

LIVING IN | EASTCHESTER, N.Y.

# *A Place to Grow and to Downsize*

By Elsa Brenner

Sept. 4, 2005

ON a sultry, late-summer afternoon, shortly before school was about to begin again, the members of one Eastchester family set off in different directions.

Melissa DiFabio, 10, swam her last laps of the season in one of the five pools at the 116-acre Lake Isle Park, a once-exclusive country club that is now owned and operated by the town.

Less than two miles away, her mother, Lori DiFabio, single and in her early 40's, scouted out back-to-school specials at the Vernon Hills Shopping Center for Melissa and her two sisters: Laura, 15, and Teresa, 13. The two older DiFabio girls set out to meet friends at Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts -- "two of the favorite local hot spots for kids that age," Ms. DiFabio said.

Ms. DiFabio has been raising her three children in Eastchester since they were infants -- first in a two-bedroom garden apartment and for the last eight years in a four-bedroom split-level house on a tree-lined street. She describes the community as one that "offers something for everyone, and where everything is convenient."

"It's the kind of suburb that makes sense even when your life changes," she said. "It was a perfect place for me when I was married, and it's a fine place for our family now. Even when the kids are grown, I plan to stay here, only I'll probably downsize as far as a house goes."

While Eastchester encompasses the villages of Tuckahoe and Bronxville, those areas tend to have their own strong identities separate in many ways from the rest of the town. It is the unincorporated area of Eastchester that has a particularly broad range of housing.

### What You'll Find

Of the 7,792 housing units in the unincorporated section of Eastchester, 53 percent are single-family homes, 32 percent are co-ops, and the remainder are rental apartments, according to Richard D. O'Donnell, the town's assessor.

As Patricia Arena, a broker in the Eastchester office of Prudential Ragette Realtors, said, "Because there's so much to chose from, the town serves a real cross section of the population."

A wide spectrum of incomes, races and religions is represented in the town, where the median household income is \$78,224, according to the 2000 census. Eastchester has Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches, and nearby in Scarsdale and New Rochelle, there are several synagogues.

Most of Eastchester's single-family homes are in developments built during the 1950's. In one of the early developments, tidy Capes and colonials that went up in the 1950's sell for about \$500,000. Nearby in another development, larger split-level and colonials built about the same time go for \$700,000.

Countywide, the median sales price for a single-family home reached an all-time high of \$700,000 in June. However, Mrs. Arena said prices in many Westchester towns appear to be dropping, with reductions on the initial asking prices.

That is true for the unincorporated area of Eastchester, she said, with one exception. Because of frenetic renovation activity on Lake Shore Drive around Lake Innisfree, housing prices are soaring "into the multimillion-dollar range," Mrs. Arena said. Homeowners are building up and out on their properties, creating huge homes.

Land has become so valuable and development pressure so intense in that neighborhood that the owners of one rundown split-level in that area recently put their unrenovated house on the market for \$1.8 million, Mrs. Arena said. When renovated and enlarged, it could command twice that amount. One newly renovated, 5,450-square-foot brick contemporary on Lake Shore Drive, with four bedrooms and five and a half bathrooms, is on the market for \$2.9 million.

### What You'll Pay

A four-bedroom, two-bath Cape Cod with 1,850 square feet is on the market in Eastchester for \$579,000, an example of the lower range of the single-family home market.

In the midrange, a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath split with 2,470 square feet is listed at \$959,000. The latter is one of a handful near Eastchester's northern border that bears a Scarsdale address and shares the glitzy 10583 ZIP code.

Also, parts of the unincorporated section share Bronxville's ZIP, 10708.

"Some people may like that, but I don't think it really means that much in terms of sale price," said Janice A. Guarino, an elementary schoolteacher who has lived in one of those homes with a Scarsdale ZIP -- a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath split-level -- for 20 years.

The Scarsdale address offers a certain cachet, and could make a house more appealing, Mrs. Arena noted. But property owners like Mrs. Guarino and her husband, Alan, a funeral director, noted that they still pay school and property taxes to Eastchester.

Most of the unincorporated section of Eastchester has the more unassuming ZIP code of 10709.

The bulk of Eastchester's co-ops are clustered next to the Scarsdale border, on Garth Road, within easy walking distance of the Scarsdale Metro-North Railroad station. The

median sales price for a co-op at the end of June was \$200,000, compared with \$170,000 for all co-ops in the county at the end of June, according to the Westchester-Putnam Multiple Listing Service.

## What to Do

Eastchester's richest gift to the public is the many opportunities it offers for sports and other recreational pursuits.

The town has five mini-parks, including Mill Road Park on one-quarter of an acre, with a Victorian-style gazebo and benches, picnic tables and a small grassy play area.

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of size and things to do is Lake Isle Park, which, besides five swimming pools, has an 18-hole golf course and six tennis courts. It is open to all residents of Bronxville, Tuckahoe and the unincorporated section of Eastchester, as well as a limited number of nonresidents, on a first-come-first-served basis.

Parkway Oval, a 14-acre park in the village of Tuckahoe, has baseball and softball fields, soccer fields, an all-purpose play field and a basketball court. The park, which is run by the

town, sits alongside a county-owned jogging and bicycle path along the Bronx River.

For those seeking a less-physical type of recreation, retail shopping opportunities abound in Eastchester. Indeed, they have been multiplying exponentially in recent years near the Vernon Hills Shopping Center.

The outdoor mall is anchored by a branch of Lord & Taylor, and has several other well-known chains as tenants, like the Gap and Banana Republic. Across the busy White Plains Post Road, a smaller strip mall has chains like Eastern Mountain Sports and Old Navy.

Nightlife is not Eastchester's calling card, although several local dining spots -- among them, Joe's Quarry Inn and Ciao Restaurant -- offer a complete menu in a casual setting.

## The Schools

The Eastchester Union Free School District, which serves students living in the unincorporated area of town, has an enrollment of 2,680 students in three elementary schools, a middle school and a high school.

The district offers a full-day kindergarten for its youngest students (along with formal computer instruction at that level), foreign language instruction that begins in sixth grade, and gifted and talented programs for all levels.

Neither the Bronxville nor Tuckahoe public school districts, which are smaller than Eastchester's, have programs for gifted and talented students outside the regular classroom.

Of the 155 seniors who graduated last spring from Eastchester High School, 79 percent are attending four-year colleges now, and 15 percent have chosen two-year schools. The remaining 6 percent have entered the work force, the school reported.

On last year's SAT's, the average scores were 553 for math and 543 on the verbal section. Statewide, the most recent averages were 510 for math and 497 for verbal.

Mrs. Guarino, who teaches in a parochial school on City Island, has opted over the years to send her three daughters -- Stephanie, 24, Danielle, 21, and Amanda 15 -- to parochial schools.

"It's not that we didn't like the public schools," she said. "It was more an issue of size. Some children do better in smaller schools. For example, Amanda transferred to a Catholic school in New Rochelle in fifth grade, because the public middle school just felt too big for her."

## The Commute

Metro-North's Harlem line stops in several places that are convenient for Eastchester residents, with one stop in downtown Scarsdale and another in the Crestwood section of Yonkers.

Service from the Crestwood station to Grand Central Terminal on a weekday morning express train takes about 36 minutes.

## The History

The town now known as Eastchester began as a farming settlement in 1664, when 10 families migrated to the area from Fairfield.

By 1818, Eastchester's first marble quarry opened, and the region produced stone that was used for the Government Printing Office and the General Post Office in Washington

and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

## What We Like

A community with plenty of green and open space for recreation is a welcome surprise so close to New York City.

## What We'd Change

The retail growth along White Plains Post Road has its pluses, but at certain times of the year, traffic congestion mounts.

---

A version of this article appears in print on , Section 11, Page 9 of the National edition with the headline: LIVING IN/Eastchester, N.Y.; A Place to Grow and to Downsize