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Holding On to Stability in Queens

By *EMILY S. RUEB*

Change comes slowly to Woodside and Sunnyside, Queens, even during a recession.

These decidedly middle-class neighborhoods — Woodside originally held a large Irish-American population, yet lately has seen an influx of South Asians and Latin Americans — have retained a relative degree of stability during the recession, according to economic indicators tracked by the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

The area has very low rates of subprime lending (11 percent at the height of the subprime boom in 2006, compared with 23 percent citywide) and very few foreclosures (53 in the first two quarters this year). And one of the early signs of homeowner distress, tax delinquency, is virtually nonexistent.

With tidy rows of one-, two- and three-family homes of sturdy brick common in the 1920s and '30s, the area feels mature and cared for, aside from the occasional dilapidation. The towering London plane trees that bow their heads on each side of the sidewalks are a testament to the staying power of all things that put down roots there.

The residential streets feel far from the rumbling 7 train that ambles nearby, though they are surprisingly close. Nearly 50 percent of residential units are within a retail corridor, the highest percent of any community district in Queens. Sheltered under the elevated subway tracks along Roosevelt Avenue is a string of diverse businesses, many representing the recent influx of Latino immigrants.

On one stretch, an Ecuadorean disco stands next to a Colombian travel agency and a Mexican taqueria. Neighborhood stalwarts include Donovan's Pub and ubiquitous Laundromats, most with fading signs evincing little turnover. There are very few vacant storefronts, with new businesses opening. Claret Wine Bar, for example, was opened by a husband-and-wife team at the beginning of the year.

One resident, Dorothy Raymond Morehead, has been in her home since 1975, and has been a real estate agent in the neighborhood for 20 years. She now owns her own company and is the chairwoman of the environmental committee of the community board.

Neighborhood Snapshot

• [Furman Center Data](#) »

Q. How has the neighborhood been feeling the recession?

A. It hasn't. I know of only one person that was laid off from Yeshiva University, but that had to do with Madoff. Some of the small businesses are feeling it, though. I bought a building next to

my office and turned it into a restaurant, and I know it's been tough for the owners who bought it. People are being more cautious. And when they do go out, they don't splurge.

Q. How do you account for the low rates of subprime lending and foreclosures?

A. We have a number of long-term residents with manageable mortgages that don't have to sell. And we have a lot of young people coming in. They'll come here and rent as young parents, then buy. The other thing is that if somebody has to move, they can rent because there's a strong rental market.

Q. What keeps people here?

A. The taxes are reasonable. Seniors, in places like Long Island and New Jersey, can't afford the taxes. But there are a lot of support services for the elderly, like a home care program and Meals on Wheels. And their neighbors really support them.

Q. What has the community done right, in terms of real estate development, to stave off a downturn?

A. When the designers built this community, particularly Sunnyside Gardens, they built everything, from one-, two- and three-family houses, and the two-family homes have four rooms and five rooms. And people can move in here and rent to try out the neighborhood, like I did. I fell in love with my street when I first walked down it in 1968, then bought my house in 1975, and will never leave.

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