

A NEW FACE FOR ROSCOE VILLAGE



BRIAN JACKSON/SUN-TIMES

Agent and developer Larry Bernstein, left, and Atul Kharkhanis in front of their building at 2252 W. Roscoe.

BY ANNE O'REILLY

When Riverview Amusement Park was still drawing crowds to Western and Belmont avenues, the neighborhood bustling with bakeries and ice cream parlors. A street car traveled along Roscoe Avenue, with the amusement park its destination.

Riverview closed in 1967. Residents needed a voice, and neighborhood activists had to focus on current and future community issues.

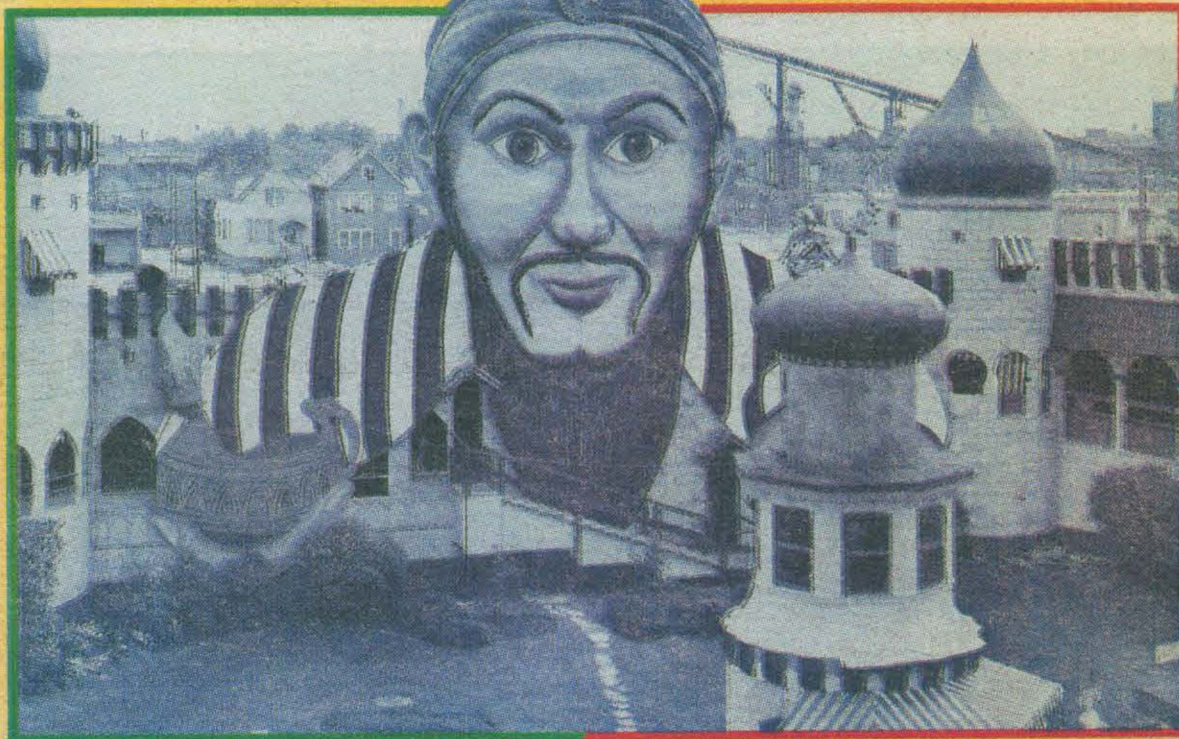
Today's residents don't hear the sound of carnival music and roller coasters like they did in the days of Riverview—they hear the sound of construction. Whether new homes are being built or ex-

isting homes are being remodeled, there's plenty of activity in the quaint neighborhood bounded by Addison, Ravenswood, Belmont and the Chicago River.

As the area has become more popular, "the value of the real estate has really soared," said Betty Bauer, owner of Lake View Realty.

Since 1993, the median price of single-family homes has increased from \$168,750 to \$302,000, according to the Chicago Association of Realtors. Prices for condos and lofts have increased from \$129,800 to \$180,000 for the same period.

The typical buyers are young couples or singles who are pooling funds to share the cost of the build-



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ing, Bauer said.

"It took a while to get this far north and west, but the [real estate] wave is here now," said homeowner Mike Wilkinson.

Saving the history

Despite the changes in the neighborhood, many Roscoe Village residents want to preserve its past.

"Some of the gated developments in other neighborhoods look like people storage," said Chad Harrell, a resident. "It's not

even housing."

If such developments were built in Roscoe Village, it would not only change the architectural look of the area, it would eliminate the reason that Harrell and others moved there in the first place, he said.

The community organization, Roscoe Village Neighbors, took a major step last year toward keeping the look and feel of the neighborhood intact. The group helped pass a zoning over-

lay on Roscoe Avenue that restricts the size of new developments to limit density and congestion.

The overlay requires new construction to follow certain guidelines, including that building heights be limited to 36 feet. A new building along Roscoe with commercial space on the first floor can have only two residential units above, rather than four.

Some of the current construction along Roscoe Ave-

ABOVE: Aladdin's Castle might be gone, but home prices around his fortress are on the upswing.

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Roscoe

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nue was approved before the overlay.

Larry Bernstein, a real estate agent and builder who lives in Roscoe Village, said the restrictions are extreme.

"New brings better," said Bernstein of Remax Alliance, Lincoln Park, and of Classic Home Builders. "I'm a firm believer of that. The median buyer is looking for nice and new, and there's not much available. It's hurt Roscoe Village."

Chuck Hadley, an RVN member, disagreed. He pointed out that the overlay does not prevent new construction. "Change is inevitable, but change needs to be guided," he said.

Real estate agent Josephine Chaparro of Coldwell Banker Stanmeyer-Ash Manor, who grew up in the area, said the neighborhood's history is its greatest asset. "If you tear everything down, there's no feeling of community left," she said.

"Roscoe Village has plenty of charming cute little cottage homes that are taken care of. I don't think you'll see them disappear. There are a lot of professional people who own those little houses and won't let go of them," she said.

Doing business

Roscoe Village homeowners have guided the area's commercial development, as well. In 1995, the neighborhood group surveyed residents asking what businesses and services they wanted. Residents responded with a desire for more restaurants, as well as more upscale goods and services. You can see the results along Roscoe and Belmont avenues.

"The businesses coming in now have done their homework," said Carole Rosenkoetter, executive director of the Roscoe Village Chamber of Commerce. "The goods and services are needed and wanted."

Roscoe Village aims to strike a balance between businesses that draw people during the day and those that attract people in the evenings.

As the community grows and changes, the neighborhood's beauty is worth preserving, Rosenkoetter said.

"One of the key reasons that the property value has done the amazing skyrocketing that it has, is the way that we have managed land use," she said. "It preserves quality of life, and offers a reasonable profit to the builder or developer."

■ Anne O'Reilly is a Chicago area freelance writer.



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ABOVE: Betty Bauer, a real estate agent, in front of 2046 W. Belmont. "The value of the real estate has really soared," she said. BELOW: A few decades ago, Chicagoans laughed their troubles away at Riverview.



Roscoe work to charac

Eight men sat around a table on Wednesday night eating burgers. Gathered at the 1847 W. Roscoe Ave.

But this wasn't just a local bar after work. It was small, but dedicated Village Neighbors.

For a few hours, they tackled an upcoming festival. They tackled regularly popularity has grown. They struggled to maintain architecture, while still

"If we've done a good job," Chad Harrell, an RVN member, years down the road.

Their work hasn't helped to pass a zoning ordinance that restricts the size of buildings. It's congestion in the neighborhood groups, the RVN, throughout the year.

"Instead of playing options do we have of the neighborhood.

For many developers, the first step to building

"Development is a process," Harrell said. "It's new construction."

"There's not one can't do that," said try to take a look at done that will make the look of the neighborhood.

They have good ideas. Whether they have decades, or are relatively steadily increasing.

A few long-time group's vice president. They have gangs and The people who have a unique perspective.

"The old folks don't have real roots here. They're bringing the character and people come in wanting a reasonable amount of participation and work together."

New construction is popping up on scattered