

Tuesday, February 18, 2003

Anderson's value soars as many flock to area

But traffic is a big concern

By Randy McNutt
The Cincinnati Enquirer

ANDERSON TWP. — Anderson Township booms quietly, along back roads and busy highways.

Tucked at the bottom of Hamilton County, Anderson is physically and aesthetically removed from the northern suburbs that receive most of the attention along the Tristate's Interstate 275 beltway.

In 31 square miles, Anderson includes River Downs and Coney Island, parks and small green spaces, Mercy Anderson Hospital, the Beechmont Mall, upscale subdivisions and moderately priced homes, the growing Ancor industrial area and scattered Indian burial mounds.

"It's a 15-minute drive downtown when the conditions are right," said Township Administrator Henry Dolive. "So it's appealing for people to live here. Some years ago, we were having a single-family home start every day. Now we have 110 a year and are beginning to be built out. But Anderson's reputation has always been as a great place to live."

In Anderson, life dances to a different rhythm. Its priorities are strikingly different than neighboring Cincinnati's. Anderson invokes what local people call "quality-of-life issues," such as the 58 green spaces that pop up across the township, never to be used for anything but *space*, 10 parks and other public land (now an impressive 12 percent of total township acreage) and a calm environment in which crime has declined more than 13 percent in five years.

"It's a safe community," Dolive said. "When a woman was abducted at Beechmont Mall last year by a New Richmond man, it shocked us. This kind of thing just never happens here, and that made it jump out. Not that we are without problems. Everybody has them. But our Juvenile Court is filled mostly with test-your-wings pranks."

Anderson Township is also a community of contrasts —

DID YOU KNOW?

Ten fast facts about life in Anderson Township:

3,378: Fire and emergency medical calls Anderson Township Fire and Rescue answered in 2002.

\$93,573,145: Amount wagered by visitors to River Downs Race Track in 2002.

72: Golf holes in the township's four courses.

9,707: Hours volunteered in the Anderson Township Park District in 2002.

22: Perfect 300 [games](#) rolled at King Pin Lanes in 2002.

104,000: Cones Graeter's Ice Cream sold at its Beechmont Avenue store in 2002.

716,144: Items checked out from the Anderson branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County in 2002.

42,600: People treated at the emergency room at Mercy Hospital Anderson in 2002.

8,979: Members at the M.E. Lyons YMCA.

90: Percentage of 2002 Turpin and Anderson High School graduates continuing their educations.

- Rob Phillips

residential and business.

"I bought a small business here because the township has an excellent reputation for doing business," said Don Bock, owner of Minuteman Press, 8550 Beechmont Ave. "We have a strong chamber of commerce. I've been happy with our success. It's a terrific place, except for Beechmont Avenue's traffic."

Why is Anderson Township so popular?

Try economic and geographic convenience. The township has no payroll tax, and lower property taxes than many comparable areas. And, as Dolive has pointed out, it is not far from downtown.

In the last decade, township officials say, the median value of a home has increased by 50 percent, and the average resale price is now more than \$219,000.

"A lot of people move here because they love the community," said Russell L. Jackson Jr., president of the township's Board of Trustees. "I admit that I do, too. I like to say I'm the township's No. 1 salesman."

Despite a look of permanence, Anderson didn't spring fully-built from the hills and ravines of southern Hamilton County. In fact, the township was a rural, farming area throughout the early part of the 20th century. Anderson developed later than many other county suburbs, starting after the Beechmont Levee was built in 1950.

When the I-275 bridge opened in 1979 and I-471 was completed to downtown in 1980, Anderson Township boomed.

Now, more than 87 percent of the township's residents live in single-family, owner-occupied homes. The median income for households is an impressive \$71,000.

Yet not every house in Anderson is costly and new. Houses sell from \$78,000 to \$1.5 million, said Karen Schlosser, manager of the Coldwell Banker real estate office on Beechmont Avenue.

A part of Anderson's success stems from agreement. Long-established residents and new, young professionals with families have developed common interests and goals. In 1990, they became concerned that the township could lose its ambiance — its natural beauty — to development.

They had good reason to worry. Since its opening in 1969, Beechmont Mall and other businesses on Beechmont Avenue (Ohio 125) attracted traffic to the township. The inevitable jams developed.

"I enjoy Anderson as it is now," said Dennis Connair of the citizens' Transportation Advisory Committee, "but I can see that it will continue to evolve and that transportation issues will literally shape the township."

Connair, 43, and his family moved to Anderson from Columbia Township in 1987.

"We were interested in the school system," he said. "Now, we have five children and the sidewalk issue is a major point with us."

The township plans to build more walkways through the area to increase pedestrian traffic and reduce traffic problems. Last year, two miles of sidewalks were completed using a township road levy. More walkways are planned over the next four years to link subdivisions.

Connair said joining the TAC has allowed him to learn about issues confronting the township. "It is reassuring to see priorities are set sensibly by people who are committed to Anderson both now and in the future," he said.

Township leaders have spent the last decade trying to make up for the congestion of Beechmont Avenue.

"We only want to get so dense," Dolive said. "The new professionals want it that way. There's a tremendous amount of support for our green-space program. We consider it a quality of life service instead of an essential service.

"If you ask people what is best about Anderson, they will say: No. 1, homes; No. 2, schools; and No. 3, either parks or snow removal or paramedics."

Anderson's reputation for quality paramedic service didn't happen by accident. Next to Cincinnati, the township has the largest career (full-time) fire department in Hamilton County. Every member - all 57 firefighters - of the Anderson Township Fire and Rescue Department is also a licensed paramedic.

The township operates four fire stations with fully functional life squads. "A Mount Washington doctor said it best: 'If I'm involved in a traffic accident, drag me across the border into Anderson,'" Dolive said.

But life in Anderson Township is not totally idyllic. It can't control all of its roads - or the future. The state controls 30 miles and the county about 68 miles, leaving Anderson to tend to 114 miles. It must negotiate with the other political entities for improvement work.

"That becomes relevant when we look at Beechmont Avenue," Dolive said. "We're working to make it better. Turns on to Beechmont can be hazardous to your health."

A survey of residents late last year showed "a strong level of dissatisfaction" with a lack of aesthetics (including landscaping and signs) on Beechmont, said Steve Sievers, assistant director of the township's Development Services Department.

He suggests more trees to hide the wires and poles, as well as more safety programs for the highway.

Other problems can best be identified as questions. How do you foster a sense of community across a wide, sprawling township, and among its sometimes transient population? With the newer housing being in the high-end market, will there be sufficient housing available for couples without children and the children who grow up in Anderson?

"Most of the children of people who live here can't afford to stay," Dolive said. "There are few apartments. How do we renew generations? Some people live here only three to seven years. How do you get them to identify with and participate in the community?"

One way is to offer parks and sponsor events, such as Greater Anderson Days. Another

is to link otherwise autonomous subdivisions by the Anderson Trails hiking and biking system. About 3 miles of the proposed 23-mile trail is built, and eventually officials want to connect it with the Little Miami and Ohio River trails.

"The idea is to link subdivisions with sidewalks and provide a hiking space," Dolive said. "We want to link businesses and residential areas. It's ambitious but the plan can work, starting with our Five Mile Connector Trail."

The township is using grants and funds from the Ohio Department of Transportation to complete trails along Five Mile Road that will connect the State Road-Five Mile intersection with Newtown Road near Turpin High School. "If families want to go out on an evening and get an ice cream, they can do it without getting in their cars," said Dottie Scott, the township's safety coordinator.

As the community evolves, it strives to maintain the feeling of home that eludes so many other suburbs. To help, next year the firefighters association will finish the \$200,000 Anderson Township Firefighters Memorial at Beech Acres Park. With three flagpoles and a bronze sculpture of a firefighter, the memorial will honor fallen colleagues and more than 200 others who have served the fire department since its formation in 1940.

"It will have great visibility. ... You'll see it driving up and down Salem Road," said Gary Justice, president of the Anderson Township Fireman's Association. "The memorial part of the park will make a nice place of meditation."

But the memorial will do much more. It will provide a growing township with a sense of place and accomplishment, and, best of all, an appreciation of the past.

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