

## Having faith in Lindsay Heights

**Young newcomers hopeful that collaboration can keep neighborhood improving**

**By JAMAAL ABDUL-ALIM**

[jabdul-alim@journalsentinel.com](mailto:jabdul-alim@journalsentinel.com)

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No one can say Alan and Lisa Goodman aren't choosy.

When job demands forced the couple to move from the East Coast to the Milwaukee area, they looked at about 60 houses.

Their search spanned from the Village of Hartland in Waukesha County, near Lisa's job as a manager for a Fortune 500 company, to the growth communities of Oak Creek and Franklin, where Alan, who flies frequently on business for the same company, would have been closer to the airport.

But nothing suited them. The houses were either overpriced, in their opinion, or lacked amenities they very much wanted. They also wanted a diverse neighborhood that reflected the character of Milwaukee. He's from the west side of Philadelphia. She's from Boston.

The receptionist at their new dentist's office pointed them to the Lindsay Heights redevelopment initiative, a collaborative program that involves WHEDA and the city. The program offers \$1 city-owned lots, \$10,000 forgivable loans and custom-built homes. WHEDA is the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, the state housing agency that makes loans available to low- and moderate-income households for construction, rehabilitation and permanent mortgages.

The Goodmans say that was a package too good to pass up.

They customized the standard builder's plans to include 2½ bathrooms and walk-in closets.

Now, the couple dwells in a 2,300-square-foot dream home that Lisa says has her "thrilled." They had a pair of bookcases built into the wall of their living room, which features French doors to the dining room.

They have a whirlpool in the master bathroom. They have an island in a spacious kitchen that is 250 square feet bigger than called for in the original design. They added ambience with a gas fireplace. They have a two-car detached garage and a yard that's soon to be fenced in.

### **Near 'Ghost Town'**

Such are the deals being offered in this area through WHEDA.

Through the Lindsay Heights initiative, homes are going for between \$116,900 and \$183,500.

Inside the Goodmans' two-story, three-bedroom dwelling, it's easy to forget that you're on W. Wright St. near Phillis Wheatley Elementary School in an area of the city often referred to as "the 'hood." The area is bordered by N. 17th and N. 20th streets, and W. Center and W. North avenues.

Of course, all neighborhoods have their share of crime. But this one is near an area recently dubbed "Ghost Town" because of the high homicide rate there.

So the situation begs the question: Why would a young professional couple that plans to start a family soon move into the midst of an area where bullets fly and bodies drop?

The answer is simple: faith.

Faith that things will turn around. Faith that the investment in the community, such as a nearby YMCA on North Ave., where Alan is a member, can help make the quality of life that much better. Faith that when neighbors band together and form groups such as the Phillis Wheatley Neighborhood Association, which Alan Goodman has been invited to co-chair, that they can help turn "the 'hood" back into a neighborhood where property values rise at enviable rates.

That's the Goodmans' dream - or at least the one they bought.

So far, the Goodmans are pleased. But they are not ones to sit back and not do their part.

"It doesn't make sense to move into a neighborhood and not get involved," says Alan Goodman, 36, who says he plans to volunteer his time at the nearby Phillis Wheatley Elementary School to share his career expertise with area youths.

"My concern is people are going to get hung up on the history of the neighborhood and they're not going to come in," Alan Goodman says.

Lisa Goodman says that, aside from one break-in while the house was being built, she hasn't seen anything to make her regret moving to the area.

The couple say they've met most of their neighbors and cherish them because everyone looks out for one another. He encourages other young professionals to consider buying into the area while they can.

Antonio Riley, executive director of WHEDA, describes interest in the Lindsay Heights initiative as "very hot."

Unlike other WHEDA programs, the Lindsay Heights program doesn't have income requirements, and buyers do not have to be first-time home buyers.

### **'Good for the economy'**

Riley says the Lindsay Heights initiative has added \$15 million to the tax base.

"Property tax growth is major, because vacant land was a drain," Riley says. The building of homes on city-owned lots, he says, is "good for the economy."

About 40 lots are left in the Phillis Wheatley area of Lindsay Heights. To increase stability, buyers must agree to occupy the homes at least five years, and the houses cannot be rented.

Houses now being built on the \$1 lots are going for an average of \$180,000, says Cindy Kuhs, co-owner of Kuhs Quality Homes, which has built 90 percent of the new homes in the Lindsay Heights initiative.

"It's like planting seeds," says her husband, Brian Kuhs. "Once you build a couple of new houses, people rally around the development."

Richard Quarles, president of the Phillis Wheatley Neighborhood Association, says the development has motivated area property owners to improve their own properties.

"It's having a great impact on the area," says Quarles, a retired iron pourer who has resided in the area for 38 years. "It's bringing new people that are willing to help out in the community."