Bill Boeckelman, Associate Broker (914) 681-5792

Coldwell Banker, 6 Cedar Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

The New York Times

Real Estate Sunday, December 25, 2005

If You're Thinking Of Living In:

Dobbs Ferry, NY

Working To Keep That Small Town Flavor

By ELSA BRENNER

MOST residents of Dobbs Ferry, like Lyle and Jerrie Miller, say they have just about everything they need close at hand: good neighbors, fine schools, broad vistas and safe streets.

New York City and White Plains may offer more choices of employment, shopping and nights out on the town. But according to the Millers, small villages like the one they live in next to the Hudson River are better suited for staying close to home and raising a family.

"If it's the movies or malls or that kind of excitement we want," Mrs. Miller said, "it's easy enough to get in the car and go there. Most of the time, though, we're just happy to stay here."

But maintaining Dobbs Ferry's small-town charm doesn't come easily. Concerned about the village's future and eager to protect its relatively easygoing way of life, Mr. Miller, a managing director at Morgan Stanley in Manhattan, ran for village trustee this fall.

He was sworn in this month, and he says his first priority will be to focus on a busy intersection in the center of the village where a Stop & Shop supermarket wants to expand. Like the newly elected mayor, Joseph J. Bova, and the five other trustees, Mr. Miller is wary of too much growth in a community with precious little land left for development.

"The long-term challenge ahead for Dobbs Ferry," Mr. Miller said, "is to maintain the qualities and character of the village that attracted all of us to begin with."

What You'll Find

A densely populated suburb 20 miles north of Midtown Manhattan, Dobbs Ferry offers a mix of two-family homes, Victorians from the 1900's, midcentury split-levels and colonials and sprawling estates.

Near the business district, the tree-lined side streets are marked by rows of modest wood-frame homes with tidy well-kept yards on lots as small as 0.10 acre. Lot sizes and houses become increasingly larger away from the business area, with estates bordering meticulously groomed country club properties on the outskirts of the village.

The commercial center of the village includes some 60 retailers on two main streets that wind down from Route 9 toward the river. On a recent snowy winter afternoon, with holiday lights glimmering and art galleries and boutiques conducting a brisk business, the quaint business area resembled a scene from an old-fashioned picture book - the main difference being a few modern-day touches, like a couple of sushi restaurants, a Buddhist center and several coffeehouses.

Even the architecture of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library, which opened in 1899 in the front parlor of a home on lower Main Street and was rebuilt two years ago, blends the past and present, especially with its distinctive clock tower. Along the river's edge, and a narrow strip of land just west of the railroad tracks, are the Metro-North Railroad depot, the Dobbs Ferry Waterfront Park,



a seafood restaurant and Livingston Ridge, a condo complex built several years ago with 3,500-square-foot units that now sell for about \$1.6 million. To the east, along Route 9, at the Ashford Avenue intersection, the Stop & Shop and its parking lot occupy the major portion of an area often referred to as the village's gateway.

"Because of the river, there isn't any way into the village by car except for Ashford Avenue or Route 9," said Mayor Bova, who owns Cary's Pharmacy on Main Street, which has been in business since 1869.

The mayor said he is leery of commercial expansion at that site, adding that he believes the streets cannot absorb any more traffic coming through the village...

What You'll Pay

The median sales price of a single-family home in the village is \$756,422, with the lowest price of a home sold in 2005 at \$230,000 and the highest at \$3.25 million, according to statistics from the Westchester-Putnam Multiple Listing Service.

A median-priced house on the market today for about \$750,000 would have sold for about \$650,000 a year ago, said Therese Militana Valvano, an associate broker at Coldwell Banker Ye Village Realty in Dobbs Ferry. Five years ago, that same house would probably have been priced at \$400,000, she said. "The last five years have been witness to a tremendous growth in prices, due mainly to the village's proximity to New

York City, its high quality of life, and crime rates that don't exist - unless you're talking about a speeding ticket," Mrs. Valvano said.

The spread in prices is wide, with houses that homeowners on a tight budget could afford listed next to homes for those with generous Wall Street bonuses. For example, a 7,000-square-foot brick colonial with nine bedrooms, five fireplaces and a slate roof, on a 2.4-acre lot near a private country club, is on the market for \$6.5 million. And at the other end of the spectrum, a 1,100-square-foot garden-style condo with three bedrooms is being offered at \$314,900.

"Because of the wide price range of houses," Mrs. Valvano said, "Dobbs Ferry is a perfect place to buy up without having to uproot your children."

The Millers, for example, bought a three-bedroom ranch in Dobbs Ferry in 1993, and sold it several years later for \$635,000, when Morgan Stanley transferred Mr. Miller to a job in China. Upon their return five years ago, the couple bought a six-bedroom English Tudor for \$1.6 million.

"We came back because of the good combination of schools and community," Mr. Miller said. "It was the right combination."

Rentals - some in apartment buildings and others in units above stores - rarely become available through the Multiple Listing Service, Mrs. Valvano said. Those transactions occur mostly by word of mouth, and a one-bedroom apartment in a renovated structure would rent for about \$1,500 a month.

Because there is almost no undeveloped space - just a few lots near the waterfront - remaining in Dobbs Ferry, there is little new construction, except in terms of expansions and major renovations of existing ranches and splits, either by speculative builders or by the owners themselves. A developer is seeking to build 12 single-family houses on 3.37 acres along the waterfront, but the permit process for the project, being called Water's Edge, is still in the very early stages, according to

Jack Goldstein, the village engineer. He said the developer must first get subdivision approval for new lots and roads.

What to Do

Restaurants representing a variety of foods are thriving in the business district, according to Robert Ponte, president of Dobbs Ferry's 65-member chamber of commerce. To promote shopping and dining close to home, the Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington and Dobbs Ferry chambers are advertising jointly in The Rivertowns Enterprise, a local weekly newspaper, to push the idea that "you don't have to go to the mall, because you can get what you need locally," Mr. Ponte said.

For outdoor recreation, there are several public parks, including the eight-acre Gould Park, which has playing fields, a swimming pool and children's playground; the three-acre Memorial Park, which has playing fields and a children's playground; and Waterfront Park, on four acres next to the river, with picnic areas and a children's playground. The Dobbs Ferry Department of Recreation is responsible for maintaining all the parks and administering programs for all age groups.

The Schools

The Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District has close to 1,400 students in three schools: Springhurst Elementary School, Dobbs Ferry Middle School and Dobbs Ferry High School.

In 1998, the high school became the first in the county to offer an international baccalaureate diploma program, in which 11th- and 12th-grade students take college preparatory courses and earn college credit. About one-fifth of junior and senior students are enrolled in the program.

The Dobbs Ferry Schools Foundation, a private nonprofit group, was created in 1994 to increase financial resources for the public school district's programs. The organization, which has raised money for academic scholarships and special programs, several years ago helped finance the purchase of a concert grand piano.

Last year, students taking the SAT exams

scored an average of 552 on the verbal section and 556 on the math, besting the state average of 511 for math and 497 for verbal, according to Elizabeth Hausman, the public information officer for the district. Of 81 students graduating from the high school last year, 80 percent are attending four-year colleges and 12 percent are enrolled in two-year colleges.

In addition to the public school district, Dobbs Ferry has two private schools: the Masters School, a coed day and boarding school for Grades 5 through 12; and Our Lady of Victory Academy, a Catholic school for girls in Grades 9 through 12.

The Commute

The drive to Midtown Manhattan south on the Saw Mill River and Henry Hudson Parkways takes 35 minutes when traffic is light, and an hour or more during the rush. Train service on Metro-North's Hudson Line is under 40 minutes during peak hours.

The History

The first known residents of what is now called Dobbs Ferry were the Weckquaesgeek Indians, who lived at the mouth of a stream now called Wicker's Creek, which leads into the Hudson. They lived off the shellfish prevalent in the water at that time.

In 1609, Henry Hudson and his Half Moon made their way up the Hudson, and by the early 1700's, the area had become a ferry landing, with service carrying passengers and supplies to Sneden's Landing across the river. The arrival of the train in 1849 began a new area of development, and by 1873, Dobbs Ferry was incorporated as a village.

What We Like

Dobbs Ferry, which offers a mix of architecture and real estate prices, appears to welcome people of all ethnicities.

What We'd Change

It is daunting to navigate the congestion at Ashford Avenue and Route 9, especially during peak hours.

