

Willowbrook

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others.

On the other hand, mall shoppers are largely responsible for the traffic woes on Forest Hill Road and Brielle Avenue. To the north of Victory Boulevard, residents in the older section of Willowbrook face similar traffic problems from motorists heading to the nearby Forest Ave. Shoppers Town.

"You can always tell when there's a sale at Macy's," Mrs. Santangelo said, "because traffic is bumper to bumper."

Construction of the area's new home developments during the late 1960s and 1970s involved re-routing, submerging or just plugging up many of Willowbrook's existing streams, which flowed down from Todt Hill and Seaview. Even Willow Brook itself, which once ran along Willowbrook Road and emptied into the swamp from which Willowbrook Pond was carved, suddenly dried up in July 1966, apparently having been illegally dammed.

The result is a need for storm sewers that still hasn't been met and apparently won't be, at least for the foreseeable future.

"It's kind of a Catch-22," Zavin said. "They keep telling us they can't widen the street because they have to put in the storm sewer first. But they say they can't put in the storm sewers because they have no money."

"It (Willowbrook) has grown up considerably, sometimes not all for the better," concedes the Rev. Joel E. A. Novey, pastor of All Saints Episcopal Church.

"Rich blending"

"But I see a rich blending of older families who have stuck with their homes and young families with small children," said Father Novey.

Like Young Israel, All Saints Episcopal moved to Willowbrook with the new Verrazano Bridge, opening in its Victory Boulevard home in 1965.

It had started many years earlier as kind of floating "annex" of the Seamen's Institute that moored in Mariners Harbor. Today, the church still recalls its nautical roots, at least in its roof, built to simulate the inverted keel of a ship.

Father Novey, who joined the congregation in 1970, said few of the original church members who made the move to Willowbrook remain there today.

"I'm probably on my third congregation of people," said Father Novey.

One measure of the changing face of the community can be seen in the many requests Father Novey receives from other congregations looking to rent church space. Most recently, All Saints Episcopal has served as a temporary home for the Martohma Church, an Indian congregation. A Korean congregation meets at the Willowbrook Park Baptist Church nearby.

Father Novey notes that even though the area is predominantly young and upscale, (the congregation's Kiddie Kampus nursery school is 19 years old), the church maintains a food pantry for Willowbrook's needy, and hosts a number of self-help groups, from Cocaine Anonymous to AA.

Sense of unity

Willowbrook residents have also proved they can band together when their community is threatened.

For a time, the neighborhood was galvanized to a boiling point by the proposed 500-bed homeless shelter that would have been built on a city-owned parcel behind PS 54. Following an agreement by the city to drop the shelter plan in return for a jail in Rossville, the land was auctioned off, with restrictions, to a developer. But Zavin, a member of Community Board 2, said the future of the parcel remains unclear.

Last year, when the Transit Authority decided to re-route the S-61 bus down Harold Street enroute to the Staten Island Mall, another firestorm of protest erupted. The T.A. agreed to re-study the route, but hasn't changed it.

More recently, following a rash of thefts and burglaries, residents, at the prompting of police, formed a neighborhood block watch program.

John Petito, one of the residents who joined the program, says he's less worried about crime these days than he is about the growing Fresh Kills Landfill and the poor condition of the nearby roads.

"Richmond Hill Road is a minefield," Petito says.

Petito hastens to add that generally he likes life in Willowbrook — the neighbors, the convenience. But he said problems seemed to get solved quicker and more efficiently back in his old Queens neighborhood.

"The politicians there were much better," Petito said. "Whenever anything happened, we'd get it taken care of."

Government funds

Nevertheless, government dollars are flowing into Willowbrook. Millions of them.

At Willowbrook Park, for example, where many an Island youngster has enjoyed catching some of the fish stocked in man-made Willowbrook Pond, the first phase of a \$1.2 million improvement project is now underway.

Two years ago, the park had become the Island's No. 1 marijuana market, partially because of its easy access from both Victory Boulevard and the nearby Staten Island Expressway.

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