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Real Estate

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*If You're Thinking Of Living In:*

## Hastings On Hudson, NY

*Hilly Riverfront Village With 50's Flavor*

By ELSA BRENNER

**I**N the 10 months since Filipe Pereira moved with his wife, Michiko, and their three children to this village along the Hudson River, he has met more neighbors than he did during the previous four years living in another Westchester community.

"That must say something -- that Hastings is a very friendly place, and everyone fits right in here," observed Mr. Pereira, a housing contractor who was raised in Brazil and has met some fellow villagers while playing soccer with a local adult team. His wife, who was born and raised in Japan, has similarly settled in.

Indeed, many residents agree that Hastings is not your typical Westchester suburb. Doris Cadoux, a retired executive who moved to this community just north of Yonkers about a decade ago, described Hastings as "a breath of fresh air."

"It's not a formal kind of place, not at all manicured like many other towns and villages in the county," she said. "And because there are many different kinds of people living here -- blue-collar workers as well as C.E.O.'s, and people from different backgrounds -- it's always very interesting."

This variety is apparent among the ranks of the village's 143 volunteer firefighters, said Anthony Gentile, Hastings's fire chief. "We draw a real mix, including lawyers, carpenters, insurance adjusters, musical composers, teachers and for-pay firefighters in New York City who come home to volunteer at night," said Mr.

Gentile, who has lived in Hastings for 16 years. "Everyone works together and gets along."

HASTINGS occupies two square miles and has a population of 7,650. Some of its diversity may trace to the village's manufacturing heritage. The community's first industry, more than a century and a half ago, was quarrying sandstone and marble, operations that attracted Irish immigrants to an area settled at that time mostly by tenant farmers.

In the late 1800's, the waterfront became the site of a sugar refining plant that attracted German immigrants. Later, Anaconda Cable and Zinsser Chemical located on the deep-water port, staying until the 1970's and attracting workers from places like Poland, Russia, Hungary and Italy.

But in recent years, as the village has become increasingly popular, the prices of single-family homes have driven many descendants of those early blue-collar residents out. Michael A. Gibbons, the owner of Gibbons Real Estate in nearby Dobbs Ferry, noted that unless property is passed down within a family, young adults who grew up in Hastings are often forced by the high cost of real estate to move away.

Such price appreciation has not always been the case. David Willis McCullough, the village's historian, tells a story about Washington Irving and his brother Ebenezer, who purchased almost all of what is now downtown Hastings in 1814. Three years later, they sold it at

a loss. The moral of the story, Mr. McCullough said, is that "they should have held on to it just a little bit longer." In 1999, the median sales price of a single family home in Hastings was \$386,000, said Arthur Riolo, a co-owner of Peter J. Riolo Real Estate in the village. By the end of last year, that number had risen to \$645,000.

"In the 20th century, we went from being a factory town dependent on the Hudson to becoming a bedroom community," said Mr. Riolo, 53, who was raised here. His father started the business 65 years ago at the same spot on Main Street that holds today.

"For a child growing up in Hastings, though, very little has changed -- you still get great rice pudding at the Center Restaurant," Mr. Riolo noted, referring to a diner on Warburton Avenue with pink leatherette booths that has been in business for as long as most people can remember.

Diversity is a hallmark not only of Hastings's demographics, but also of its geography, housing and architectural styles. The village consists mainly of three hills and a valley, with Tudors, wood-framed Victorians, Capes, colonials and contemporaries tucked along roads that wind up the hills.

The downtown shopping district is in the valley. That is the general area where the first residents of the area, the Weckquaesgeek Indians, an Algonquin tribe, planted corn and other crops before the area was settled by the Dutch in the early 1600's.



The name Hastings was apparently provided by William Saunders, a resident who it is believed was born in the English town made famous in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In the 1830's, Saunders operated the Saunders Patent Axle and Brass and Iron Turning Factory. Hastings incorporated as a village in 1879.

Today, the shopping area, with its simple storefronts, is "unpretentious, with a well-worn patina," in Ms. Cadoux's words.

Indeed, except for one restaurant touting a low-carbohydrate menu, there is little along Main Street and Warburton Avenue to suggest that the village has entered the 21st century. Some people have suggested that the retail area -- with its bookstores, delis, dry cleaners and beauty salons -- looks as if it would fit better in the 1950's than in a county of booming super-shopping-centers, soaring downtowns and big-box retailers. But Ms. Cadoux and other residents said they were not eager for Hastings to change.

Except, that is, for the waterfront. Parallel to Warburton Avenue alongside the river, a mostly rundown strip of land remains where Anaconda operated. Looking ahead, officials like the village manager, Neil P. Hess, said they were optimistic that the site, contaminated with PCB's and heavy metals, would soon be cleaned up and rebuilt.

In 1891, the National Conduit and Cable Company manufactured cable along the waterfront for early electrical-utility companies. In 1929, Anaconda took over the business and operated it until 1975, when the plant closed down. The Atlantic Richfield Company of Los Angeles, which took over Anaconda, has acknowledged responsibility for cleaning up the contaminants in the soil.

Mr. Hess said that Hastings received instructions last week from the state Department of Environmental Conservation for part of the cleanup but that it was unclear how long the work would take. The village expects to also move ahead to improve the 50-acre property.

A PRELIMINARY plan by the nonprofit Regional Plan Association suggested a

mixed-used development of housing, offices, specialty retailing and restaurants, a community center, a performance space, a health club and a conference center in addition to 22 acres of parks.

But given the collective temperament of the village, a consensus on how to use the waterfront best may not be reached quickly, Mr. Riolo noted. "Hastings is a very bohemian kind of place where nothing gets done quickly because everyone has an opinion," he said. "But most of us love it that way."

Notwithstanding their diversity and differences on other issues, residents have consistently passed the Board of Education's annual budget. For the more than 10 years that Michael Holstein has been on the board, the budget has passed easily, he said. The current \$28.8 million budget was approved "at least two to one," he said.

There are 1,713 students enrolled in the district's three schools (Hillside Elementary School, Farragut Middle School and Hastings High School), with per pupil costs estimated at \$16,791, said John Russell, the superintendent of schools. Class size averages about 20 at the elementary school, which serves kindergarten through fourth grade, and 22 to 24 in the higher grades.

Of the 101 graduates from Hastings High last spring, 88 percent went on to four-year colleges, 6 percent went to two-year colleges, 3 percent are employed and another 3 percent chose "other options." Average scores on the SAT reasoning tests last year were 575 in the verbal section and 593 in math. Statewide average scores were 496 and 510. Three students were National Merit Scholarship finalists.

In the fourth grade language arts test last year, 89 percent met or exceeded state standards; on the math tests, 97 percent met or exceeded standards, said Marilyn Wishnie, principal of Hillside Elementary School, which has 600 students.

Mrs. Wishnie said the school is also proud of its Tools of Problem Solving curriculum, "which is woven into lessons and teachable moments throughout the

day." The TOPS program, as it is often called, emphasizes social and emotional learning, she said, and teaches students how to listen, how to monitor and control of their feelings, how to have empathy for others and how to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner.

For recreation and cultural pursuits, villagers have a number of options. Hastings was home to the Hudson River School artist Jasper Cropsey in the late 1800's, and today the Newington Cropsey Foundation operates a gallery in Hastings, with the artist's home and studio open to visitors.

Bikers and hikers use the Old Croton Aqueduct Trailway, which runs through Hastings and is owned and managed by the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

On clear evenings at MacEachron Waterfront Park (named for a former mayor, Frances D. MacEachron, who worked to set aside the land), there are often stunning views of the sun setting behind the Palisades on the river's western shoreline.

There are also several other parks. Draper Park, the home of John W. Draper, a scientist credited with taking the first photograph of the moon, is now owned by the village and is home to the Hastings Historical Society. Hillside Park has a pool, tennis courts, nature trails and a pond for fishing and ice skating, and at Zinsser Park, alongside the Aqueduct, the village has set aside land for a community garden.

Another notable former village resident, Jacques Lipchitz, the sculptor, lived in Hastings from 1947 to 1963, and one of his pieces, "Between Heaven and Earth," graces the lawn of the village library.

And then there was the producer Florenz Ziegfeld and his wife, Billie Burke, who played the good witch in "The Wizard of Oz." They lived on a 22-acre estate called Berkeley Crest with a menagerie that included an elephant, two bears, two lion cubs, 15 dogs and a herd of deer.

