

# Lost In Riverbay

**F**ormer Chatham building commissioner Arthur Child remembers the time he was working in his yard and a car with Pennsylvania plates pulled up to the curb. The driver asked directions to an address in the Riverbay neighborhood; Child explained how to get there and the car drove off.

"About 10 minutes later, here they come again," Child said. "They'd been around the block. I ended up getting in my car and leading them to where they wanted to go." When he first started working for the town and had to delve deeper into the subdivision than his Riverview Drive home, he was "forever getting lost. I didn't have the foggiest idea where I was."

Getting lost in Riverbay is a rite of passage in Chatham. For the uninitiated, finding one's way around the huge subdivision, bracketed by Old Queen Anne Road, Training Field Road and Muddy Creek (renamed the Monomoy River by the project's original developers), can be like trying to navigate the back roads of a foreign country without benefit of a map or a translator. The roads twist and turn upon themselves, intersections appear when least expected, and short roads with strange-sounding names sprout out of nowhere. One resident recalls a neighbor wandering around after being unable to locate the house she was building. And there's a story, possibly apocryphal, about a rookie cop who responded to a call in Riverbay and got so lost he had to call the station to send someone to lead him back to civilization.

"The way the streets are set up in there, you can go round and round and round, and there's no sign telling you how to get out," said Child, who no longer lives in Riverbay (but not because of the street layout).

The first time I drove into the subdivision I thought I'd never find my way out. I was headed to someone's home for an interview, and while the who and what has slipped from memory, the experience of driving over the gentle hills and sweeping curves for what seemed like an interminable time stuck with me. For a long time I wouldn't venture back into Riverbay without a map handy.

Riverbay Estates was developed by Cape Investors, Inc., a group of local real estate tycoons, in 1961 and 1962. The project was quite controversial at the time; it contained some 400 lots, a massive subdivision by the standards of the day, or any day, for that matter. It remains the largest single subdivision ever developed in Chatham. Deputy Assessor Walter Brown thinks it may be the lower Cape's biggest subdivision as well.

Originally marketed as a retirement community, lot sizes ranged from half to one acre or larger; those with views of the "Monomoy River" and abutting conser-



vation land were most expensive, selling for about \$8,000 to \$9,500, according to an advertisement in the Aug. 15, 1966 edition of *The Chronicle*. A three-bedroom house on a half-acre of land sold for what seems today the astonishingly low price of \$23,900; you could get an eight-room house with two baths for under \$30,000. A huge seven-room, two-story house with a two-car garage would set you back a whopping \$40,000.

Today, vacant buildable lots in Riverbay — there are only about 20 left, according to Brown — sell for \$60,000 to \$75,000. Home values vary, but average \$225,000 to \$275,000. Many sell for considerably more, but Riverbay properties generally hover around the

middle of the Chatham market, Brown said.

Despite its reputation as a senior citizen enclave — earning it somewhat derogatory nicknames like "Wrinklebay" — Riverbay is a very desirable neighborhood these days. The mix of residents has changed somewhat in the 30-plus years since its inception; among the over-60 crowd are young families with kids, early retirees and quite a lot of second homeowners.

"It may not appeal to everyone, but it appeals to quite a lot of people," Brown said.

"I think it's a great development," said William McGarry, president of the Riverbay homeowners' association. There is a variety of architectural styles but a general consistency in size and feel; the residents, he said, are social and outgoing. It's a real neighborhood in a

town with few real neighborhoods due to its seasonal nature.

"The homes are all different but have a flavor to them that builds neighborhoods," he said.

Yet there's always those darn roads, which not only pose a challenge to the directionally-impaired but also have some pretty strange names. Wonkapit Way. Potonumecot Road. Sachems Way. Joshua Jethro Road. Who knows how many people never stop to ask directions over embarrassment at not being able to pronounce the street names.

And then there are the normal names, like Deer Meadow Lane and Round Cove Road, and those likely appropriated from elsewhere because of their tony sound, such as Riverview Drive, Lakeview Avenue and Park Avenue.

McGarry is lucky enough to live close to the impressive Park Avenue entrance to the subdivision, near the intersection of Old Comers and Training Field roads, a wide, two-lane thoroughfare with aspirations toward its more famous New York City namesake. While he acknowledges learning your way around Riverbay can be troublesome, he thinks the confusion factor is overplayed.

"When you're out walking, service people stop you with bewildered looks on their faces. But once you're here a while, it's like anyplace else." Chatham in itself, he pointed out, is not exactly the easiest place to find your way around if you aren't already familiar with the area.

And the fact that only four roads lead in and out of the development has a benefit.

"It makes for great security," McGarry said, noting that a couple of police cruisers could cordon off the entire 400 lot subdivision. "God help any burglar that gets caught in here."

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