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Readers show off their ZIP appeal

Tout joys of ethnic diversity, getting more room for less

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April 6, 2008

After we published "[Alternate ZIPs](#)," describing some less-well-known but robust neighborhoods and suburbs (Real Estate, Jan. 20), it was our readers' turn.

They offered lively descriptions of their areas—their alternate ZIPs as it were. North, South, East and West—all the way to [Indiana](#)—these neighborhoods are more than home to our readers:

Chicago

HERMOSA

Roughly Belmont to Diversey Avenues and [Metra's Milwaukee District North Line](#) to the [Union Pacific Northwest Line](#)

I call my Northwest Side neighborhood BungalOasis for a good reason, says Mazurka Wojciechowska, who has lived there for four years. As my nickname implies, you can find many beautiful bungalows here, with stained-glass and leaded windows and original flower boxes and limestone decorations. Many of corners are anchored by vintage apartment buildings.

This is an area that is attracting more and more "hip" neighbors, a situation I first encountered since I was a grade-school student in the [Lincoln Park](#) neighborhood in the '60s. I have watched Lincoln Park, Old Town, [Lakeview](#) and Lincoln Square gentrify. [Hermosa](#) will be as hot. The homes here are the right size and price for artists, musicians and young professionals looking to buy a home—like my next-door neighbors—or upgrade from a condo—like me. (According to Naperville-based appraiser Chip Wagner, a single-family home in Hermosa averaged \$282,317 in the last year.)

Many of the newer neighbors such as myself have escaped the noise and congestion of trendier areas.

BungalOasis is a melting pot with Mexican, Puerto Rican, Polish, Romanian and Ukrainian families dominating. It's very bilingual.

Restaurants mirror the population, ranging from Mexican (El Mitote my favorite because it makes awesome tongue tacos) to Polish (The Red Apple, *Czerwone Jabluszko*). Wally's is the place for meat, bread and prepared Polish food. Value Village with its half-price Mondays is a great source for inexpensive clothes.

BEVERLY

Roughly from 87th to 107th Streets and Vincennes and Western Avenues



I would include Beverly, says Andrew Siegal. A diversity of beautiful homes, wide lots, mature trees and hills and a great neighborhood feel. With the Dan Ryan reconstruction complete, downtown is just 20 minutes away (30 on the Metra/Rock Island), and there is walkable commerce and diversity.

BRIDGEPORT

Roughly Stewart Avenue to Pershing Road and the [Chicago River South Branch](#)

There are so many deals with older used homes that are a steal, says Laura Dencer. Bridgeport's location is great for people who work downtown. It is a real neighborhood filled with families.

The suburbs

BERWYN

Bounded by Roosevelt and Pershing Roads and Harlem and Lombard Avenues

It's a great location, near [Oak Park](#), [River Forest](#), [Forest Park](#) and Chicago, says Alice Reimann. She and her husband have lived in Berwyn for 5 1/2 years. "When we decided to buy a home, Berwyn was the one place [where] we could afford something that didn't need any repairs," she says.

It, too, is a bastion of Chicago-style brick bungalows.

EVERGREEN PARK

Roughly Western Avenue, Pulaski Road, 87th and 103rd Streets

This can be a starter suburb or a come-and-stay-forever place. Many housing styles and price tags. (Wagner says prices averaged \$226,454 in the last year.)

New homes, updated rehabs, fixer-uppers. Mature trees and housing variety provide a homey feel. Most homes are brick and plaster with hardwood floors. They were built to last.

Warm friendly shopping and walkable or short drive to most major retailers. See the improved library. Skate at the new ice skating rink. Swim at the pool. Enjoy the famous July 4 celebration, old-fashioned parade and fireworks. Great transportation via the Metra/Rock Island. Easy expressway access via the newly rebuilt Dan Ryan. Great schools and excellent city services.

GRIFFITH

Nestled among Highland, [Hammond](#), Gary and Schererville in Lake County, Ind.

I moved here in July after stints in Albany Park, [Oak Brook](#) and [Oak Lawn](#), says Natalie Aglipay.

In 2007, I built a semi-custom home in Griffith, Ind., for \$280,000. It has four bedrooms, 3 1/2 baths, partially finished basement with a bar, attached garage, granite counters and hardwood floors. It is less than 30 minutes to Congress Parkway in Chicago and 40 minutes to [Downers Grove](#). That's closer to Chicago than Shorewood, [Joliet](#), [Bolingbrook](#) or Elgin. If you want farm country, that is only 5 minutes away.

Half my neighbors take the South Shore to work, 25 percent drive I-294 to work in the Oak Brook area or the south suburbs. The other 25 percent work in the area.

Tear-downs can start at \$80,000 to \$120,000, your typical three-bedroom two-bath, ranch house with a finished basement ranges from \$135,000 to \$175,000. (According to the Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors data, the average sales price was \$134,115 in 2007.)

The schools are very good—public and private.

OAK LAWN

Roughly Pulaski Road, Ridgeland Avenue to 87th and 111th Streets

My fiancé and I, thirtysomething professionals, chose Oak Lawn when moving from [Andersonville](#), says Kimberly T. Hofkens.

Our commutes weighed heavily into the decision. I (work) about 10 miles southwest of our house, and he is downtown once or twice a week or in the field. The convenient access to the Metra SouthWest station, which is only three stops out of downtown, and I-294 were also big selling points.

Oak Lawn has seen some great redevelopment along 95th Street, the main drag, while maintaining its established character. You see a dog walker, bicyclists or kids playing. Housing varies from traditional one-story brick ranches to newer, larger homes.

Ultimately, we wanted to live near the city in an area that offered neighborhood walkability and convenient access to urban amenities.

But we needed more space than we could afford in Oak Park or Evanston. We ended up with a wonderful home and neighbors who care about their community. We think Oak Lawn is one of the best-kept secrets of the inner-ring suburbs. (According to Re/Max Northern Illinois, the average price from October 2007 through March 31 was \$248,958.)

VILLA PARK

Bounded roughly by Ill. 83, North Avenue, Van Buren Street and Addison Road

I live in [Villa Park](#), and cannot stress enough the value here, says Sam Greco. Homes are quite affordable, and the community remains decidedly middle class. ([Wagner said single-family homes average \\$281,302.](#))

Schools are excellent and police and fire are top-notch. Plus, the community involvement. There is never a shortage of volunteers for the myriad events held here. Check out the village's Summerfest June 21.

Surrounded Elmhurst, Oak Brook, and Lombard, Villa Park is truly an island of value, adds Warren Stewart. If the restaurants, jobs, shopping and cultural advantages aren't enough, Villa Park has Metra Union Pacific West line service downtown, two walking paths (Illinois Prairie Path, and Great Western Trail), and is near the "State and Madison" of the Chicagoland expressway system (Interstates 290 and 294). It is 20 minutes from O'Hare or Midway airports, yet not in the flight path of either.

Villa Park's housing stock comprises mostly single-family homes built in two distinct eras: Craftsman-style from the teens and '20s, and a whole host of mid-century houses. scosgrove@tribune.com

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