

LIVING IN DEER PARK, L.I.

In This Park, the Big Game Is Shopping



G. Paul Burnett/The New York Times

OUTLET OUTPOSTS The 800,000-square-foot \$350 million Tanger Outlet Center at the Arches is set to open in October, making Deer Park an even bigger retail magnet. Some residents fear increased traffic congestion.

LAST November, Marsha and John Perrotta and their two children moved from a rental apartment in College Point, Queens, to a \$362,000 three-bedroom ranch house with a family room, brick patio and grassy backyard in the Suffolk County hamlet of Deer Park.

“Nassau was too crowded,” Ms. Perrotta said, pushing the search slightly farther east. In Deer Park, the family found well-tended homes that “are not that close together” and a reasonable commute for Mr. Perrotta, a conductor on the No. 7 subway line.

“Everything is here,” said Ms. Perrotta, who works as a chiropractic assistant in nearby North Babylon. “I don’t have to go far for anything.”

Her assertion is getting truer every day. With its strip malls, fast-food franchises and big-box stores, Deer Park already has shopping for its 28,000 residents (and for many visitors besides), and is about to get even more.

But Edward Blumenfeld, whose Blumenfeld Development Group is at work on the 800,000-square-foot \$350 million Tanger Outlet Center at the Arches, sees it as adding something beyond more shopping.

“It’s giving the feel of a downtown, not just of a strip mall,” said Mr. Blumenfeld, who described being inspired to put an Old World-style spin on the suburban shopping experience during a trip to Italy with his wife. “We are trying to create an atmosphere and an environment.”

The center, with its arched promenades and piazzas, is to cover 80 acres on Grand Boulevard off Commack Road at the east of this unincorporated area of the town of Babylon.

When it opens in October, it will offer entertainment, dining and 120 to 130 retail, discount and outlet shops — as well as a designer wing with luxury outlets including St. John, Wolford and Betsey Johnson.

Add a 16-screen multiplex, a New York Sports Club and a pedestrian walkway and shuttle connecting the mall to the Deer Park train station, and the development may pilfer the hamlet’s heart from Route 231 — Deer Park Avenue, the four-lane highway that cuts a north-south swath through Deer Park’s suburban sprawl.

It is also projected to generate \$200 million in consumer sales annually, pumping \$13.2 million in sales tax revenues into state and local coffers.

Beyond being a “place that people will actually enjoy just strolling around” said Steve Bellone, the town supervisor, the new mall “will help stabilize the property taxes for the community” and create close to 2,000 jobs.

The project does not come without worries. Michael Oddo, a 41-year resident of Deer Park who founded the Deer Park Civic and Taxpayers Association, which is now dormant, and for 10 years was president of the local school board, fears worsening congestion, especially from Queens and Nassau day-trippers who used to head past Deer Park to the Tanger Outlet Center in Riverhead.

Still, with the added tax dollars, Mr. Oddo sees room for hope. And perhaps Deer Park, like Woodbury Commons in Orange County, will become “synonymous with ‘let’s go shopping at the mall,’ ” he mused.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND

Equidistant from Manhattan and the Hamptons, Deer Park occupies four and a half square miles at the center of Long Island. Situated in western Suffolk, between Exits 51 and 52 of the Long Island Expressway and just south of the wealthier unincorporated area of Dix Hills, it is easily accessible to the Sagtikos Parkway and the Southern State Parkway.

Cape Cods, ranches, high ranches, split levels and minuscule cottages line a grid of quiet streets that blends to the west into the neighboring hamlet of Wyandanch and stretches south to North Babylon. The eastern fringe encompasses 500 acres of the Edgewood state conservation area.

Though it is still under construction, the new mall is already helping to spruce up a stretch of Deer Park Avenue with colonial-style decorative lighting and new median landscaping, Mr. Bellone said.

“We have put in a great deal of effort to improve the look of the downtown,” Mr. Bellone said (though there is no escaping the fact that a Long Island Rail Road trestle cuts through its heart).

Mom-and-pop shops along the main drag may initially “feel a pinch” from the new mall, said Anthony Macaluso, 49, a commissioner with the Deer Park Fire Department and a lifelong resident. But he predicted that they would survive, pointing out, “You have an allegiance to these people.”

As for the Perrottas, whose children are 14 and 8, they already have an allegiance to the school district, among other things. “Everybody in the neighborhood has been friendly,” Ms. Perrotta said. “It’s like, ‘Wow it’s a really good place to raise my family.’ ”

WHAT YOU'LL PAY

“The houses are reasonably priced,” said Patricia A. Wayne, a 23-year resident who is a sales agent with Coldwell Banker Easton Properties in North Babylon.

Yet inventories remain high. “If you don’t price it right,” she added, “it is just going to sit.”

There are 176 homes on the market, ranging from a six-room ranch, listed at \$219,000, to a nine-room colonial on offer for \$750,000; most homes are priced from \$350,000 to

\$450,000. Among the handyman specials priced under \$300,000 are a handful of foreclosures, Ms. Wayne said.

Nineteen condominiums are also for sale, many in the 350-unit Quail Run, a Tudor-style complex with a pool and tennis courts, where prices range from \$349,000 to \$445,000.

In 2007, the average home sold for \$406,000. Prices have dropped since then, said Patricia A. Kent, a licensed associate broker with the Coldwell Banker office, adding that the decline had been slightly less severe than in surrounding communities.

In the first quarter of 2007, there were 43 closings, at an average price of \$388,306. The average house stayed on the market for 104 days, according to the Multiple Listing Service of Long Island. For the same period this year, 20 homes closed, at an average price of \$367,600, after being on the market for an average of 129 days.

Most homes date to the late 1950s and early 1960s; new construction is limited.

The addition of the Tanger center, Ms. Kent predicted, will “be a major asset to the home values here.”

THE SCHOOLS

Overall enrollment in the public school system is about 4,455, said Dennis Ryan, president of the Deer Park School Board.

For kindergarten through Grade 2, there is the May Moore Primary School. For third through fifth grades, there is the John F. Kennedy Intermediate School. Grades 6 through 8 are taught at Robert Frost Middle School — which is followed by Deer Park High School. SAT averages for the class of 2007 were 462 in reading, 493 in math and 449 in writing, versus 491, 505 and 482 statewide.

WHAT TO DO

The area has Home Depot, Kohl’s, Waldbaum’s, Super Stop & Shop and Walgreens, as well as an abundance of Chinese restaurants, delis, pizzerias, and nail and tanning salons. Local landmarks include Deer Park Ravioli, an old-fashioned homemade-pasta shop.

Residents have their own library, as well as access to two Babylon pools and three Babylon beaches: Gilgo, Cedar and Overlook. State Trooper Fabio Buttitta Memorial Park on Acorn Avenue has a pool, a roller-hockey rink, tennis courts and playgrounds.

Baseball, soccer, lacrosse and football are played on artificial turf at Birchwood Park. A new playground is being installed at Pine Acres Park, a popular spot for Little League games.

The 850-acre Edgewood state conservation area is perfect for hiking, biking and bird-watching. Belmont Lake State Park is not far away.

Until the multiplex opens at the outlet center next fall, the closest cinemas are a 10-minute drive away in Commack.

THE COMMUTE

Options when driving the 35 miles west to Midtown include the Long Island Expressway, the Southern State Parkway and the Sagtikos Parkway. Those who take the Long Island Rail Road can park free at the Deer Park station. The 7:47 a.m. direct train takes 60 minutes to get to Penn Station. Other trains transfer in Jamaica and take up to nine minutes longer. Monthly passes are \$248, slightly less if bought online.

THE HISTORY

In the 1950s, Route 231 from North Babylon to Deer Park was known as a suburban drag racing strip. People still use it, particularly on summer weekend evenings, to park and show off their cars. But the parade of roadsters, muscle cars and hot rods, with accompanying sounds of screeching tires, blaring stereos and roaring engines, has largely diminished. The county police cracked down in the 1980s and '90s.