

## Residents Find Room To Grow

Metro a Key Attraction In Southeast Fairfax

By Margaret Roth

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After Al and Sandy Snyder moved into Jefferson Manor in 1947, they watched the neighborhood grow around them. Now they watch as the standard five-room duplexes edge outward to become six rooms here, seven rooms there.

The houses in the southeast Fairfax County community -- 550 duplexes, or semi-detached houses as real estate agents prefer to call them -- are modest, but not the land and location. Sitting on a tenth of an acre less than a mile from Metro's Huntington station, the average original house is 1,000 square feet with two bedrooms and a bath, a small living room, separate dining room, galley-size kitchen, front porch and an unfinished, slab-floor basement. The exterior is brick or wood frame.

Untouched, the yard is big enough for a patio, a garden and a badminton game. Add an extension to the house and there is still room for the patio and garden.

The duplexes are "sturdily built three-level homes with hardwood floors, nice yards and mature trees," said Tom Rickert, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker who lives in Jefferson Manor and has owned four houses there since 1990. The neighborhood also has two apartment complexes, which are emptying out to be redeveloped, most likely into townhouses.

But what most buyers look at first these days are the Metro station around the corner and the house prices that start in the \$300,000s. Just across North Kings Highway, the Huntington station is about a 10-minute walk.

"I think we're probably one of the most affordable neighborhoods close to the Metro," said Josh Delmonico, president of the Jefferson Manor Citizens Association. He bought his house four years ago for \$200,000. Since then sales prices have risen into the \$400,000s, as high as \$489,900 for a house with a two-story addition that backs to the 15-acre Jefferson Manor Park.

One of the larger additions belongs to Edwin and Elsie León, who doubled their floor space with an L-shaped extension that gives them room enough to raise their daughters, Natalie, 4, and Melanie, 3.

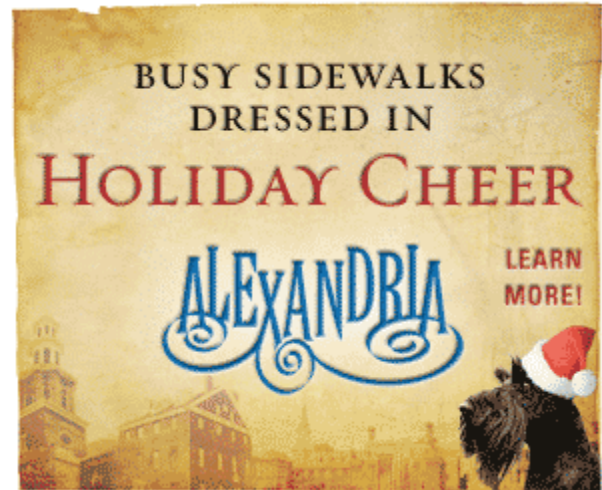
The couple bought their house in 2000 for \$113,000 and spent about \$135,000 on the addition after Elsie became pregnant with Melanie. They extended their living and dining rooms and kitchen, and added a large playroom and full bath to the back of the main floor. Upstairs, the two bedrooms became one large master bedroom, and a bedroom for each of the girls was added to the back. On the lower, below-ground floor, they remodeled the existing space to create a bathroom with shower, along with a tiled family room.

Their fenced yard still provides plenty of space for a playhouse, a sandbox and their dog, Rocky.

For the Leóns, price was the neighborhood's main attraction. "We looked around the area, but the houses were \$300,000, and we couldn't afford it," Elsie said.

Convenience played a part, too, though they do not use Metro. Edwin, a patent examiner for the U.S.

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Patent and Trademark Office, commutes by car to Alexandria.

For the size house they have, "Where would we go?" Elsie asked.

The Snyders, too, stretched their house to fit their family. When they moved in, they paid \$9,000, all they could afford. Married earlier that year, they were sergeants -- he in the Army and she in the Women's Army Corps.

The couple enclosed their front porch in the 1950s, then added onto the back to make room for their third child.

At ages 57, 54 and 46, the Snyders' children have long since left the nest. After a long stretch without many children, Jefferson Manor is now home to a new generation such as Natalie and Melanie León.

"The demographics have really started to shift," said Delmonico, a computer systems analyst for the Army. "We've probably got 15 or 20 families with little kids or newborns."

Ethnically, too, Jefferson Manor is different than in the 1960s, when the arrival of a family from Indonesia brought out neighbors in protest, to no avail, Sandy Snyder said.

Now an ethnic mix is taken for granted among the homeowners, in the Fairfax County public schools and among the businesses in the three nearby shopping centers. Within walking distance, for example, are Peruvian chicken, Tippy's Taco House and Hungarian takeout. A nearby coffeehouse, Janet's Java, is a neighborhood gathering place.

Delmonico said the citizens association (not, he points out, a homeowners association, but a community group with voluntary dues of \$10 a year) has seen a revival as the community approaches its 60th anniversary next year. In addition to being active in Neighborhood Watch and local planning discussions, the association promotes monthly social gatherings. On its Web site, people can catch up on goings-on or offer up herb cuttings.

That coziness is reinforced by the neighborhood's layout, with curving, one-way streets that discourage quick cut-throughs between Telegraph Road and North Kings Highway. It is not just the one-way signs that slow people down, however. While some streets in Jefferson Manor have been repaved and new curbs and gutters installed, large swaths of roads have not been improved since they were built. Many in the community are growing impatient as more houses and traffic are on their way with the redevelopment of the apartments and still bigger plans for Route 1, less than a mile away.

The local school, Mount Eagle Elementary, is also seen as a work in progress. Because slightly more than half of its 260 or so students have limited English, Mount Eagle is one of Fairfax County's Project Excel schools, which receive additional money to provide more classroom time, a strong concentration on literacy and limited-size classes.

"We'd like to see more money put into schools. We'd like to see more money with roads," Delmonico said.

"The sidewalks are not good for strollers," Elsie León said.

The properties' appearance also varies noticeably, although there is improvement as money is put into upgrades and additions.

The duplex houses are subject to neither covenants nor restrictions. Only Fairfax County's zoning law limits what can be built. As a result, one porch might be enclosed with glass, while another two doors down is enclosed with siding. Rarely are additions to the brick houses also done in brick.

Some of the improvements "stand out like a sore thumb; the house next to it looks like it's a shed or something," Sandy Snyder said, although she and her husband understand the need for houses to grow.

"The general look of the neighborhood has changed a lot," said Jim Martin, a Foreign Service officer and father of two children 8 and 12 years old, who has owned a house in Jefferson Manor since 1991. When he moved in, "there were very few additions," and "you had some people who took very good care of their gardens and the houses themselves, and other people whose gardens tended to be more overgrown."

He said, "Even at that time, I had the sense that it was an improving area," and it turns out he was right.

Martin bought his house for \$125,500; it recently was appraised at \$375,000, without any alterations. Now he is planning an addition.

Crime is less of a concern than ever, he said. There was a time when drug sales were a problem; Martin remembers hearing a commotion one night and stepping outside to see a drug bust in progress.

"Even then, it wasn't a place where I'd be worried walking around at night," he said.

Although the neighborhood "is still a place where most of the people have been there 10 years or less," Martin said, "one of the things that there's a lot more of in this neighborhood now that wasn't here before is a community spirit. People are starting to get to know each other more."

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