Pottstown people value their town

You don’t have to spend much time on The Mercury’s Facebook page, where people can comment on the news, to be overwhelmed by negativity about Pottstown.

In response to a column I recently wrote about Pottstown being a great place to live, one commenter opined, “Great place to live if you love drug sales in broad daylight. Very high taxes, a terrible school district, pot hole ridden streets, low income houses just about everywhere in town, and let’s not forget all the shootings that have been going down recently.”

Another asked, “Has the person who wrote this ever been to, much less lived in, Pottstown?”

Well, yes, I do live in Pottstown, in the same house my wife and I bought 45 years ago on Chestnut Street next to the Potts Burial Ground. Since then I’ve walked perhaps 50,000 miles around Pottstown, and my wife taught 35 years in Pottstown public schools.

We do have very high taxes and a lot of poverty, but our positives far outweigh our negatives.

A recent survey by scholars at the American Enterprise Institute found that about 75 percent of people in all demographic groups were satisfied with where they live. People reported they drew their sense of identity more from their friends, neighbors, and hometown than their political ideology or ethnic group.

I think that’s true of Pottstown.

For example, consider all the negative headlines about bullying and other problems at Pottstown Middle School.

My longtime neighbors on Hanover Street, the Fettermans, who are college educated and could afford to live elsewhere, put all four of their children in Pottstown public schools.

Patty Fetterman recently sent a letter to the Pottstown School Board which says in part, “over the past four years that my twins have been at Pottstown Middle School, I have repeatedly given them both the opportunity to leave school and do cyber/charter/home school.

“The behavior issues at that school are no joke. Every time I extend this offer, the twins reiterate how much they love school and no they do not want to leave. This year, when Mr. Rodriguez (Pottstown superintendent of schools) sent out the email about the bullying/shooting incident, we had a serious discussion about school violence over dinner.

“I offered to go to Best Buy and get them both brand new Macbooks so they could home school that night. They both - especially my daughter Lily - emphatically defended their school, how much it means to them, how much they love it. Lily told me that even if I forced them to stay home (which I can do as a parent), she would walk to school herself at 7:30 in the morning and disregard my direction.

“So... while there may be bad stuff going on inside the middle school, there is also some very good stuff happening.”

The headlines are one thing. The reality as experienced by people who actually live here may be different.