

Neighborhood of the Week
 Real Estate
Jackson Park home to history, camaraderie Shops, atmosphere make area attractive to many
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Every Fourth of July, Sharon Stehmeier sets out 1,700 little red, white and blue flags that line the streets of the Jackson Park neighborhood. She does it because it looks pretty and because it's a good way of boosting flag-waving and patriotic spirit.

But there's also another reason.

"I do it as a way of thanking my neighbors for helping me to be a good Realtor," she said.

One of the most active Realtors in the area, Stehmeier also has been a resident of the neighborhood for the past 21 years. She figures, "Who better to speak for the neighborhood than a resident?"

Although it may pay for Stehmeier, of Re/Max Realty 100's Greenfield office, to be a big neighborhood booster, it's that personal touch and sense of pride and participation that draws home buyers to the neighborhood and makes it a pleasant and popular place to call home, residents say.

The Jackson Park neighborhood, which runs from about 27th St. to 60th St. and from Lincoln Ave. to Morgan Ave., could be considered one of Milwaukee's quintessential neighborhoods. Not only does it offer a mix of home sizes and styles from Tudors to Cape Cods, colonials, Mediterraneans and bungalows, it's also a mix of business, community and commercial centers.

St. Luke's Medical Center, at 27th St. and Oklahoma Ave., one of the state's largest hospitals, is a big employer. So is Alverno College, at 39th St. and Morgan Ave., with an enrollment of 2,000, including many who attend the school's non-traditional weekend college.

St. Sava Cathedral, on the western edge of the neighborhood, serves as a center for the Serbian community. Adjacent Serb Hall is not only popular for its Friday-night fish fries, but it has gained a reputation as a place for labor and political gatherings.

On busy 27th St., there's the city's first shopping mall, Southgate, which has been through many phases since it was built in 1950, and now, with Tuesday's approval of the Common Council, will be home to the city's first Wal-Mart store.

And one of the city's most famous landmarks, Leon's custard stand, still dishes out scoops of homemade custard on hot, summer days.

But the centerpiece and building block of the neighborhood remains rambling Jackson Park, one of the busiest parks in the city. Actually, the park developed more quickly than the neighborhood. It had electricity before some of the homes in the area, said Stehmeier. By 1932 the 130-acre park had paved sidewalks, a new pavilion, athletic fields and a swimming pool.

During a boom period in the 1920s, the neighborhood began to develop along Forest Home Ave. In 1927 Polish Catholics built Blessed Sacrament Church at 40th St. and Oklahoma Ave. Later some German Lutheran residents organized the first Jackson Park Lutheran Church on S. 49th St.

The Great Depression halted a lot of the home construction, but improvement in the park, some aided by the federal WPA projects, continued. Kinnickinnic River Parkway, east of Jackson Park, was completed, and by 1940 the park contained the newly excavated lagoon.

World War II brought everything to a standstill. But the end of war and the housing shortage created a building boom that filled out the neighborhood.

"Manitoba Park was filled with tents and barracks after the war with men coming back from war and the shortage of housing," Stehmeier said.

Many homes were built so fast that some smaller homes were built without basements, she said.

Today those homes sell for about \$60,000, while the larger homes with bigger city lots can go for as much as \$211,000, she said.

The neighborhood's average assessed value, according to the Milwaukee Department of City Development, is \$96,420.

"There's some beautiful craftsmanship -- crown moldings, beautiful wood, and some gorgeous homes in the area," Stehmeier said.

What makes the neighborhood retain its value is that those who move into the neighborhood work to keep up and improve their

homes and yards, she said.

The Jackson Park Neighborhood Association says it has a membership of 300 families and 50 businesses. It keeps residents abreast of issues in the community and organizes activities that keep the residents involved. There's a park watch that encourages neighbors to keep an eye on what's going on in the park and report vandalism or other problems, said Jane Morris, president of the association.

During the summer, the association gives a monthly award for outside home improvement to recognize and express appreciation for the efforts of residents in improving their homes, she said. Neighborhood merchants donate gift certificates for prizes.

The association also sponsors an Easter-egg hunt in the spring, nighttime Halloween trick-or-treating, Christmas caroling and a Christmas home decoration contest.

"We try to pick different houses every year to be fair and spread it around because people really do try," Morris said of the Christmas decorating event.

She remembers moving into her 1954 bungalow on the coldest day in January, when the park was covered with snow. In the spring the flowers bloomed, and in summer the park filled with picnickers. Her favorite season, though, is autumn. And for Morris, clearly the best part of living in the neighborhood is living across the street from the park.

Stehmeier and her husband moved to the neighborhood in 1978 from Illinois when her husband was transferred to a new job. They had lived in the Chicago suburbs in a new home with a big yard for their six children.

Here, they settled on a big bungalow and they loved it from the start.

"You don't really feel like you're in the city," she said. "I love the community spirit."

One of her grown, married daughters lives just down the street from her, and her husband commutes to work in Illinois, she said.

Jennifer Freckmann lived in the neighborhood, moved to suburban Oak Creek, then moved back four years ago.

"This is the best neighborhood," she said. "I love it. And I love the parks."

With small children of her own, she also likes the Christmas caroling, tree lighting and other activities.

The mother of three, Freckmann now runs the weekly Wednesday morning play group that meets year-round at Manitoba Park.

"I look forward to it as much as the kids," she said.

For working parents, the YMCA has organized summer-camp programs and activities at the parks, said County Superintendent Daniel Diliberti. Diliberti, a former president of the Jackson Park Neighborhood Association, said the neighborhood residents often are second- and third-generation.

"It's a livable neighborhood with grocery stores, hardware stores, parks and playgrounds and a lot of interaction among neighbors," he said.

Although the neighborhood still may be predominately Polish and German, it's changing and becoming more diversified with a lot more Hispanic and African-American families moving in, he said. But the constant, stabilizing force in the neighborhood continues to be home ownership and pride in that ownership, he said.

For graphic see microfilm or bound file

Map; BOB VEIERSTAHLER; JOURNAL SENTINEL; Photo color 1; DALE GULDAN; STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER; Photo color 2; Caption: Jackson Park; Jackson Park offers visitors walking, woods, water and waterfowl. The park, one of the busiest in the city, developed faster than the neighborhood around it, said Sharon Stehmeier, a 21-year resident of the area.; Jennifer Freckmann holds Megan Landru, 6 months, a friend's daughter, and watches Mariah Bukiewicz draw in Manitoba Park. Freckmann runs a neighborhood play group every week.

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