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HEADLINE: Community spirit spurs Arlington Heights
Suburb retains a small-town feel as its population keeps on growing

BYLINE: By Jim Sulski

BODY:

Arlington Heights has one of the largest populations in the metropolitan Chicago area.

But don't tell that to the people who live there.

They'd rather think of their suburb as a small hometown that reflects the family values one might find in a quiet Midwestern village.

"When my family first moved here, this town had everything my parents were looking for: a nice atmosphere, country life and friendly people," says Gertrude Adam, 88, who has lived in Arlington Heights since 1917.

"I personally wish the town hadn't developed as much. But nonetheless, the things here have stood up very well. Everything about the town has improved. There's nothing lacking in this town."

Adam, whose parents took her to Arlington Heights from Chicago's Northwest Side neighborhood when she was 15, says the community is still very family-oriented.

"This place is full of families and family things to do," she says.

A family lifestyle is also what led the Stevens family to Arlington Heights 73 years after the Adams.

"We were looking for a community with a lot of stability and a lot to offer for children," says Nancy Stevens, 34, who moved to Arlington Heights in December with her husband, Richard, 32, and 18-month-old son, Jake.

"We previously lived in a condominium in Evanston, and we were very happy with that," Stevens says. "But when our child was born, we started looking at buying a home and (finding) a lifestyle that we could all enjoy together. What led us here was a wonderful selection of amenities."

Those amenities include schools: Arlington Heights is served by one private and six public high schools, two public junior high schools, and eight public and four private elementary schools.

Roosevelt University offers undergraduate and graduate programs at its Northwest Campus at the former Forest View High School, 2121 S. Goebbert Rd.

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university serves about 2,500 students and offers about 250 courses each semester.

The village library is one of the largest in the northwest suburbs, offering more than 450,000 items.

The community is home to Northwest Community Hospital. The 400-bed hospital admits about 20,000 patients each year; another 200,000 are treated as outpatients. The hospital also operates a 200-bed nursing home on the site.

Recreational facilities in the village are ample. The park district has 53 neighborhood park sites on nearly 500 acres and offers about 200 programs each year. Facilities include one indoor and five outdoor swimming pools.

The village throws an annual bash called Frontier Days, a five-day 4th of July celebration with entertainment, food, a parade and a carnival. For more adult-oriented recreation, there is Arlington International Racecourse, which was rebuilt after a 1985 fire.

The community also has access to major transportation routes, such as Interstate Highway 90 and Interstate Highway 290, and Chicago and North Western commuter trains, which take many Arlington Heights workers into downtown Chicago each day.

The village is strong on community spirit, officials say.

"Despite its size, Arlington Heights has always had this feeling of community," Mayor William Maki says. "Residents of Arlington Heights truly feel involved in their community. There is just a tremendous amount of volunteerism."

The town, which calls itself the "Village of Good Neighbors," is home to many service and volunteer organizations.

They include the following youth services and activities: after-school child care operated by the park district; a school district drug and alcohol prevention program; Omni Youth Services, a counseling agency; and the Service Over Self Club at John Hersey High School, in which students donate their time to a number of causes.

Other volunteer groups include the Arlington Heights Nurses Club Lending Closet, the READ NOW Literacy/Volunteer program, the Arlington Heights Garden Club and the Arlington Heights Community Band.

"One of the things that make Arlington Heights so unique is the people," says Dee MacIntyre, executive manager of the Arlington Heights Chamber of Commerce. "We have a real strong sense of neighborhood in the village."

There is also a sense of history. The village was started in the 1850s as a stop along the Chicago and North Western railway (then known as the Illinois and Wisconsin Railroad). It was originally named Dunton, after one of its first settlers, stone cutter Asa Dunton. Other European settlers followed, starting farms on the rich land northwest of a growing Chicago.

By 1887, when the town was incorporated, it had changed its name twice: first to West Wheeling and later to Arlington Heights, which officials thought would

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ore attractive to potential home buyers.

The village's original population of 600 increased to the thousands by the early 20th Century as the town became a rural alternative to Chicago.

In the last half-century, the community has continued to attract families. Preliminary and partial 1990 census data show that Arlington Heights has a population of 75,251, placing it second in Cook County after Chicago and fourth in the greater metropolitan area after Chicago, Aurora and Naperville.

The figure is nearly 14 percent higher than the 1980 census figure of 66,116.

That population growth comes just as Arlington Heights is running out of vacant land. The dwindling supply of raw land has somewhat applied the brakes to the massive building boom of the 1980s. Hence the spotlight is shifting from new development to redevelopment, officials say.

"Some of our neighborhoods that were booming in the late 1960s and early 1970s are all maturing at the same point," Maki says. "But we have addressed that."

The village is working on infrastructure improvements such as flood control and street repair, and it brought in Lake Michigan water in 1984.

"If we maintain the community, all the other ancillary activities will follow," Maki says. "Business will continue to seek to locate in Arlington Heights, and people will continue to seek to live in Arlington Heights."

illage officials will emphasize more cohesive development, they say.

"We'll be taking a much closer look at the design of new developments, making sure they are aesthetically pleasing and that they blend in well with the existing developments," says Charles Witherington-Perkins, the village's director of planning.

Despite a slowdown in single-family housing construction, residential development accounts for slightly more than half the village's tax base. Commercial/retail development makes up about a third, and industrial makes up the rest.

A number of residential areas are being redeveloped, Witherington-Perkins says. "These are very large lots that were plotted when the community was rural. Under new village regulations, lots can be one-quarter of an acre."

Developers are buying lots of 1 acre or more, knocking down the houses and redividing the land, he says.

One such example is Somerset Court, west of Rand Road and south of Thomas Street. In the next year, five large lots that housed two homes there will be converted into 34 single-family lots.

The village also is considering several multi-family construction projects on smaller parcels.

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etail redevelopment also is taking place, especially downtown, near Northwest Highway and Arlington Heights Road.

A few years ago, the village's first redevelopment challenge was to bring life back to the dormant downtown. The plan was to revive it with high-density apartment housing and new retail space.

"The key component is having people live and work - or live and commute - from the downtown area," Witherington-Perkins says.

The first step was the construction of Dunton Towers, a 15-story apartment building with retail space on the ground floor that was completed in 1986.

Another major project was 200 Arlington Place, a development with 409 apartments and more than 40,000 square feet of retail space.

The village also created a tax increment financing district in the downtown to spur development. With the district, municipalities can pay development costs up front and repay them with the additional taxes generated by the development.

The village also offers other incentives, including a facade improvement rebate program and a program to teach marketing techniques.

The result was that 631 dwelling units, 66,800 square feet of retail space and 1,198 parking spaces in two public parking garages have been added to the downtown since redevelopment started five years ago.

"The downtown is now fairly strong from an economic standpoint," Witherington-Perkins says. "There are obviously areas (where) we'd like to see continued improvement. . . . But we're happy with the results so far."

"I think we're on track," says Dennis Kalka, Chamber of Commerce president. "The downtown has been turned around."

The area's merchants, old and new, are pleased with the downtown improvements.

"I was looking for a store location that would be in some type of European setup - I wanted an area where people walk around," says Anne Marie Eber, president of La Parfumerie Francaise, a shop that sells perfumes, cosmetics, skin care products and services such as facials and makeovers.

"I wanted to be in the center of the town," says Eber, who considered several northwest suburbs before opening her shop in Arlington Heights late last year. "And this location is great. It's right across from the train station, and we have hundreds of people walking by us - a lot of pedestrian traffic."

"The new interest in the downtown is terrific because Arlington Heights is a great place to do business," says Carl Weinrich, 76, who operated a shoe repair and merchandise store downtown for 30 years before his son David, 47, took over about eight years ago.

"The people of Arlington Heights are very loyal customers," says Weinrich, who still helps out at the store. "So we've been fortunate, and grateful, to build up a loyal following. We even have customers coming in from places such

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Crystal Lake, Palatine, Schaumburg, etc. The downtown has been good to us, it is getting even better."

Other areas of the village help create a balanced economic base, officials say.

At the north end of Arlington Heights, along and near Dundee Road, strip and indoor shopping malls can be found. They include Ridge, Town & Country and North Point Malls.

There is also the racetrack, one of the village's most noticeable commercial developments.

"We want to work with (the owners) as they reach out and try to expand their business interest beyond the Midwest," Mayor Maki says. "Remember, the racecourse still has 300 (vacant) acres at its site. At one time, it was rumored to be the site of a possible Bears stadium. So there are a lot of possibilities."

"The racetrack is also important because of the spinoff business it provides, such as visitors coming into the community and spending their dollars in the local restaurants and retail areas," Witherington-Perkins says.

The village's incentive programs also apply to its industries, officials say. Most of the industries are high-tech and are near the Northwest Tollway.

By redeveloping and refining the town's economic base, officials hope to see that the quality of life remains the same or improves.

"What's definitely foremost in everyone's minds is the idea to maintain and preserve that quality of life even though there may be no new room to grow," the Chamber of Commerce's MacIntyre says. "That may take some creative thinking, but we're on our way."

GRAPHIC: PHOTO: "When my family first moved here, this town had everything my parents were looking for," says Gertrude Adam, a 73-year resident of the village. "The values here have stood up very well."

PHOTO: "The new interest in the downtown is terrific," says Carl Weinrich (left), who turned over the helm of the family's shoe repair and merchandise store to son David about eight years ago.

PHOTO: Richard and Nancy Stevens made the decision to move to Arlington Heights in December after the birth of their son, Jake. Tribune photos by James O'Leary.

PHOTO: Anne Marie Eber (left), president of La Parfumerie Francaise, tries out one of her store's many fragrances on manager Lorelei Rojeka. Tribune photo by James O'Leary.

PHOTO: Children play in a class offered by the park district, which has 53 neighborhood park sites and offers about 200 programs each year. Tribune photo by James O'Leary.

PHOTO: Historical Society and Museum. (Page 4).

PHOTO: John Hersey High School. (Page 4).

PHOTO: Arlington Heights Memorial Library. (Page 4).

: Arlington Heights. Chicago Tribune Map.