every opportunity and continue a campaign in the central portion of the city to let residents know what they have in a business line and the benefits of trading there," The Times reported, and said any interested "citizen in the Five Points neighborhood" may join.

The name "Five Points" for the area was adopted because many of the businesses in the neighborhood were where several streets, Montana, Elm, Piedras, and East Boulevard met.

Property owner T.E. Head, an early association member, emphasized the central location as the key to its success.

"There is such a meeting of highways and intersection of street railway and jitney systems that it must necessarily follow that more people pass this location than any other spot in El Paso, with the exception of the busiest downtown district," Head said, according to a newspaper article.

At this time, the neighborhood boasted "three drug stores, five groceries, two meat markets, a restaurant, tailor shop, one of the biggest dyeing and cleaning houses in the city, two garages, a dry goods store and two oil filling stations."

Later, Five Points was also home to a significant first in the United States when the Masons purchased the Ralston Hospital there in 1922. It became the first hospital in the United States to be "established, maintained and operated by Masons and members of the Eastern Star." The Five Points Masonic Hall on Piedras, stood directly across from it. One of its services was treating many patients who traveled to drier climates like El Paso during the spread of tuberculosis in the early 20th century. The hospital operated until 1946. The property was soon purchased by Sears Roebuck & Co, which tore down the existing building and put in a Sears store. The site is now home to the El Paso Police Department Headquarters on Raynor.

Today, the history of the Five Points area can still be seen in a mural created by Jesus "Cimi" Alvarado adorning the west wall of El Paso Police headquarters.

The mural, dedicated in 2000, chronicles the various legacies of the area's community leaders who have impacted the Five Points area over time, including Federal Copper; El Paso's first female architect, Mabel Welch; Otto Thurman, another one of El Paso's early architectural leaders; the city's best known artist, Tom Lea; and Price's Creamery.

In March 1940, the Pershing Theatre movie house opened in the center of Five

Points, and remained in business until the 1980s. Photographer Marty Snortum purchased the theater in 1989, and has made it his home and studio since 1990.

Life Two: Today's People and Progress

Hipster-friendly eateries and shops and public transportation improvements are some of the standouts that help the Five Points of today draw the attention of people throughout the city.

One of the most visible ways the Five Points area acts as a center for the entire El Paso community is through the Sun Metro Robert E. McKee 5-Points Transfer Center. The "city has committed to making transit-oriented development a priority along all Bus Rapid Transit corridors," including the Five Points area, said City of El Paso Mass Transit Department's Public Information Officer Oscar Arriaga. "The Five Points Transfer Center will be a hub for both the Alameda and Dyer Brio (express bus) service coming on line in late 2018, and in the future, Montana Brio in late 2020, as all three lines will meet at Five Points Transfer Station."

He said the Five Points Transfer Station and other developments in the area are "moving in-line with Plan El Paso's Long Range vision of creating mixed-use, walkable, and livable communities."

"We are focused on local economic development opportunities, neighborhood revitalization, maintaining the character of the neighborhood and of course, increasing access to mass transit," he said.

Christina Muñoz is co-owner of Joe, Vinny & Bronson's Bohemian Café at 824 N. Piedras and recently opened a yoga studio across from the urban-style coffee-house. Five Points was a natural choice for her, she explained.

"We live in the (Five Points) area, so we're part of this community," she said. "There's a good mix of everything here,

and that's what makes it so special."

She said they knew they wanted to create a place in the area, before they had even chosen what type of business.

"We saw there was so much potential, and we wanted to do something awesome," Muñoz said, but admitted they were taking a risk building in a spot they weren't sure would be discovered. She took some inspiration from neighborhood businesses in other communities.

"You travel to bigger cities, and you see these districts that cater to the different neighborhoods," she said.

The risk paid off, and the café has been in business nearly seven years.

Other business owners have also taken notice of Five Points. The 1/8 Pizza Pub and Dewey's Corner Pub have joined Joe, Vinny & Bronson's on the same block of Piedras. Just this past year, Salt + Honey Bakery Café opened at 801 N. Piedras. Salt + Honey owner Maggie Asfahani credits Muñoz for being among the first to give the area a change. The success of Joe, Vinny & Bronson's did much to encourage others to take a second look at Five Points.

"I live on the West Side, but I knew I didn't want to have a place that was just Westside or just Eastside," she said. "Five Points really is central to it all, and it's easy to get to from both sides."

Asfahani said people in the area have really been great, and she is even planning on extending her hours to include dinner-time in the near future.

"I'm not currently open in the evening yet, but some of the other places are, and this area is a wonderful, friendly gathering place at night," she said.

Muñoz noted while it is a good thing to see more people taking interest in the area, there always needs to be "a delicate balance" of the new coming in without disturbing the integrity of the neighborhood.

"You don't want to take away from the past, just because you bring in something new," she said.

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