

June 29, 2008

LIVING IN | BEDFORD PARK, THE BRONX

A Friendly Bustle, With Oases Nearby

By LAWRENCE LANAHAN

IT was either the [Bronx](#) or [Queens](#).

Jason Velez, 32, a financial adviser, and his girlfriend, RoseAnn Monterroso, 28, a consignment shop manager, had decided to move in together. He owned a one-bedroom in Bedford Park and worked nearby in Belmont. She owned a one-bedroom in Jackson Heights and commuted to Midtown.

They looked in Queens but decided they would get more for their money in Bedford Park — whose proximity to public transportation and major highways provides easy commuting to both [Manhattan](#) and [Westchester](#). “There’s the Bronx stigma,” said Mr. Velez, who grew up in Parkchester. “I thought it would be hard to convince her, but the more she saw, she started liking it.”

She sold her place, he sold his, and they bought a two-bedroom in his co-op on East 201st Street for \$178,000. They plan to redo the bath and closets with a custom job, not prefab units. “We’ll take the extra money,” Mr. Velez said, “and instead of buying something we don’t like, we’ll create something we do like.”

But Bedford Park is about more than affordability to Mr. Velez. It’s about friendliness. For instance three weeks ago his broker, David Abreu, who lives next door, visited a Manhattan comedy club to witness what Mr. Velez had billed as his first foray into stand-up. (In fact, Mr. Velez is no comedian: halfway through his “set,” he pulled Ms. Monterroso onstage, dropped to one knee and proposed. She said yes.)

Once heavily Irish and Jewish, Bedford Park in the 2000 census was 58 percent Hispanic, 17 percent white, 13 percent black and 7 percent Asian. There is a large mix of new arrivals, among them Guyanese, Albanian and Vietnamese. A Korean commercial strip occupies a block of East 204th Street.

John Dhauraj, a Guyanese immigrant who has owned a three-bedroom house on East 203rd Street for 19 years, was chatting one recent afternoon with a neighbor, Cholelle Miranda, who grew up locally and rents a place in a six-story brick apartment house two doors down. Their block is typical: tree-lined and backing up to the woodsy Mosholu Parkway, with early 20th-century single-family and multifamily houses sandwiched in among apartment buildings.

“This block is still a community,” Ms. Miranda said, and Mr. Dhauraj added, “We look out for each other.”

Like many in this middle-class area, both feel pinched by the economy.

“Let me put it to you this way,” said Mr. Dhauraj, 63, who used to work in building maintenance. “Since I retired, I got to look at the pennies. When I was working, I never looked at pennies.”

Fortunately, Mr. Dhauraj bought before the wave of subprime lending. The Bronx is the

seventh-ranked county in the nation for foreclosure-related decreases in home values, according to the Center for Responsible Lending.

But several factors insulate Bedford Park. Rental apartment buildings, which constitute a majority of housing here, are mostly immune. Typical homeowners have lived in their homes for a long time, so are less susceptible to the recent proliferation of risky loans.

Also, many buildings have gone co-op in the last 25 years, and co-ops have stringent financial requirements. "In a co-op," said Connie Amestis, president of the board at the co-op where Mr. Velez lives, "you have to put 10 or 20 percent down, so there's no way that a bank can say, 'We'll give you a mortgage with no down payment.'"

WHAT YOU'LL FIND

Bedford Park is bounded on the north by Mosholu Parkway, on the east by Webster Avenue and on the west by [Lehman College](#). The southern boundary may be anywhere from Bedford Park Boulevard to East 196th Street.

The neighborhood takes up less than half a square mile. In the 2000 census, it had about 26,000 residents and a median household income around \$30,000. Newer residents often come from elsewhere in the Bronx or northern Manhattan, although more Brooklynites have arrived lately, Ms. Amestis said.

Most housing consists of rent-stabilized buildings; a number have become co-ops. Many of the frame houses scattered in between have been converted to multifamilies. Tracey Towers, a 41-story pair of Mitchell-Lama rentals at the north end of the area, has provided middle-income housing for 35 years.

One can't walk far without happening upon green space. Residents particularly love the woods surrounding Mosholu Parkway, where they jog, bike, take their children and dogs, and sunbathe. The neighborhood abuts the [New York Botanical Garden](#), and the campus of Mount St. Ursula High School and Convent takes up four square blocks between Bainbridge and Marion Avenues.

Residents lament a lack of bank branches, and the area's commercial strips do not look as though they have changed in some time. Yet there are plans for a coffee shop near Lehman College, and the city has chosen a developer to turn the colossal Kingsbridge Armory, once a women's homeless shelter, into a mall.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY

There are about eight co-op apartments on the market in Bedford Park. Current listings and broker estimates put one-bedrooms in a range from \$125,000 to \$200,000, and two-bedrooms from \$150,000 to \$225,000. An 1,100-square-foot three-bedroom co-op on the Grand Concourse was listed at \$365,000 in April and is now down to \$310,000.

Multifamily homes are easier to find than single-families. Floyd Cooper of Cooper Group and Associates says houses list from \$375,000 to \$600,000, depending on size and location. A few on the market were built recently; most are 70 to 90 years old. "They're fairly well kept," Mr. Cooper said, "and many are still owned by old-timers."

This continuity may be a reason that the area's market hasn't taken a harder hit, brokers say. According to Mr. Abreu, prices have more than doubled over all in the last five years, with a drop of 5 percent or so in the last two.

Vatisha Smith of Coldwell Banker Previews International says that in an under-the-radar area

like Bedford Park, sellers must price aggressively. Prices here are 20 percent lower than around Yankee Stadium, for example. “That’s the area getting the most attention,” she said. “If you don’t say ‘Yankee Stadium,’ people are like, ‘What? What?’ ”

Houses are less expensive below Bedford Park Boulevard. A single-family house in the 2700 block of Marion Avenue is listed at \$249,900 — as is.

A small one-bedroom rents for \$850 a month. A two-bedroom on Mosholu Parkway rents for \$1,400, a three-bedroom on Decatur Avenue for \$1,800.

WHAT TO DO

Bedford Park is well connected to the great outdoors. To the east are the [Bronx Zoo](#) and the New York Botanical Garden. To the north and west are Van Cortlandt Park, Mosholu Parkway and Jerome Park Reservoir.

For arts and culture, Lehman College, [Fordham University](#) and Bronx Library Center are all within a half-hour’s walk. A longer walk — about 1.5 miles — ends among the Italian grocers and restaurants of Arthur Avenue.

THE COMMUTE

The D and 4 trains link the neighborhood to the East and West Sides of Manhattan and reach Midtown in just over 30 minutes. Metro-North trains run from the Botanical Garden to Grand Central in under half an hour.

For “reverse” commuters to Westchester, Mosholu Parkway connects to the Major Deegan Expressway and Saw Mill River and Bronx River Parkways.

THE SCHOOLS

Overcrowding is a major problem at Public School 8 in Bedford Park. In a recent report the city comptroller, [William C. Thompson Jr.](#), found it to be 44 percent over capacity.

At the school, which teaches kindergarten through Grade 5, 50 percent of fourth graders met standards on 2008 reading tests; 77 percent did so in math.

At Junior High School 80, which covers Grades 6, 7 and 8, 23 percent of eighth graders met standards in reading and 41 percent in math.

Bedford Park’s educational crown jewel is the Bronx High School of Science, which is highly competitive and draws gifted students from all over [New York City](#). DeWitt Clinton High School, on West Mosholu Parkway South, accepts students from all over the city, although Bronx residents have priority. SAT averages for 2007 at DeWitt Clinton were 434 in reading, 446 in math and 429 in writing, compared with citywide averages of 441, 462 and 433.

Walton High School, with 2007 SAT scores of 357, 356 and 348, will close for good this summer because of poor performance. Several smaller high schools will occupy the building, including Kingsbridge International High School, for students newly in the country.

THE HISTORY

Leonard Jerome, [Winston Churchill](#)’s grandfather, owned much of Bedford Park in the mid-19th century. In September 1866 Mr. Jerome, a horse fancier, built a racetrack on his estate where, according to The New York Times, high society mixed with “the ‘commons’ and the bookmakers.”

At the turn of the century, the city built a reservoir on the track's site. The subway arrived in the late 1910s; 20 years later, Art Deco apartment buildings went up on the Grand Concourse.

[Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)