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A Quiet Villagelike Section of Greenwich

By ELEANOR CHARLES

OF the 15 neighborhoods that make up Greenwich's 50 square miles, one, running north-south along the eastern side of town, has a name that is said to be unique: Cos Cob. Nobody knows what it means, the Greenwich Historical Society has been sifting through a mass of conjectures about Indian chiefs, Indian words, early settlers' names, 17th-century Dutch words and so on for years.

The neighborhood itself is somewhat of an aberration for Greenwich — a quieter, more villagelike part of town with few of the estates, celebrity residents or personal wealth of greater Greenwich.

Its community spirit, which survived two severe floods in the 30's and 50's and several destructive fires, was itself again when its library, housed at various times in a school, over a supermarket and in a store front, locations, was cut from the town's library budget and threatened with extinction.

Although there is a large and superbly equipped main library in downtown Greenwich, Cos Cob wanted its own and spent 15 years raising \$1.3 million locally, in small amounts, to purchase a piece of property on Sincopa Road and build a 5,000-square-foot library. It opened in 1999, and 631 bricks in its walkway are inscribed with the names of the donors.

"It's a very close-knit community," said Rowland Harris, a second-generation real estate agent, now semi-retired. "Everybody is friendly, and we have everything we want right here." R. M. Harris Realty, the only real estate office in Cos Cob, is over a plumbing shop on the Drenckhahn Boatyard property on River Road. Mr. Harris' father brought the family to Cos Cob in 1923, when they lived over the Diamond Hill Liquor Store. Their prospering real estate and insurance business financed a move to a three-bedroom house on a 50-by-200-foot lot on Valley Road. "In 1965 we sold it for \$23,000," Mr. Harris said. "It changed hands several times and was recently sold for \$773,000."

Those figures portend a Cos Cob more like the rest of Greenwich. Gloria Meyering, a broker at Prudential Connecticut in Old Greenwich, said: "Cos Cob has traditionally been considered the backbone of the middle economic group of Greenwich, but prices have gone so high and continue to climb. I have not been able to sell anything for three clients looking for something between \$300,000 and \$400,000," a former benchmark medium-priced house.

"With prices rising all over town, you still get more house for your money than anywhere else in Greenwich," said Pam Chiapetta, broker at Coldwell Banker in Old Greenwich. "Not everybody is a millionaire. We still have a strong middle class and a cross section of blue- and white-collar people."

Her office manager, Nancy MacDonald, citing the lack of inventory in an overheated market, said: "There are only 28 listings of single family homes, and they are priced from \$569,000 to \$3.25 million. Out of Cos Cob condominium complexes only four or five units are available, ranging from \$389,000 to \$725,000."

In the past three years, Joe Pagliarulo, a local builder, has found a niche for himself in Cos Cob's new luxury market. He has built a half-dozen 6,500- and 7,000-square-foot homes on two- and three-acre parcels with tennis courts and swimming pools along Stanwich and Cognewaugh Roads. Priced from \$1.4 million to \$3.1 million, they sell as fast as they are built.

With handsome profits to be made within the neighborhood, some elect to stay there, moving up from one house to another. Two and a half years ago, Wayne and Suzanne Sullivan bought a small older house and recently made a \$200,000 profit selling it, enabling them buy a larger, more costly home on Valleywood Road where they plan to raise a family. Valleywood, Mead Avenue and Valley Road are among the most desirable addresses in Cos Cob. Mr. Sullivan considers Greenwich real estate a blue-chip investment and Cos Cob a bonus in ambience. "I think the people are a little different here," he said, "a little nicer than in other parts of Greenwich where we looked."

Shops, services and restaurants on a section of the Post Road called the Hub supply everything Cos Cobbers may need. Anything more, from Saks Fifth Avenue to the Greenwich Furniture Barn to three-star restaurants, can be found among the more than 150 establishments in downtown Greenwich.

While most of Cos Cob is inland, its Mianus Riverfront, Cos Cob Harbor and proximity to Long Island Sound have perpetuated a relationship with the water that began in the 18th and 19th centuries, when it was a major commercial shipping port. Potatoes, onions and apples, about all that would grow in the rocky soil, were transported by ship from Cos Cob Harbor to New York City. But the industry declined with the advent of the railroad in the mid-1800's and disappeared entirely when the harbor's depth was compromised irreparably by the damming of the Mianus River.

TODAY fishing, recreational boating and charter trips have replaced the packet boats, and marinas are lined up on River Road. Beacon Point is the largest, with 250 slips at \$95 a foot per season and a Fishermen's Pro Shop where live and frozen bait, fishing licenses and gear may be purchased. Rick Kral, the owner, also owns Cos Cob's only hostelry, the Cos Cob Inn, originally an 1870's rooming house, with 14 rooms across River Road from his marina. "It's set up for couples," he said, "quaint and romantic." Rates for two are \$99 to \$249 with continental breakfast. Jacuzzis, private porches, sitting rooms, working fireplaces, modems and voice mail are standard in some rooms and suites.

Boat owners may also apply for membership at one of Greenwich's five yacht clubs, none located in Cos Cob. Those with more limited resources can avail themselves of the Mianus River Club, Cos Cob's town-owned marina, where launching costs \$50 a season. "If you don't come in around April 15 for a launching permit, you probably won't get one — they go so fast," said Fred Walters, superintendent of marine and facility operations. A limit of 15 permits are sold annually to out-of-towners. Dockage for boats up to 35 feet runs from \$240 to about \$2,000, depending on size.

Cos Cob residents have access to all Greenwich recreational facilities, including the town-owned Griffith E. Harris 18-hole golf course, named for Rowland Harris's brother, "Griff," who was first selectman from 1952 to 1958. Fees are \$85 a season, with a \$15 greens fee per round for residents 18 to 64 years of age, or \$45 and \$11 for people over 64. Nonresidents pay a \$45 greens fee per round. There are also five private country clubs in Greenwich.

A sampling of the plethora of recreational activity includes ice skating at the Dorothy Hamill Rink at \$4 an hour, \$2 for children, and tennis and paddle tennis at \$15 a season at several locations, including Central Junior High School, Lockland Avenue Park and Bible Street Park in Cos Cob. Greenwich's only lighted platform-tennis court is in Cos Cob, where one-hour sessions once a week from October to March cost \$200.

While Cos Cos has no beach, Greenwich Point, Byram and Great Captain's Island Beaches are open to town residents with \$20 seasonal parking passes. Nonresidents may visit Greenwich Point with daily parking passes of \$10 on weekdays and \$20 on weekends, purchased Monday through Friday at Town Hall.

Exemplifying Greenwich's high priority for broad-based education, Cos Cob Elementary School, with 450 pupils in kindergarten through fifth grade on a 6.4-acre campus, offers a talented and gifted program, learning disability resources, science laboratory, fine arts and music, a media center, cafeteria that doubles as a 450-seat auditorium with a stage; a before- and after-school child-care program, a double-sized gymnasium; and a baseball diamond.

Cos Cob's Central Middle School, which also serves children from nearby neighborhoods in Grade 6 through 8, has 740 students divided into groups of 8, each group assigned to a team of math, language arts, science and social studies teachers. The groupings are changed annually. "We feel it's essential to deinstitutionalize the school and in small groups we get to know the whole child," said Dr. James Bolger, the principal. Parents are required to come in at least once a year to meet with teachers.

ALL Greenwich public school students attend Greenwich High School, which is divided into four "houses," breaking down the student body of 2,000 into manageable groups. A \$40 million science and technology wing was built in 1998. In addition to the traditional curriculum, the offerings include a course in leadership skills, a dance studio for boys and girls, ceramics, engineering, electronic music, Web site creation, photography and a robotics club, where robots are built for regional and national competitions. Among 35 varsity sports are water polo, fencing, rugby and sailing, which takes place at the Indian Harbor Yacht Club. College Board scores for 2002 of 549 verbal and 567 math exceeded state and national averages by 40 to 51 points.

Among the best known private schools are Brunswick for boys and Greenwich Academy for girls. Upper grades of the two schools are joined in coeducational classes. Greenwich Country Day, the Convent of the Sacred Heart and Whitby Montessori School are some of the others, none located in Cos Cob. Fees range from \$13,000 to \$20,400 a year. At the Greenwich Catholic School, which runs from pre-K through eighth grade, tuition is \$5,000 to \$5,900.

One of the town's most visited attractions is the 1730 Bush-Holley House complex overlooking Cos Cob harbor, a national landmark where the Cos Cob Impressionists stayed and painted each summer from 1890 to 1920. Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir and Theodore Robinson were among the regulars, sometimes joined by Willa Cather and other writers. Holley was the name of the boarding house landlord who sold the property to the Historical Society in 1957, but the name Bush has no connection to the family of President Bush, some of whom still live in the town. It was Anglicized from Hendrik Bosch, the original Danish settler.