

WESTLAKE'S GOLDEN (SPEEDING) TICKETS

BY ERIC NICHOLSON

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2016 | 16 DAYS AGO



Westlake is DFW's leader in traffic citations by a mile.

[Town of Westlake](#)

Westlake seems like a perfectly lovely place to live, so long as one doesn't mind **being neighbors with Glenn Beck**. It's astoundingly prosperous, with a median household income north of \$250,000, which is where the Census Bureau stops counting. Children there are automatically admitted to Westlake Academy, the charter school the town established 15 years ago as an alternative to the Southlake or Keller school districts. It has the lowest effective tax rate of any municipality in North Texas, levying a mere \$156.34 for every \$100,000 of appraised property value, 32 percent lower than in Highland Park.

Westlake is, by contrast, an awful place to drive through. When the *Observer* compiled a list two weeks ago of North Texas' **biggest speed-trap cities** (i.e., those towns in Dallas, Tarrant,

Collin and Denton counties that write the most traffic tickets per capita), Westlake came out on top by a huge margin – 5.32 tickets for each of its 1,171 residents, which was more than double the rate of second-place Pantego, which issued a mere 2.2 tickets per person.

According to Westlake police, however, our numbers, which we pulled from Texas' official online database for the period between December 2014 and November 2015 (we didn't do the calendar year because December 2015 data isn't yet available), are a bit off. Keller Police Chief Michael Wilson, whose department provides Westlake's police services under contract, says that officers in the town didn't write 6,225 citations in the town in 2015 as we reported; they wrote 7,524, thus bringing the per capita total to 6.43 tickets per resident.

Wilson contends that the numbers aren't so extraordinary as they appear. "When you look at the citation count based strictly on residential population, sure, that's going to give you concern," he says. But per capita calculations don't take into account Westlake's daytime population, which swells to about 10,000 thanks to the presence of hundreds of acres of corporate campuses. The numbers are also boosted, Wilson says, by the presence of State Highway 114, which runs along the town's northern border and carries 80,000 vehicles per day.



State Highway 114 in Westlake, prime hunting ground for police issuing tickets.

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Wilson says the approach to traffic enforcement in Westlake is identical to the approach to traffic enforcement in Keller. "Our number one goal is to ensure motoring safety by changing

driver behavior," he says. To that end, two traffic cops are stationed in Westlake, their locations each day typically announced on Keller PD's Twitter account. What roadways they focus on is determined by a combination of factors, including the number of traffic complaints fielded by the department for a given area and crash data for a specific section of road. SH 114 has long been a priority, though a 30 percent jump in traffic accidents over the past year has added urgency to enforcement efforts.

"We would love nothing better than to have zero traffic accidents," Wilson says. "That's the funny thing. People look at a traffic citation [with irritation]. It's not a major criminal offense. However, a traffic crash can impact someone immediately."

Not that one should ignore the salutary impact of the ticket-writing on Westlake's budget. Policing the town is essentially a break-even operation. The police services contract with Keller costs the town \$850,000 or so per year. Municipal court revenues, the vast majority of which come from traffic citations, average about \$700,000 per year. The bulk of this money is generated by out-of-towners. According to data presented to the Westlake Town Council last January, 86 percent of citations were issued to drivers residing outside of Westlake's 76262 ZIP code.

	Citations Issued to Individuals	Percentage of total issued	Searched	Consent	Arrested	Race known before stop	Zip Code 76262	Percentage of total citations issued to Zip 76262
All races	5555	100.00%	42	1	34	5	771	13.88%
White	4131	74.37%					640	83.01%
Black	572	10.30%					42	5.45%
Indian	27	0.49%					4	0.52%
Asian	107	1.93%					13	1.69%
Hispanic	640	11.52%					59	7.65%
Middle E	65	1.17%					13	1.69%
Other	13	0.23%					0	0.00%

That ZIP code also includes about 30,000 licensed drivers residing in Trophy Club, Southlake, Keller and elsewhere, so the number of Westlake residents hit with Westlake traffic tickets seems almost vanishingly small.

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