

Arlington Haven Blooms With Style

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Lyon Park celebrated its 90th birthday with its annual spring home and gardens tour. About 14 houses opened their doors, showcasing "classic older homes, newer ones that have unique additions, and homes with awesome gardens and lots of old trees," said Lyon Park Citizens Association President Natalie Roy.

The neighborhood is well kept, and many houses have undergone renovations that preserve much of their original exteriors. One of the homes included on this year's tour, Mike and Joey Durishin's 1921-built Craftsman, was renovated to preserve its original appearance. "The windows on the front are original to the house. They saved the facade, and that's what sold us," said Joey Durishin.

The tour is just one of the events that the residents of the Arlington neighborhood hold each year to supplement their \$10-a-year park membership dues. Most Arlington parks are taken care of by the county, but the grounds and building of the main park within the neighborhood -- Lyon Park -- are fully maintained by the residents of the community on a volunteer membership basis. Residents prefer it that way. Projects include playground and landscaping maintenance and, currently, renovating the community center.

Besides the tour, there's also the Spring Fair, the community yard sale, the Halloween parade and

pumpkin carving, the Thanksgiving Turkey Trot sponsored by a neighborhood church, the craft and bake fair, the carol sing-along, the pancake breakfast and the chili cook-off. Those bring in funds from residents and visitors and cover the substantial costs of maintaining the large, grassy Lyon Park and the 1925-built Lyon Park Community Center.

The 284-acre neighborhood is on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the neighborhood's oldest homes date to 1891, most were constructed by builders including Walter Sunderland and Mihran Mesrobian starting in 1919, after the land was platted as a suburb by developer Frank Lyon. Lyon, whose company was known then as Lyon and Fitch (later Lyon Properties) went on to develop other Arlington neighborhoods, including Lyon Village.

The Lyon Park houses, set among large, old trees with well-kept lawns and gardens, include a wide variety of styles, including Victorian, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Bungalow/Craftsman, Cape Cods, American Foursquare, and pre-fabricated kit houses. A number of the roughly 2,300 homes in Lyon Park are condominiums and apartments in small brick two- and three-story Colonial Revival-style buildings, mostly on the southern and eastern sides of the neighborhood.

"There are so many complementary architectural styles that it's not cookie-cutter by any means," said real estate agent Ron Cathell, who has lived in the neighborhood since 1982.

Besides a love of old homes and trees and friendly neighbors, many residents sought the community for its proximity to jobs in the District. A number bike to work, while others walk to the Clarendon Metro stop, just a block north of the neighborhood.

Clarendon has changed significantly in the past 10 years.

"When we moved in here, the area around the Metro was used-car dealerships and a few restaurants -- a few which we still enjoy today," said Ed Feeney. Now Clarendon is a bustling hub, following the construction of the Market Common about seven years ago and the subsequent influx of businesses, high-rise residential buildings, and numerous shops and restaurants.

But the Feeneys' home, which is about three-quarters of a mile from the Metro, is still far enough that there is no additional traffic on neighborhood streets. "It's usually quiet," he said.

Residents Kim and John Franklin agree. Their house is also about three-quarters of a mile from the Metro and the Clarendon shops, restaurants and businesses. It's not too far to walk for dinner or to commute by Metro and yet it's far enough that "parking isn't an issue here," John Franklin said.

Jill and Ed Feeney have lived in the neighborhood for nearly 10 years in a 1947-built stone Colonial on a double lot. They moved from about two miles away, in search of a bigger home. Jill Feeney felt comfortable in their new home immediately. She and her husband have three cats and "there are a lot of animal lovers here," she said. "People are very friendly and look out for each another."

Another thing residents like is a surprising constancy of neighbors, given the often-transient nature of the Washington area. "The great thing here is that we've been here 22 years and we're still kind of newbies," said Lynn Dorfman, who lives in a 1944-built Colonial.

Elizabeth Sheehy agrees. "The woman next door to me was born in her house," she said.

Sheehy particularly likes the large trees in the neighborhood. One recent Saturday afternoon, she planted two trees in her yard because one of her large old trees will need to be removed in a few years.

"One of the things that draws people here is that we have giant oaks up to 150 years old," Cathell said. Residents have discovered this when removing dead or dying trees from their yards, said Cathell, who has owned three different homes in the community. "Neighbors will go to great lengths to save their trees or prolong their lives," he said.

"Trees are really important to people here," said Roy, the citizens' association president.