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If You're Thinking Of Living In:

Ardsley, NY

Heavy Traffic, Great Schools, No Airstrips

By ELSA BRENNER

IT is described as one of [Westchester](#)'s four "rivertowns," yet the village of Ardsley is landlocked, with no Hudson River views save for a few glimpses when the trees are bare. Its modest downtown has a Starbucks but generally lacks the more commercialized glamour of its sister villages: Hastings-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry and Irvington. And come 5 p.m. on a weekday, the traffic in Ardsley's business district is often at a standstill.

Yet the 1.25-square-mile village, tucked in among major highways in the center of the county, remains popular with home buyers — both in spite of and because of its geography.

"There's the saying that you can't get to there from here," said Jay Leon, the mayor. "But in Ardsley, it's more a matter that you have to go through here to get to there."

Indeed, for getting from one side of Westchester to the other, Ashford Avenue, which winds through the center of the village, is a heavily used alternative to the two major east-west roads - the Cross County Parkway to the south and Interstate 287 to the north in White Plains.

In addition to its central location, the village's strongest suits are its school system and recreational offerings — ample reason for its 4,580 residents to find it "a fine place to live, a welcoming, down-to-earth kind of place," to quote the mayor.

"So even if it isn't a Scarsdale or Chappa-

qua, a Bronxville or an Irvington," he added, referring to county suburbs known for their picture-postcard downtowns, "our village still has a lot to offer."

In fact, says Steven Zucker, a longtime resident, Ardsley presents a refreshing contrast to some other towns, precisely because "it's not a place where people put on airs."

For Mr. Zucker, an accountant, and his wife, Claire, a special education teacher, who reared their two sons here, the most compelling benefit has been the high-performing Ardsley Union Free School District. It serves 2,322 students from the village as well as sections of six surrounding municipalities, encompassing about a five-mile-square area.

When they moved to Ardsley 27 years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Zucker were also drawn to the stock of its moderately priced ranches, Capes and split levels in a county known for its expensive residential real estate.

The price gap that the Zuckers found between Ardsley and other area suburbs has narrowed quite a bit since that time. The median for single-family homes here at the end of the first quarter of this year was \$640,000, according to the Westchester County Board of Realtors. This puts it on a par with the overall county median of \$635,000, but nowhere near Larchmont or Scarsdale, where medians approach \$1 million.

"My word to describe Ardsley," Mr. Zucker said, "is 'comfortable.' It was

when we moved here and still is. That's why we continue to live here."

What You'll Find

Traveling east on the Ashford Avenue Bridge from Dobbs Ferry, one comes upon the village's downtown: a cluster of strip malls at the intersection of several busy roads.

In addition to funneling a heavy burden of east-west traffic through its small business district, the downtown has become a major conduit for north-south traffic along Route 9A, also known as the Saw Mill River Road, which parallels the Saw Mill River Parkway and the New York State Thruway (Interstate 87).

Folded among the highways are established tree-lined neighborhoods that sprouted in the mid-20th century. Yet since Mr. and Mrs. Zucker moved in, the housing stock has changed, with stretches of ranches and Capes from the 1960s and '70s now sharing the landscape with clusters of larger, more expensive colonials that have been shoe-horned into remaining parcels. In all, there are 1,416 single-family houses and 40 condominiums in Ardsley, according to Barbara Berardi, the village clerk.

The traffic volume, Mayor Leon said, has increased along with the population density throughout the west side of the county between the Cross County Parkway and Interstate 287 — to some extent within Ardsley but also in areas like Hastings, Hartsdale and Elmsford.



What You'll Pay

The \$640,000 median for a single-family home represented a decline from \$655,000 a year ago — reflecting a trend in the county, where the median was down 2.3 percent from the previous quarter alone.

When showing homes to buyers interested in the Ardsley schools, Kathie Briskin, a sales agent for Prudential Rand Realty, explained that she includes all houses for sale in the Ardsley Union Free School District, including those with postal addresses in Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, White Plains, Scarsdale, Hastings and Hartsdale. Indeed, only 50 percent of the students attending Ardsley public schools live in the village of Ardsley itself, said Richard Maurer, the superintendent of schools.

Among the houses on the market in the Ardsley school district are a two-bedroom ranch on Northfield Avenue in Dobbs Ferry, listed at \$479,000; and a colonial in White Plains with four bedrooms and three and a half baths selling for \$899,900. Prices range from \$544,900 for a two-bedroom, one-bath cottage, to \$1.459 million for a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath colonial.

Arthur G. Riolo, co-owner of Peter J. Riolo Real Estate in Hastings, says prices of comparable homes are “essentially the same” in the rivertowns, but the vintage of the housing stock varies. Hastings filled in, for example, after World War I, and Ardsley after World War II.

Ms. Briskin described two-story colonials as the most popular with home buyers in the village, with midcentury split-levels running a close second. “Ardsley’s older neighborhoods, which continue to be popular with home buyers, are going through a metamorphosis,” she said. “People are taking these older houses and bringing them up to date.”

What to Do

The extensive recreation and sports programs are open to anyone living within the school district. Ashford Park has tennis courts that are lighted at night, a softball field, a basketball court, soccer fields, a playground, skateboard park and picnic area. McDowell Park has four baseball fields, a basketball court and a picnic pavilion.

There is also a supportive arts community in Ardsley, which along with the three other

villages has formed the Rivertowns Arts Council, a nonprofit that promotes the 15 to 20 galleries in the area and their contributors, many of whom are residents. One of them is Beverly Shipko, a realist painter who moved to the village a decade ago with her husband, Jay Sloofman, a marketing and promotions consultant, and their daughters, Laura, now 20, and Bonnie, 17.

Ms. Shipko, a still-life painter, often uses desserts as her subject. Some of her paintings are featured in the [Hudson River Museum](#)’s current exhibit in Yonkers. And her subjects often come from a popular Ardsley bakery called Riviera Bakehouse.

“We chose Ardsley because it’s so close to the city,” she said, “so as an artist, you’re able to have that energy to inspire you. And then you can come back to the country so easily.”

Each spring she also takes part, with 30 to 40 other area artists, in an open studio weekend, inviting the public in to view works in progress.

As for nearby night life, there are a few restaurants and pizza parlors. Barbara and Steve Rotholz, and their son, David, 21, and daughter, Sarah-Joan, 17, have made a Friday night ritual out of going to Ardsley Pizzeria, in a small strip mall where a new supermarket, part of the DeCicco family chain in Westchester, opened within the last year.

For more variety, says Ms. Rotholz, a high school guidance counselor in the [Bronx](#), she and the family often head in the direction of White Plains, which has several movie theater options and plenty of shopping.

The Commute

Metro-North Railroad’s Hudson Line has an Ardsley-on-Hudson stop, but some residents find it more convenient to board the [Harlem](#) Line in Hartsdale. Round-trip fare from either station to Grand Central Terminal and back is \$17; a monthly commutation ticket is \$184, slightly less if bought on line. The ride during peak hours takes less than 40 minutes.

Because Ardsley is near to north-south highways, many residents drive to [Manhattan](#) along the Saw Mill River Parkway or the Thruway.

The Schools

Of the 189 seniors graduating from Ardsley High School this spring, 90 percent plan to

attend four-year colleges, while 8 percent have chosen two-year colleges, Dr. Maurer said. Students taking the SATs scored an average of 587 on the verbal portion and 618 on the math; statewide averages were 493 and 510.

Also, Dr. Maurer said, 96 percent of seniors received a [New York State](#) Regents diploma — “the highest percentage ever in the history of our school district.”

A frequent winner of awards, Ardsley High School recently garnered a \$10,000 grant from the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) for a group of students who invented a device that enables wheelchairs to mount curbs.

The district recently completed \$21 million in renovations: a new band room and technology wing for the high school, as well as a new playing field. The high school, which has 792 students, is “completely full,” according to Dr. Maurer.

Ardsley Middle School has 743 students, the Concord Road Elementary School, 800. Unlike most of the rest of the county, the district sends only a few special education students to schools run by the Board of Cooperative Services; 95 percent of such students are taught within the district.

The History

The area that includes the village of Ardsley was originally inhabited by a branch of the Mohican tribe of the Algonquin nation. Ashford Avenue was once a trail connecting the Hudson River to [Long Island](#) Sound, according to “A Short, Informal History of Ardsley,” by A. W. Silliman, which also explains that by the mid-1800s, the village was called Ashford and had a sawmill and grist mill on the Sawmill River. But there was already an Ashford post office elsewhere in New York, so in 1888 the village was renamed after the estate of Cyrus W. Field, a local tycoon who had been involved in installing the trans-Atlantic cable.

Going Forward

Mr. Leon said he had been meeting with county and state officials on ways to ease congestion along Ardsley’s main roads. At the moment, proposals on the table are incremental — retiming stoplights, for example — rather than ambitious.

