

# IF YOU'RE THINKING OF LIVING IN; ARDSLEY

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WHEN Thomas and Patricia Basini bought a house at the end of a secluded road in Ardsley, they declined to buy the property next door - a bedrock ledge. They felt overextended already. Besides, their privacy seemed as immutable as the rock.

For 15 years it was. But not long ago, a blasting crew shattered the solitude. The ledge became rubble in five days, then heavy-equipment operators spent three weeks cleaning up the mess. Today a half-million-dollar house stands on the site, and several more have risen beyond it.

"We never thought," Mrs. Basini remarked, "anything could be built there."

But builders, armed with dynamite and determination, keep devising ways to squeeze a few extra houses into this small Westchester County village. Five to 10 sites are developed each year on streets already dotted with hundreds of houses.

"What used to be undevelopable land is now selling for a premium," noted Marie J. Stimpfl, who lives with her husband and two children in a 1955 ranch-style house on Abington Avenue. They bought it for \$4,200 in 1968.

Mrs. Stimpfl has been Mayor since 1983 - the first woman to hold the \$1,000-a-year post. She is also a volunteer driver for the village's lone ambulance.

The ambulance service, like the three-engine fire department, depends solely on volunteers. And three dozen volunteers help run the village library, which moved from a rented storefront into a \$225,000 building three years ago. Hundreds of villagers chipped in to pay for it. Now a \$120,000 fund drive is under way for a community center.

That spirit of cooperation helps Ardsley sustain the second lowest tax rate among six neighboring villages. It also breeds a sense of small-town cohesiveness among the 4,200 residents who share one square mile of land.

When the high school baseball team won the state championship last year, everyone joined in the celebration. After all, this is a community where parents and children meet each other on the Little League field - and the friendships developed there grow over the years.

Off the playing field, the center of comradery is Riccio's Delicatessen, one of two dozen establishments near Ardsley Square. Fanny and Michael Riccio preside over the fresh produce, the Italian delectables and the Ardsley chatter with warmth and grace.

Not much goes unnoticed at Riccio's -especially explosions.

Across the street, a blast earlier this year caused minor damage to the only structure higher than two stories on Ardsley Square - the three-story headquarters since 1942 of RSA Corporation, a chemical research and development company.

Company officials say a rare contamination of chemicals triggered the blast. Nevertheless, local officials are now looking at a law to control "the types, amounts and storage of dangerous chemicals." In return, the company has threatened a legal battle if the village should seek to oust it.

As that episode illustrates, residents prize their safety and security. Many of them moved here to escape urban ills -pollution, poor schools, crime, congestion.

Ardsley is reassuring - the sort of place where no one can recall a murder ever occurring. The most wanted criminals of late stole figures from a Christmas creche.

"When I take people out looking for houses, they ask: Should we lock the car?" said Cheryl Mathew, a local real estate agent who never locks her own. "It takes them a while to break out of the New York City mentality."

While Ardsley is only seven miles north of the Bronx, the hilly, forested terrain makes it seem much further. The unincorporated area of the Town of Greenburgh abuts Ardsley, except to the west, where Dobbs Ferry is its neighbor.

There are three parks that offer picnicking, fishing, ice skating and ballfields. Several private swim and tennis clubs are nearby, and although Ardsley has an ample array of stores, residents tend to do their big shopping in White Plains, five miles to the west.

Access in and out of Ardsley is easy. The Saw Mill River Parkway and the Gov. Thomas E. Dewey Thruway hug it to the west; Sprain Brook Parkway is to the east. The Hudson Line of the Metro-North Commuter Railroad offers 40-minute service from Dobbs Ferry into Grand Central Station. Harlem Line trains stop at Hartsdale, two miles to the east. Either way, a monthly ticket costs \$112.

James T. Tice, an associate professor of architecture at Columbia University, moved to Ardsley two years ago from an apartment on West 78th Street in

Manhattan. "It takes me less time door to door than the subway, on a bad day, used to take from 78th to 116th Street," remarked Mr. Tice, who spends 25 minutes on the road each morning.

He moved to the village after searching for a Manhattan co-op and discovering he could afford only a "not very nice" one-bedroom unit. "Now I have lots of space, wonderful sunlight, and I hear birds in the morning," he said. "I'm on a steeply sloping site, looking out at the tops of trees. It feels a bit like a tree house."

His quarter-acre lot slopes toward Ashford Avenue, a main thoroughfare between two ridges, where Indians once traveled along a trail from the Hudson River to Long Island Sound. By the late 1600's, after the English and Dutch ran the Mohegan Indians out of the area, Frederick Philipse ruled over a vast private fiefdom that included the woodland eventually to become the village of Ashford.

By 1883, Ashford had grown big enough for its own post office. But the name already belonged to an upstate post office, so the villagers adopted the name of a local baron's estate, Ardsley.

A decade later, after the railroad cut through Dobbs Ferry, a Manhattan developer laid out 300 building lots in Ardsley, priced at \$100 and up. Electric lights, wide roads and artesian wells followed fast. So did legal constraints, such as a fine of \$2 for anyone caught "bathing in a state of nudity" between 7 A.M. and 8 P.M.

Nighttime skinny dipping was no crime. THE meanest night in Ardsley's history was in December 1914. A fire destroyed most of the business section, and the village offices and fire department. The theory was that a barber set the blaze while experimenting with explosives.

In 1938, the police bought their first patrol car, saving them the trouble of calling Tommy Wilmoth's taxi in emergencies. By the mid-50's a village manager was hired to help part-time elected officials cope with the demands of progress.

"We don't have many unpaved roads today, but we did a couple of years ago," noted Timothy C. Idoni, the current manager. "When professional people move up here from the city for open space, they want asphalt right up to their driveway."

Houses in Ardsley typically start around \$250,000 and often exceed a half-million dollars. "There are unpretentious frame houses along the main streets," commented Ms. Mathew, sales manager of Hudson Affiliates Inc., a local realty company, "but lots of super-nice homes are tucked away here and there."

Taxes on a \$300,000 house are about \$5,000 a year. Sixty percent of that goes to the Ardsley school district, which includes parts of adjoining communities. One

elementary school, one middle school and one high school serve 1,400 students. The middle school boasts a lively literary magazine. The 450-student high school has honor courses in foreign languages, sciences, math and computer studies, 35 athletic teams, and everything from a marching band to a math club. More than 90 percent of the graduating students continue their education.

Joel and Helen Ross moved to Ardsley from the Bronx last fall for their two young children,. "The schools in the Bronx weren't to our liking anymore," said Mrs. Ross, who herself teaches at Public School 89 in the Bronx.

The task of finding an affordable house almost defeated them. "We realized we were doing the impossible when we started looking in Ardsley," Mrs. Ross said. "We kept upping our price until we could go no further." Finally, for \$200,000, they bought an underpriced cookie-cutter ranch with three bedrooms.

"We wanted the area," she explained, "more than we wanted an ideal house."

#### CLAPBOARD VS. SIDING: AN ISSUE OF ESTHETICS

To help make sure no one creates a public eyesore, Ardsley established an architectural review board two decades ago. Now there's a project that many villagers think is, well, ugly. The man overseeing it, Michael Zinman, just happens to be chairman of the review board.

By day, he is chairman of Earthworm Tractor Company, a worldwide machinery supplier based in Ardsley - and cramped for space. So it recently built a structure to link its Colonial-style headquarters with a Victorian house next door.

Gone are the traditional white clapboards. Now everything is sheathed in vertical rough-wood siding. "What he did to the building is an abomination," said Beverly Levine, president of the Ardsley Historical Society. "It's a shame. Ardsley is a tiny village and we're trying very hard to preserve what little history we have."

That sort of reaction prompted Earthworm to post a sign that begins: "Dear Neighbor, It seems many of you are curious, to say the least, about what is happening here . . . ."

Mr. Zinman, who removed himself from hearings that led to approval of the project, believes the Ashford Avenue complex will be "graciously received" after the yard is landscaped this spring.

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