

LIVING IN

Great River a Retreat From 'Burbs

By ROBERT L. FOUCH
STAFF WRITER

FRANCES SCHAUSS doesn't have to go far to get away from the breakneck pace of people-clogged, traffic-choked Long Island. In fact, she doesn't have to go anywhere. She simply stays home. In Great River.

"It's just a little island of its own in the middle of the chaos we call Long Island," says Schauss, a 49-year-old homemaker and former teacher who has made Great River her home since 1976. The community is virtually hemmed in by tranquility, a rare thing indeed on Long Island. To the south is Heckscher State Park; to the north, Bayard Cutting Arboretum and, to the east, the Connetquot River. Timber Point Country Club is next door. And the Great South Bay is only a couple of minutes away.

"It preserves the sacred spaces that we all need for preservation of sanity," Schauss says.

Joseph Canfora makes such sanity a selling point. As owner of Century 21 Selmar Realty in East Islip, he occasionally gets to tout one of the approximately 640 homes in Great River to a prospective buyer. Not often, though. Once people move to Great River, they tend to stay awhile. (Canfora lives there himself.) Consequently, there's high demand and low supply. Canfora says the median price for a home in Great River is about \$240,000, with houses along the Connetquot running from \$400,000 to \$1 million.

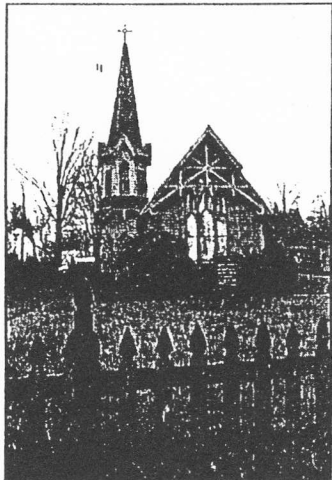
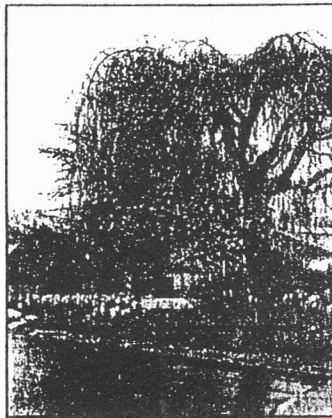
"It's a very quiet community, very picturesque," he says. "The common thread is that you can retreat. There are a lot of trees and not everyone is on top of each other."

Even with the breathing room, folks in Great River see a lot of one another. And they seem to like it that way. Case in point: Residents pick up their mail at the local post office, a practice pretty much discontinued across the rest of Long Island. A while back, residents were asked if they wanted home delivery. They voted no, deciding instead to preserve the sense of community the post office helps foster.

"You always see someone you know [at the post office]," says Ellen Gibbons, 46, who moved to Great River when she was 2 and has lived there ever since. "It's like a little gossip center."

"The post office is the key to the community," Schauss says, "because it's the purveyor of information. If someone dies, the flag is flown at half-staff. It's a very touching symbol of the love in this community."

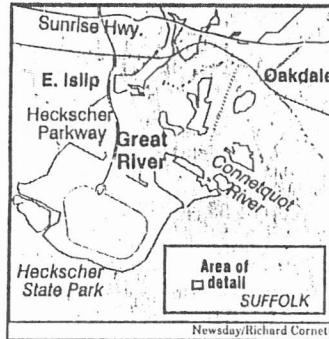
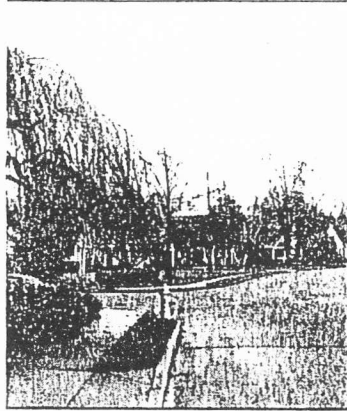
The post office also helps residents look out for the welfare of their neighbors. If there's a burglary in town, Laurel R. Iadeluca, a Suffolk County police officer and Great River resident, posts a notice of the details of the



From top: One of Great River's many trees; Emmanuel Episcopal Church; Bob Vogelsang and Ron Gibbons, at a community-wide cleanup on April 19.

crime. That's when the community springs to action.

"Everyone becomes like eyes and ears," Iadeluca says. "It is amazing how the people fight back. They just will not allow themselves to become victims." The 49-year-old Iadeluca, who is also chief of the volunteer fire department, says that time and again criminals are caught in a matter of days because of community help. "From my



POPULATION: 1,401
MEDIAN AGE: 39.3
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$101,165
SCHOOL DISTRICT: East Islip



police point of view, it's so refreshing."

Great River is a residential community that has virtually no industry. Northrop Grumman Corp. used to have a plant there but began laying off workers in the early '90s and eventually closed. "That was a low point," Iadeluca says. "It was so sad to see some of our neighbors who were executives making six figures a year all of the sudden have their house go up for sale and get out

Long before Grumman came and went, Great River was known as Youngsport, named after the Youngs family that built and repaired boats on the west shore of the Connetquot River near Great South Bay in the 1840s. The railroad arrived in nearby Oakdale in 1868 and the name was changed to Great River.

That was also the start of the great estate era, when tycoons such as William Bayard Cutting and William K. Vanderbilt, built mansions in the area. The Cutting estate is now home to the Bayard Cutting Arboretum and has been open to the public since 1954. (Vanderbilt's Idle Hour estate, in Oakdale, is now Dowling College.)

There are still signs of Great River's history to be found, sometimes going further back than the tycoon era. Ruth Schaefer, 63, a Great River resident for 25 years, has found such evidence in her backyard. "I've dug up arrowheads," she says. "And maybe a hundred years ago, there was a thriving shellfish business here. When you dig in your garden, you can find old oyster shells." And Schaefer points out that members of the Nicoll family, founders of the Town of Islip, are buried behind the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Great River.

Barbara Llobell, 41, has been living in a piece of history with her husband Paul. She says they moved to Great River because of the quality of the East Islip school district — a must with their 11-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter — and have lived there for 15 years. "We're kind of newcomers," she says with a laugh.

The Llobell's home isn't; it was built in 1860. "It's nice living in an old house and conserving the historical aspect of Great River," Llobell says.

That's one of the reasons the Llobells and a few other residents recently resurrected the defunct Great River Community Association. They want to preserve Great River's history but also guide it into the future.

"The first step is cleaning up a bit," Llobell says. (Residents got together for a community-wide cleanup three weeks ago.) "Then we'll see what the townspeople want."

Ellen Gibbons is also a member of the community association and has a simple goal she hopes the group can accomplish soon: erecting two signs, one on each end of the town, that say, "Welcome to Great River." "It's a beautiful little town off the beaten path," Gibbons says.

Residents point with pride to the array of recreational activities available. There's the county-run golf course at Timber Point Country Club, places to fish and crab, and marinas from where boaters can launch themselves into Great South Bay. The fire department regularly organizes community events, including a Memorial Day parade in which "The Dazzlers," Great River's children's marching band, participates. And each summer, residents grab lawn chairs and coolers and walk to Heckscher State Park for the New York Philharmonic's concert.

"It feels as if it is a community lost in time," Schauss says. "Back when people's