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## A Break From the Yard In Suburban Maple Lawn

By Tony Glaros  
 Special to The Washington Post  
 Saturday, July 12, 2008; Page G01

When Prasad Karunakaran lived on a half-acre in Sykesville, northwest of Baltimore, tending to his spread came with the mortgage. Over time, the novelty of mowing turned into plain drudgery.

"Cutting the grass was a nightmare," he recalled. "You try to spend weekends with your family, and you end up doing all these chores."

Eventually Karunakaran set out to simplify his life. He went house-hunting in Rockville and Gaithersburg, but he was turned off by the congestion. Someone suggested he check out a new, mixed-use community in southwest [Howard County](#) called Maple Lawn. He liked what he saw and bought a single-family house on just an eighth of an acre. "This morning, I cut the grass in 10 minutes," he said cheerily from the steps of his wind-powered house. Karunakaran buys electricity from Rockville-based Clear Currents, which generates much of its power on wind farms in Texas and the Midwest.

Karunakaran, 40, a government contractor, boosted his quality of life in another way. His office is less than a mile away in downtown Maple Lawn, which is made up of a handful of low-rise office buildings. Tenants include lawyers and financial service firms. With the soaring price of gasoline, the idea that he can walk to work in 15 minutes is satisfying, he said. He's even considering asking the staff at the homeowners association to install a bicycle rack outside his office building.

There's plenty to like about Maple Lawn, said Sharada Karunakaran, 39, a certified public accountant for her husband's business. "I like the concept. It's very mixed," she said. "There are retired people whose children are gone, and there are married couples with no kids. And the ethnicity is amazing."

Since 2004, Maple Lawn has been taking shape in semirural Fulton, two miles north of Burtonsville off Route 29. The neighborhood follows popular "neotraditional" design principles, sometimes called new urbanism. Such neighborhoods aim to recreate an old-fashioned, small-town feel in new suburban areas.

Maple Lawn's neighborhoods, many of them tree-lined, are made up of small blocks woven together to promote walking and interacting. Homes are a mix of sizes and types. The business district is young, but there's an ever-growing list of retailers, including a tapas bar, ice cream parlor and small specialty stores such as lingerie shop Bra-la-la.

At the Daily Grind, a franchise coffee shop, owner Sophie Bradford, 43, said her business has grown in fits and starts since opening two years ago.

Advertisement "Maple Lawn is an excellent concept, but it's still very new," she said as a late-morning line formed. To create more awareness after dark, Bradford sponsors Family



Prasad Karunakaran, left, chats with neighbor Pradeep Sinha in the Maple Lawn community. (By Andrew Glaros For The Washington Post)

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Game Night on the third Friday of each month. "During August, we'll have it every Friday night," she said. It brings together parents and children who play board games such as Scrabble and Monopoly.

This fall, she plans to reopen the store at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and offer "specialty drinks, live entertainment and gourmet desserts." The focus will be on adults searching for lighter fare. "You might be up late working on taxes. Parents can put their kids to bed and have a cup of coffee."

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Plans call for more than 1,300 homes -- single-family houses, townhouses, multifamily condominiums and rentals. So far, 219 have sold, said Denise Shrader of Re/Max Advantage Realty in Maple Lawn. "The people are moving here because of the attractive location" near Baltimore, Washington and Annapolis "and the lack of large lots to maintain."

Given the sluggish real estate market around the region, she said, "I think the builders have made some adjustments and are continuing to sell. In spring and summer, there are typically more sales than in fall and winter."

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## A Break From the Yard In Suburban Maple Lawn

Larry Yumkas and his family moved to Maple Lawn in late 2005 from the Village of Kings Contrivance in Columbia.

His wife, Miriam Fisher, 47, works as a lawyer in downtown Washington. "Any closer we could get her [to the District] while staying in Howard County was a plus," said Yumkas, 44, a lawyer-turned-chief executive of a consulting group in Annapolis. Staying in the county meant their children, Emily and Ben, could continue attending its top-ranked public schools.

While he found Columbia friendly, he said, "Maple Lawn is more conducive to a sense of community. In Columbia, you tend to be in a cul-de-sac so you're limited in how many people you come in contact with."

Fisher said of their six-bedroom, 5,500-square-foot house: "It looks over a horse farm across the street. One of the nice things about it is even though it is a large house, the rooms are not enormous. There's coziness to it. . . . The guest room is in a separate part of the house that's quiet. And there's a lovely patio in front of the house that has a certain privacy to it." They still shop at the [Mall in Columbia](#), she added, but for groceries, they make the short drive down Route 29 to the [Giant Food](#) in Burtonsville.

Although Metrobus does not extend into Howard County, Maple Lawn residents can park in Burtonsville, in [Montgomery County](#), and catch a bus there. State-owned buses also run from a commuter lot on Scaggsville Road. For those who prefer the train, MARC's Camden Line from Baltimore is a 10-minute ride away on Main Street in Laurel.

Long before Maple Lawn became an upscale residential and commercial project, it was -- and still is -- the name of the nearby farm that raises and sells 20,000 fresh turkeys each year during Thanksgiving week. In 1839, Henry Iager immigrated from Germany and bought the family's original 108 acres in Fulton. The family has farmed the land since. The farm had grown to as many as 1,000 acres. Eugene Iager, Henry Iager's great-great grandson, who runs the farm, said he is pleased at the way Maple Lawn is taking shape a mile east of his rolling pastures. "We only committed a small parcel -- 150 to 170 acres -- to the development," he said. "If we hadn't done it, it would still be all farmland today. Nobody wants density . . . they're trying to keep lots of open space there."

The sprawling community center is the focal point for activities that extend beyond the outdoor, Olympic-size swimming pool, said Isabella Boyd, assistant manager of the homeowners association. The list includes yoga, Pilates and wine tasting. Come summer, the soccer field is transformed into an outdoor movie theater showing family films.

"People bring their blankets and their lawn chairs and their relatives," she said. A fireworks



Prasad Karunakaran, left, chats with neighbor Pradeep Sinha in the Maple Lawn community. (By Andrew Giaros For The Washington Post)

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Late one recent afternoon, Kristina Leary was keeping a close eye on her two young sons playing in the children's pool. Leary moved from the District to Maple Lawn in February 2005, making her the first resident of the development. "We wanted to move out and get some more space but still have a feeling of community," she said. "After you move to the 'burbs you can feel isolated."

Leary, 39, admitted it was hard leaving the city and all the services it offered, such as good doctors and upscale shopping in places such as Mazza Gallerie in upper Northwest.

Being the first residents of a neighborhood wasn't easy, she said. At that time, her street had more construction workers and equipment than anything else and no street lights. "My husband traveled a lot," she said, which added to the loneliness. "Your imagination sometimes runs wild. Thank God we had a big old Lab retriever."

Trish Cott, 60, and her husband, Jerry Cott, 61, moved from their house in College Park to Maple Lawn, where they paid \$750,000 for a 5,000-square foot house complete with Palladian arches and copper drain pipes. "We didn't look anywhere else," she said.

"It's fantastic. People walk their dogs at 1 o'clock in the morning, and you can go outside and talk to them."

Cott, who works for the [Social Security Administration](#) in the District, served as a trailblazer of sorts. Since she bought at Maple Lawn, her sister, son and daughter have all followed.

"We're in the middle of all this rural paradise," she said, "and we have public water and sewer. I'm a psychologist. This has done more for my mental health. . . . it's better than [Prozac](#)."

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