

## Neighborly Maple Lawn

**JANENE  
HOLZBERG**  
NEIGHBORS

IT'S ALMOST AS IF TIM AND Emily Higgins willed Maple Lawn into existence.

A planned development of homes and businesses on 600 acres in southwestern Howard County, the neighborhood had yet to be advertised when the couple went in search of it more than four years ago.

At the time, they both worked in Gaithersburg near a similar mixed-use project called Kentlands. They admired its emphasis on neighborliness, with tightly packed houses built within easy walking distance of recreation, restaurants, shops and offices. But the surrounding area was too congested for them.

Hoping such a great concept might be duplicated near their Columbia home, the couple decided to check county zoning plans. Their hunch paid off when they discovered Maple Lawn Maryland in Fulton, which stretches between Johns Hopkins Road and Route 216.

"We thought it was so cool that we decided to wait for it," said Tim Higgins, a loan officer. In 2005, they moved in.

The Higgins family was among 550 residents at the fourth annual Community Fun Day on Saturday afternoon, one of many community-building events that Maple Lawn offers.

"This is where we want to raise our family, with lots of other kids, who will grow up together," said Emily Higgins, a real estate agent and mother to Maya, 2. The family was the fifth to move into the development. Now, 222 of the 1,340 planned homes are occupied, and 30 more are under construction.

The Higginses had taken part in a 50-family lottery to win a chance to purchase one of nine available lots, which came with a predetermined style of single-family home. While they got their first choice, they said they would have bought in Maple Lawn no matter what the house looked like.

"I love our home, but it's 100 percent about the neighborhood," said Emily. "We wouldn't want to live anywhere else, ever."

Catered food, live music, a Moon Bounce and face painting were offered under tents on the community center's expansive



Charity Robin visits with neighbors at Maple Lawn Community Fun Day while her dog, Sydney, explores.

S.L. ZIRKLE [SPECIAL TO SUN]

lawn, next to the Olympic-size pool. Activities were capped off that evening with a disc jockey and a fireworks display.

"This whole event is about community — it is what Maple Lawn is all about," said developer Stewart Greenebaum, partner in Greenebaum and Rose Associates.

Inspiration for Maple Lawn might have come from Kentlands and King Farm, both mixed-use developments in Montgomery County, but it was Columbia's founder, James W. Rouse, who really made it all possible, he said.

"I knew Jim, and I would like to think that this development is the second generation of what he would have done if he were alive today," he said.

Maple Lawn was conceived as a pedestrian-friendly and self-contained neighborhood, he added. Homes built on lots ranging from 4,500 to 9,500 square feet encourage interaction between neighbors. There are also sections of townhouses and condominiums.

There are three restaurants, seven retail stores, two doctors offices, a preschool and 21 companies in the development. There also are corporate and medical offices along with specialty retailers that include a spa, wine store, and lingerie shop. Pizza Fresca, an Italian bistro, will open at the end of this month.

Harris Teeter, a North Carolina-based chain of grocery stores, plans to open a 50,000-square-foot store in the fall next year. The company opened its first Howard County store in Kings Contrivance Village Center in May.

When all commercial and re-

tail construction is completed within another 10 years, it will total 1.86 million square feet of space.

"The developer's vision is for people to live, work and recreate here," said Lydia Chandlee, property manager. "This is not only idealistic, it's realistic, because it's happening."

Jose Ramirez knows firsthand. He and wife, Stacy, operate Outrageous Occasions, a special-event planning service, from their home in Maple Lawn. Fifty-five children are enrolled in a summer camp that they run on-site, and the couple arrange birthday parties and offer Kids Night Out, a child care service based in the community center Friday nights.

"My wife found this place, and the first day she brought me here I said, 'Sold!' You could just see what was going to be happening," he said. They moved into the neighborhood in 2006 and married last year.

The close proximity of everything, especially the homes, isn't for everybody.

"If you want 2 acres so you can raise German shepherds, then this neighborhood isn't for you," said Greenebaum.

Residents "are forced to interact," Tim Higgins said, since their homes are purposely built close together. "The only negative is if you want privacy. It isn't here."

Like the Higginses, Gino and Christy Hefner saw the potential in Maple Lawn, which is named after Maple Lawn Farms. Members of the Henry Iager family, who have farmed nearby since 1839, sold about 150 acres to the developers.

"I feel like this place has evolved into even more than we imagined," said Gino Hefner, who likes the frequent community get-togethers. "They've really taken it to a level that we didn't expect."

The couple, who have four children ranging in age from 2 to 10, praised the local public schools — Fulton Elementary, Lime Kiln Middle and Reservoir High — clustered together off Route 216.

"When we first moved in, there were only nine children on the [elementary] school bus, and now there are 50," said Christy. "This is an especially great place for families."

Children swarmed the pool and playground areas surrounding the community center Saturday, yet some residents did

not choose the neighborhood for its child population.

Richard Keating and his wife, June, are empty nesters who moved into Maple Lawn three years ago from a 1960s rancher on three-quarters of an acre in Laurel. They chose a larger, low-maintenance home with a first-floor master bedroom.

A vice president with a Silver Spring mortgage company, Richard Keating said the neighborhood's easy access to U.S. 29, Interstate 95 and other high-

**ON THE COVER** Tim and Emily Higgins and their daughter, Maya, 2, enjoy Community Fun Day at Maple Lawn Maryland in Fulton.

ways was a large factor in their decision. The couple are visited frequently by their four children and six grandchildren, who come from Virginia, New Jersey and Montgomery County.

### NEIGHBORS

Is someone in your neighborhood worth writing about? Is there an event that everyone in Howard County should be aware of?

Neighbors columnist Janene Holzberg wants to know about it. E-mail Janene at [jholzberg76@msn.com](mailto:jholzberg76@msn.com) or call 410-461-4150.

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