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If You're Thinking of Living In/The South Great River, L.I., Neighborhood; Solitude With Parks and a Waterfront

By Vivien Kellerman

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THE tiny waterfront neighborhood of South Great River on the South Shore of Long Island has only one main road running through it. Its seclusion is enhanced by parkland, a golf course and both a riverfront and a bayfront. The downtown consists of the post office, a deli and a small Italian restaurant.

But for all its seclusion, South Great River is close to major roads -- Heckscher Parkway and Sunrise Highway. And the Great River railroad station is minutes away.

Its residents cherish its public, county-owned Timber Point Country Club, two public marinas, an arboretum within and bordering the neighborhood, and Heckscher State Park just across the border in East Islip.

"The community is so rural it doesn't even have mail delivery," said Thomas Potter, owner of Tom Potter Real Estate in East Islip. "People like it that way. During the winter, even if they don't get to see their neighbors outside, chances are they'll see them at the post office."

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Detached houses are the only dwellings available in the community, where prices start in the low-\$200,000's and rise to more than \$1 million for some waterfront properties. There are about 480 houses in all.

Although many of the houses are custom-built, some of them dating back to the turn of the century, there are also a few developments, which began to spring up in the late 1950's. Among them are Flower Estates, built in 1958, with 100 houses on lots no smaller than an acre; Kenwood Estates, a 50-home development on minimum .75-acre lots, built in 1966, and Riverview, with about 30 houses, built on half-acre lots in 1978. All have a mix of farm ranches, ranches and colonials. Today, there is only one vacant lot in all of South Great River.

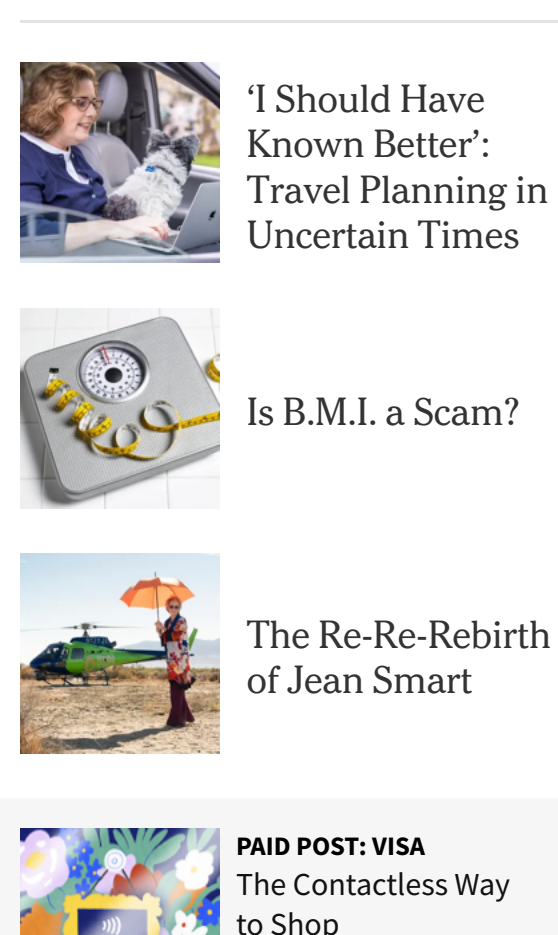
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Patricia Markesfeld, postmaster since 1982, said that South Great River's population of 1,400 makes it a rural community and that the only way it could receive home delivery would be to assume East Islip's ZIP code. Before she took her post, said Ms. Markesfeld, residents voted to keep their own 11739 ZIP code and forgo home delivery.

"New people coming into the community complain, but after awhile they love it," she said. "The post office is a real meeting place. We joke that we should put in a pot-belly stove."

Laurent A. Iadeluca, a police officer working in the community since 1973, chose to move there in 1984.

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"I saw Long Island slowly becoming Levittown and knew that South Great River, with its large parcels of land, would be a good investment," said Mr. Iadeluca, who had previously lived in East Islip.

He and his wife, Janet, a controller for Weight Watchers in Deer Park, purchased a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath colonial with a glass enclosed breakfast room that looks out on an acre of mostly wooded property.

"For 10 minutes last week, I watched a fox that came out of the woods, scratch and preen himself," he said. "It was wonderful."

Mr. Iadeluca is also the president of the Great River Homeowners Association. When the community is upset, residents unite in force, he said. On one occasion people were angered by a sense that the Town of Islip was ignoring the upkeep of the neighborhood's roads. Membership in the homeowners association quadrupled to 200 as homeowners sought to join in a protest.

"The potholes in the road were teeth chattering," said Mr. Iadeluca. To emphasize their displeasure, residents showed up en masse at a meeting to which local legislators were invited to attend.

Mr. Iadeluca said the residents reminded these legislators that they were taxpayers and voters. "It was a gentle type of persuasion," he said.

Six weeks later, he said, residents drove over newly paved roads.

THE Homeowners Association proposes to add trees along Great River Road and River Road. They will be seeking grants from the National Arbor Day Society and possibly the town for this project.



For about \$1,000 a year, boaters can rent space at some of the larger private residential docks along the Connetquot River.

There is also a total of 153 slips at Timber Point, the site of two Suffolk County marinas. The cost for a boat is \$34 per foot at the West Marina on the river and \$38 per foot at the East Marina on the bay. The average waiting time for a slip is about 18 months.

The county also owns the 225-acre Timber Point Country Club, situated at the mouth of the Connetquot River on the Great South Bay. It has a 27-hole golf course, a driving range, putting green, a pro shop and locker rooms, as well as a full-service restaurant. Weddings, banquets and other catered events are held in the newly renovated estate buildings, which can accommodate up to 300 persons. A green key membership pass costs county residents \$20 for three years. Green fees are \$19 on weekdays, \$20 on weekends.

The 1,679-acre Heckscher State Park borders the southwestern portion of South Great River. The park has a swimming pool complex, beaches, bicycle paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, softball and soccer fields, camping and trailer sites and a boat-launching ramp. State residents must obtain a \$39 annual parking fee for entrance into the park. The single-day fee is \$5 per car. The pool fee is 50 cents for children 6 to 12 and \$1 for all others.

The 690-acre Bayard Cutting Arboretum contains 4,800 plants, trees and shrubs of 1,200 different varieties. The 62-room former Bayard Cutting residence, built in 1887, has 22 fireplaces, rich dark paneling brought in from England -- some of it now 400 years old -- and stained-glass windows by Charles Louis Tiffany.

The mansion now serves as a natural history museum featuring an extensive collection of mounted birds. Concerts, meetings, classes and exhibits are presented at the Arboretum, which is open from May through October from 10 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. and November through April from 10 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. The parking fee is \$4, but there is no charge to enter the museum.

The community's students attend the 4,800-student East Islip School District, which has an early childhood learning center that includes kindergarten; four elementary schools for grades 1 through 6; a junior high school and a high school.

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Last spring voters approved spending \$8.3 million to add space at each of the elementary schools. The expansion will include a library media center and science lab in each school along with additional classroom space to ease a situation where there has been an average of 25 pupils from kindergarten to grade 3.

In addition, said Schools Superintendent Michael Capozzi, the district is in the third year of a five-year, \$5 million program to upgrade its computer system. Within two years, he said, there will be five computers in every elementary classroom and at least two in every other grade-level classroom.

Students who are in need of special help can begin classes three weeks before the school year starts. And next month the district will embark on a new language program in which all students in grades 1 to 6 will receive 75 minutes a week of Spanish lessons.

Superintendent Capozzi said that 92 percent of last June's 251-student graduating class had indicated that they would go on to higher education.

FOR everyday items, residents shop in the adjacent communities of Oakdale or East Islip. The 846,000 square-foot South Shore Mall in Bay Shore, anchored by Macy's and J. C. Penney, is about four miles away.

Emmanuel Episcopal Church, founded in 1862, is the only house of worship in the neighborhood. The original structure is still standing, although it has been expanded several times. There are about 100 families in the congregation.

The hamlet of Great River has its roots in the 1840's when Erastus Youngs and his family began building and repairing boats on the west shore of the Connetquot River. It soon became known as Youngsport.

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In 1868, the Long Island Rail Road arrived in adjacent Oakdale, to serve the many millionaires that had estates in the area, among them William K. Vanderbilt in Oakdale and Horace O. Havemeyer, the sugar baron, and William Bayard Cutting, in Youngsport. Many workers on these estates lived in Youngsport, which changed its name to Great River in 1870.

Cutting, a financier, lawyer and railroad tycoon, died in 1912. His family left the estate with its arboretum to the state and they were opened to the public in 1954.

In time, all the estates broke up, to be replaced by residential neighborhoods.

In 1970, Frederick Rose, owner of Clare Rose Distributors in Patchogue and a Patchogue resident, heard about a riverfront house in South Great River that was for sale.

Mr. Rose said that while the home was just what he and his wife, Sally, wanted, the asking price of \$90,000 was more than he could afford.

"I said that when the price dropped to \$60,000 to call me," he said. To his surprise, five months later, with a depressed real estate market making the house difficult to sell, he got the offer. He and the owner agreed to a price of \$63,000.

Today, with the house almost totally rebuilt, he said, it is worth about \$1 million. But, he said, he has no plans to sell it.

"South Great River is quiet, with little or no crime," he said. "It's my sanctuary at the end of a hard day."