



UNCOVERING THE GOLD COAST

nieauthor



# The carriage trade a.w" --

HOW THE GOLD COAST GREW INTO A GREAT PLACE TO BE BORN

BY RICK KOGAN

When I was born, in the late summer of 1951, my parents brought me home from the hospital to an apartment on the second floor of an old graystone at 1444 N. State Pkwy. This was at the heart of that area known as the Gold Coast, and it was, if memory serves, a very fine place to live.

It had been less so a century before, when the first settlers to the area found a relatively inhospitable climate: low sand hills covered with scrub growth of pine, oak and brush lining the lakeshore. Between the hills were swamps and frog ponds edged with high grass and cattails.

Most of these first settlers were German immigrants and they built modest cottages of frame construction. Few of them were built near the lake, since it was believed that the often-chilly lake air was bad for their health. Truck farming was the profession of choice, and though the city limit was soon extended north to North Avenue, and the massive municipal cemetery there, the area was quite rural.

There was one notable exception: the brewery built by Johann A. Huck. In 1855, this immigrant from Baden, Germany, built a large brewery on State Street, near what is now Goethe Street. It was one of the most striking structures in the city. But it, like all the other buildings in the area, was leveled by the Great Fire of 1871.

Other parts of the city rebounded quickly, but much of the northern area lay undeveloped, even after 1875 when the city built Lake Shore Drive, a 200-foot-wide carriage boulevard connecting Oak Street to Lincoln Park.

In 1882, merchant Potter Palmer hired architects Henry Ives Cobb and Charles Swanner Frost to build a house on a 100,060-square-foot patch of lakeside frog ponds between what are now Banks and Schiller Streets.

Most of the city's wealthy then lived in immense and elaborate homes on Prairie Avenue—"the street of the sifted few"—and they scoffed at Palmer's plans.

Within a year after Palmer and his wife, the former Bertha Honore, moved into their mansion in 1885, value of property in the area—much of it owned by Palmer—went up 150 percent. As Chicago society began to flock to the area, Palmer subdivided and developed the land he owned, building homes and apartment buildings that were for sale and for rent. He would eventually be acknowledged as the builder of as many as 300 buildings and apart-

ments in the Gold Coast and its environs.

At the northern edge of the area, much of the property was owned by the Catholic archdiocese; the official residence of the archbishop (or, as now, cardinal), facing North Avenue between Astor Street and State Parkway, was built in 1885. At the turn of the century, the archdiocese began subdividing its holdings for homes and handsome buildings began to rise on Astor Street and State and Dearborn Parkways.

It was around this time that the area acquired its shimmering moniker, courtesy of some Harvard students home for vacation. Though "Gold Coast" is an old term—first used to describe the region of France near Dijon—the Harvard men had used it to describe their newly constructed student quarters, complete with bathrooms and swimming pools.

Back in Chicago, the college men told tales of this Gold Coast, and the name became common in the area, though without its derisive edge. By the time it was first used in print by the legendary editor Walter Howey, who headlined a 1915 Tribune story "Gold Coast Burglaries"—the area was certifiably the city's richest.

It was still a neighborhood of mansions, but the first of the stately Lake Shore Drive apartment buildings—and the prototype for many that would follow—was an eight-story structure that was built in 1906 at Cedar Street and the drive. The 1100 N. Lake Shore Drive building was a place of high ceilings, spacious rooms and one apartment per floor—a place built for elegant living and entertaining on a large scale. An apartment rented at \$5,000 a year.

The area was soon dotted with other apartment buildings, ranging roughly from 6 to 20 stories. The apartments came in a variety of sizes. But most were grand affairs.

The 12-story apartment building at 1550 N. State Pkwy. was completed in 1913. It overlooked the cardinal's home and the park, and it had one 22-room apartment on each of its first 11 floors; the top floor was 24 rooms.

The Gold Coast also contained fine residential hotels, such as the six-story Ambassador, built in 1920. Six years later it was joined in-

Completed in 1885, Potter Palmer's Gold Coast "castle" became the center of Chicago society.



name and by a slender underground tunnel-to the Ambassador East, across State Street at Goethe Street. In 1938, when The Pump Room opened in the Ambassador East, the Gold Coast had what would be a star-studded centerpiece for decades, a room that attracted the Social Register set and the royalty of show business.

Still, the area's most dominating public building was and remains the Drake Hotel, which opened on New Year's Eve in 1920. It was the creation of developer-architects Ben Marshall and Charles Fox. Between 1905 and 1929, Marshall and Fox also designed and built the 209, 199 and 179 buildings on East Lake Shore Drive, then and still among the city's most desirable addresses.

The Gold Coast glittered, even as the years saw many mansions converted into apartment houses.

For the short time I lived there, the bay window of our second-floor apartment offered to the north a view of the large private gardens of an adjoining mansion. And on the second floor of the building next door to the south, a television producer lived with two pet monkeys.

"One of them used to swing over and visit you," says Marilew Kogan, my mother, who currently lives in a Gold Coast apartment. "He would jump into your crib and try to play with you. He also used to sometimes come with us when I'd take you for a stroll through the neighborhood. You were very happy."

Alas, with the arrival of another baby-my brother, Mark-my family moved to a larger apartment a bit to the northwest, in Old Town, which was not without its own charms.

I don't remember when the wrecker's ball knocked down my first home at 1444. Faded news clippings tell me it was in 1959, and there sits on that spot now a high-rise with the address 1440. But perhaps somewhere in that building there is a little boy or girl eager to be taken for a stroll through the neighborhood.

# be it ever so affluent...

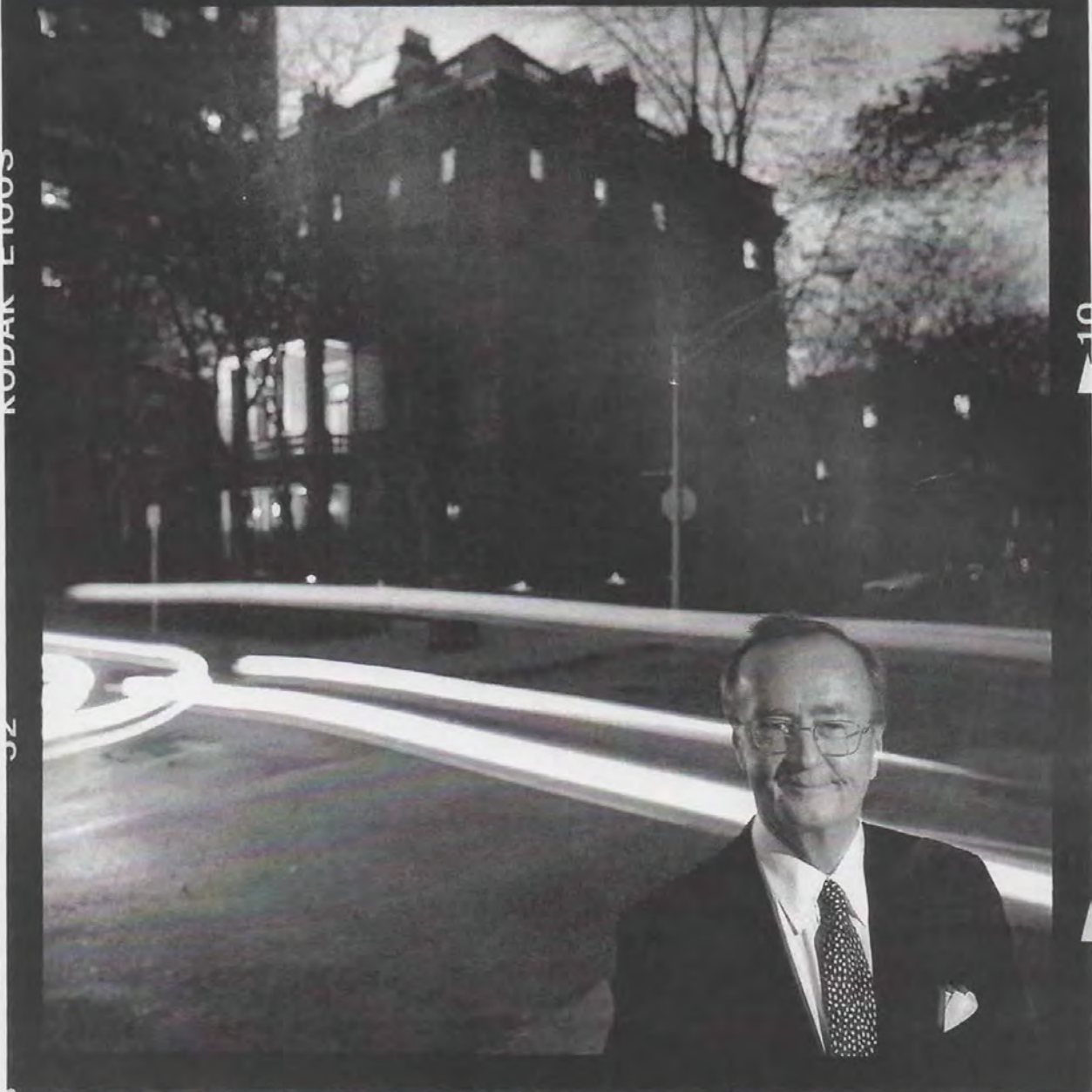
FOR THOSE WHO CALL IT HOME, THERE'S NO PLACE  
LIKE THE GOLD COAST

On warm days, Yvonne Pen often sits in the small garden hidden behind her three-story home on the western edge of the Gold Coast neighborhood.

There are finer homes in the area and larger gardens. But Pen has loved this house and lovingly tended its garden for the nearly half-century she has lived here.

"It is a special place in a special part of the city," she says. Though she was born and raised in the Hubbard Woods section of Winnetka, she fell in love with the city as a child.

BY RICK KOGAN AND PATRICK T. REARDON  
TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY CHRIS WALKER



Reuben Hedlund lives with his wife, Cynthia, in a condo carved out of the old Patterson-McConnick mansion on Astor Street. "Living there makes every day that much better," he says. The mansion was one of the first buildings to be designated a Chicago landmark.

"I was taken into the city for a weekend when I was 5 and that did it," she says. "The lights, the activity, the people."

Later, as a student at the Goodman School of Drama, she lived in the Three Arts Club, the residence for female art students that had opened at Goethe Street and Dearborn Parkway in 1914. She next lived in an apartment at 35 E. Division St., and she was living in the Tree Studios buildings when she met an artist named Rudolph Pen, the man who would become her husband.

"Rudolph and I fell in love and were married in 1946," she says. "In 1948, when he became a member of the faculty of the School of the Art Institute, he was teaching classes in the morning and then again in the evening and it was important to him that he

not lose time commuting.

"We were so lucky to find this house," she says now. "It was 70 years old in 1950, which means it was one of the oldest buildings in the neighborhood but it was perfect for us."

In this home the Pens raised two children: Ronald, now a professor of music at the University of Kentucky, and Polly, a composer-playwright-actress in New York City.

"It was a wonderful neighborhood for the children," says Pen. "They went to school at the nearby Latin School. They played music at the church and took dancing lessons not far away. The city was at their fingertips and I never had to worry."

The area just to the west of Pens' home, the stretch of Clark Street from North Avenue to Divi-

sion Street, was a strip of cheap lodgings, restaurants, nightclubs and honky-tonks. Though some will tell you they felt this area threatening, the Pens found it anything but.

"There were a number of unsavory places on the street," she recalls. "And I suppose it was sliding downhill. But it was never dangerous. It was filled with action and lights and people. We could look out our windows and see everything—and I do mean everything. It was shabby, but it was filled with character... and characters."

One of the Pens' favorite Clark Street establishments was the Red Star Inn, a German-American restaurant a block south of North Avenue.

"I still miss it," says Pen. "That is where we would go whenever Rudolph sold a painting. We would go

MIDWEST PORTRAIT



Tribune file photo

1200 block of North Dearborn Parkway, February 1936

# Frozen in time

there to celebrate the sale. And when he didn't sell a painting, that's where we would go to commiserate."

The Red Star Inn would eventually fall to the wrecker's ball as another part of the sprawling Sandburg Village complex that would change the character (and the characters) of the Gold Coast's western edge.

Pen has seen many changes in the neighborhood in which she has lived for five decades. But she remains ever in love with her home, her garden, her small slice of the Gold Coast, of the city. The kids are long gone from the house, but they visit frequently. Friends are always dropping by. Rudolph Pen died in January 1989 while taking a walk on the street where he lived. But the house is still alive with memories of him and his work. Canvases-oils of horses, chorus girls, fighters-pack every wall and even take up what used to be a hallway on the second floor.

"The garden is still my joy," says

The neighborhood is densely populated, but the presence of so many two- and three-story homes gives the Gold Coast a human scale that's missing amid the gaggle of skyscrapers just to the south in Streeterville. It feels like a neighborhood-and an interesting one at that, with its attractive mix of architectural styles and the historical significance of many of its homes. And then there's the neighborhood's closeness to Lincoln Park and the lakefront

Some residents will quietly complain about the "hordes of strangers who fill the park and beaches," and others don't much like the lively nightlife areas nearby. But they know, as 18th District Police Cmdr. Joseph Griffin says, "This is as safe a neighborhood as there is in the city. There is the night-life area on Division Street where some people will over-indulge and we do have to arrest people who act foolish. But the Gold Coast is an area without a

Gold Coast is a world unto itself and that those who live there are interested only in insulating themselves from some of the harsh realities of the contemporary city.

"But I don't think that is true," says Rev. Raymond Webster, rector of St. Chrysostom's on North Dearborn Parkway. "I like to say we are at the heart of a great city but very much a part of it too. So many of our parishioners volunteer for our charitable endeavors, our adult education programs."

Indeed, the membership lists of the area's charitable and cultural institutions are filled with the names of Gold Coast residents.

You don't have to be hugely wealthy to devote your time and money to charity-or to live in the Gold Coast. But it helps.

There's a house for sale right now on the Gold Coast for which the asking price is \$8.9 million. And there's a rumor circulating through the neigh-

neighborhoods around the Loop.

It has been a neighborhood to aspire to. If you couldn't afford the Gold Coast quite yet or simply couldn't find a suitable home or apartment in the relatively small community, you'd turn your sights to other nearby communities, such as Lincoln Park, Lake View and the Near North Side.

The Gold Coast is one of the oldest parts of Chicago. When the city was incorporated in 1837, the area, not yet known as the Gold Coast, formed the northeastern corner of Chicago. To day its eastern boundary is Lake Michigan. Its northern border North Avenue and Lincoln Park.

To the west looms the giant Sandburg Village development. Some people, particularly real estate agents and residents of that mix of high- and low rises, like to consider Sandburg Village as a part of the Gold Coast. But it's really a neighborhood unto itself with a character of its own.

The Gold Coast has a ragged west

THERE ARE A LOT OF WEALTHY PEOPLE . BUT THERE'S  
A GREAT COMMUNITY SPIRIT..

Pen. "And the neighborhood is still the most wonderful place. Why, just the other day I was out walking my dog. It was a lovely day and a man was walking down the street toward me. I didn't know him but recognized his face. He stopped and he said, 'It's so nice to see an old-timer.'

"I wasn't at all offended. I turned 80 on Halloween, but I thought the man's remark was just delightful.

"I am an old-timer. Sometimes I feel like a landmark myself."

The Gold Coast may be the wealthiest of Chicago's neighborhoods. But it's still a neighborhood-a city neighborhood.

"We rarely go to our local grocery store without running into someone we know," says Thomas Begel former CEO of the Pullman Co. "You've got a special kind of neighborhood feel here."

Begel, who now heads TMB Industries, an investment firm, moved to the Gold Coast with his wife, Sarah, in 1991 when he returned to Chicago after several years in New York.

"We did look in the suburbs, but you're either a city mouse or a country mouse. And we love living in the city," says Begel.

The Gold Coast is a neighborhood of hundreds of century-old redstones, brownstones and other single-family homes-some, former mansions; others, humble row houses. And it's a neighborhood of mid-rise and high-rise structures with dozens, perhaps hundreds of apartments, clustered not only along the lakefront but also sprinkled here and there in the community's interior.

lot of crime. I would describe it as tranquil."

The Begels purchased a 2 1/4-story redstone home on Burton Place at Dearborn Parkway that dates back to the 1890s. Their 4-year-old son, Michael, attends the Latin School, a half-block to the north. And the whole family attends St Chrysostom's Episcopal Church a half-block to the south. They have a two-car garage but rarely need to drive anywhere.

"As far as day-to-day living, it's very pleasant to walk to virtually everything you do," Begel says. "I walk to work [at One Magnificent Mile] in the morning and walk home at night."

Of course, the people Segel passes on his walks, or nods to in the store, are people like him-successful people, very successful people. The Gold Coast counts among its 20,000 residents such well-known names as former Illinois Gov. James Thompson, Fruit of the Loom Chairman William Farley and Cardinal Francis George, Roman Catholic archbishop of Chicago, as well as hundreds of lesser-known power brokers, millionaires and captains of industry.

Begel, who grew up in a modest home in Peoria, says. "The thing that surprised us is how friendly a neighborhood it is. There are a lot of wealthy people, and neither of us is from a wealthy family. But there's a great community spirit."

It's easy to get the sense that the

borhood that one homeowner is spending \$25 million-\$25 million!-to remodel his home's interior.

Parking is so scarce that spaces sell for the price of luxury cars. If you want to rent a space, you can expect to spend, say, \$3,000 a year. Or maybe you want to buy it outright. Probable cost \$30,000.



Not only is the Gold Coast the most affluent of Chicago neighborhoods, it's more than twice as wealthy as the richest suburb of similar population, Highland Park, in terms of capital income. Indeed, a study of 1990 census data found that, except for Central Park East in Manhattan, the Gold Coast has the greatest concentration of wealth in the nation.

Consider this: Based on a study of building permits, it is estimated that, since 1978, Gold Coast property owners have spent more than \$100 million to restore, renovate and rehabilitate homes and buildings in the neighborhood's 28 blocks.

In fact, the Gold Coast is so affluent that it has been a catalyst for the development of much of the rest of the North Side lakefront and of the

ern border. In some places the neighborhood ends at Clark Street. At others State Street. At others, Rush Street.

The southern border is Oak Street (for the one block between Rush and Michigan Avenue) and Walton Street (for the one block between Michigan and the lake). To the south is the Magnificent Mile and the ever-more-crowded high-rises of Streeterville, another distinctly different world.

While this is the area where Gold Coast people have their homes, it does not include all of the neighborhood's institutions.

Inside these borders are the Drake Hotel, the Racquet Club and the Fort nightly Club. But outside, mainly in the area just east and west of Michigan Avenue, are the Woman's Athletic Club and another private club, the Casino the St. James Episcopal Cathedral and the Roman Catholic Holy Name Cathedral; and, of course, the shops and stores of the Magnificent Mile.

Although now a shopping mecca for the entire metropolitan region as well as a not-to-be-missed stop for most tourists, the Boulevard Michigan was once the elegant shopping preserve of Gold Coast lords and ladies. Today, most Gold Coasters are glad they're close enough to shop along Michigan but still able, when they wish, to retreat to their residential enclave.

When you come down to it, the Gold Coast really is pretty close to even things: Symphony Center and the Art Institute; the power centers of the Loop

Oak Street Beach, Grant Park and Lincoln Park: Meigs Field for quick shots in and out of the city; Second City and Steppenwolf Theatre; even Soldier Field and the United Center.

"The location," says long-time resident and real estate agent Pat Study, "is what made the Gold Coast in the first place, and the location is what will always keep it the most valuable. We will always be No. 1. People move here because it's the best and the closest"

Yet, just as any city neighborhood changes and evolves over time, so, too, has the Gold Coast. And, while the community of today seems so settled and solid and certain, it wasn't always that way.

For much of this century, the Gold Coast has been battered by bad economic times and endangered by good ones. It has never lost its allure, but its character as a neighborhood-and its scale as a street-level community-has been under almost constant threat from social trends, political decisions and developers' schemes.

In 1958, when Study and her late husband, Robert, bought a three-story row house at 1350 N. Dearborn Pkwy, the Gold Coast was an elderly dowager down on her luck.

"It was slummy," Study recalls. "Everywhere you see a high-rise that went up in the '60s, there had been a slum building which an absentee landlord had milked." One Sunday morning, Study looked out the window and was startled to see a dead body propped up against the wall of the Pink Lady tavern on Clark Street.

Of course, the Gold Coast was never a true slum. But the years had taken their toll.

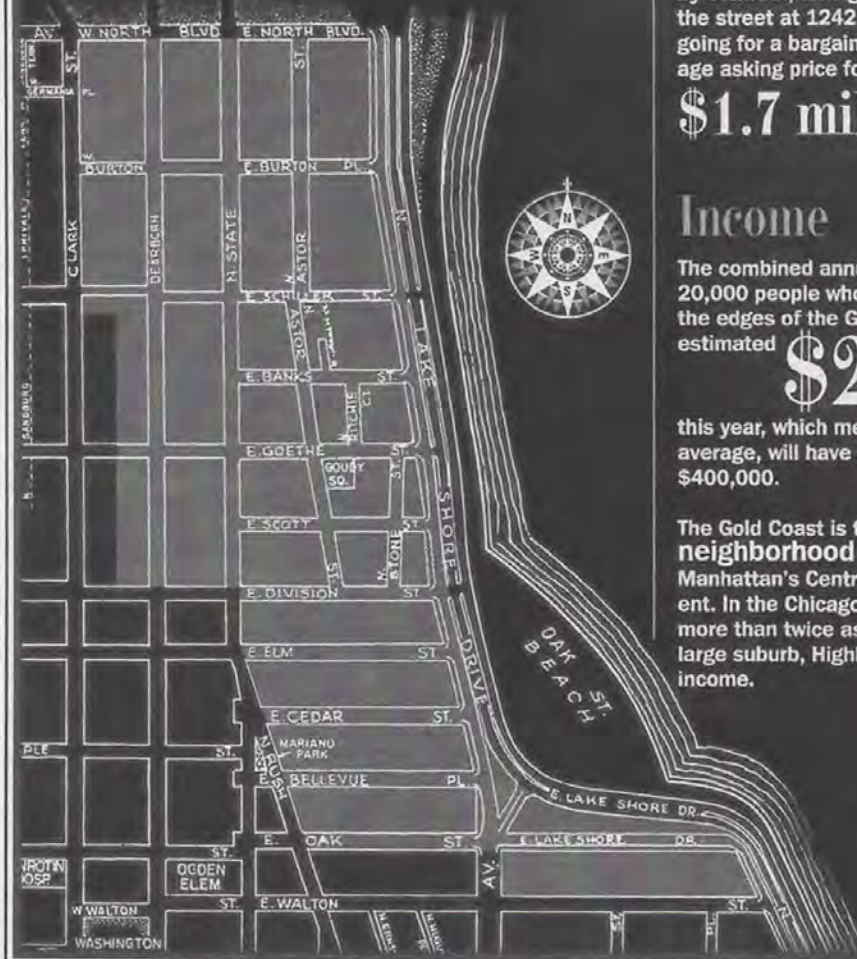
It had been built as a neighborhood of mansions and homes for the well-to-do. But the land was too valuable, too close to the Loop, to stay that way. And, as early as the 1920s, homes were being taken down and replaced by relatively modest high-rises of 15 floors or so, representing a neat profit for developers and a sharp increase in population density.

Like other Chicago neighborhoods, the Gold Coast was caught in a sort of suspended animation during the Depres-

# Gold Coast by the numbers

**FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY**, the Gold Coast has been the epicenter of wealth in Chicago. Not only has the neighborhood been the home of the most affluent of the city's residents, but it also has functioned as a social magnet, attracting well-to-do Chicagoans to communities along its borders.

Indeed, since World War II, the Gold Coast has been an anchor and catalyst in the transformation of the North Side lakefront and the areas around the Loop into high-income enclaves. Those who couldn't afford to live on Astor Street or Banks Street turned to other neighborhoods along Lake Michigan, such as Lincoln Park, a community that has evolved into a sort of Gold Coast North.



## Housing

Nine single-family homes were on sale this fall on the Gold Coast. Asking price ranged from \$799,000 (for a 3-story, 7-room home on Elm Street) to

**\$8.9 million**

(for a 22-room mansion on Astor Street).

The average asking price was **\$3.4 million.**

Sixteen Gold Coast condos were on the market for \$1 million or more, including a 12-room penthouse apartment at 1300 N. Lake Shore Drive being offered for

**\$3.95 million.**

By contrast, an eight-room condo just down the street at 1242 N. Lake Shore Drive was going for a bargain \$1.075 million. The average asking price for a Gold Coast condo was

**\$1.7 million.**

## Income

The combined annual income of the 20,000 people who live in and along the edges of the Gold Coast is an estimated

**\$2 billion**

this year, which means that a family of four, on average, will have an annual income of about \$400,000.

The Gold Coast is the **second wealthiest neighborhood in the nation.** Only Manhattan's Central Park East is more affluent. In the Chicago region, the Gold Coast is more than twice as affluent as the wealthiest large suburb, Highland Park, in per capita income.

—Patrick T. Reardon

SOURCE: TRIBUNE ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, URBANOLOGIST PIERRE DE VISE AND REAL ESTATE AGENTS PATRICIA STUDY AND LOUISE STUDY LEFFLOW OF RIBLOFF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES.

changed, except that many of the single-family homes, particularly the largest of the mansions, were reconfigured into rooming houses.

The problem was: Those mansions made sense only for a family with a platoon of servants. But, after the turn of the century, it became virtually impossible to find servants. Prospective maids and butlers were working instead in factories and stores where the pay was better and the social status higher.

When the Studys moved into the Gold Coast, a second wave of high-rise construction was starting. Unlike the earlier wave, these new tall buildings were constructed in the boxy, bleak International style. Instead of having elegant first- and second-floor facades that blended into the streetscape (and buttressed the sense of neighborhood), these new towers often brought a starkness to the otherwise quaint community. A particularly egregious example is the two-story, featureless, black-brick wall that takes up the entire middle of one block on Astor Street.

But this was also the beginning of the era of community activism in Chicago neighborhoods, and the Gold Coast was no exception.

Soon after they moved in, the Studys joined the North Dearborn Association, which was leading the fight for neighborhood improvement. (Later, a second community organization, the North State-Astor-Lake Shore Drive Association, was formed.)

One early battle had to do with traffic. Each weekday morning and afternoon, the neighborhood was flooded with automobile commuters: "It was like a river of traffic," Study recalls—who were using Dearborn Parkway and State Street as shortcuts between

Instead, North Avenue was a solid northern border.

Similarly, the construction of Sandburg Village, which started in 1960, gave a sharper definition to the western edge of the community. In fact, some community activists assert that the development, named for poet Carl Sandburg, "saved" the Gold Coast by acting as a barrier between the neighborhood and the much poorer areas to the west.

"Some of us had a frightful time when [Sandburg Village developer Arthur] Rubloff wanted to turn our little stretch of buildings into high-rises, too," says Yvonne Pen. "We fought a tremendous fight. I even wrote a letter to Mr. Sandburg asking him to intervene. He never wrote back, but we won the battle."

Another long-running battle was to spruce up the look of the neighborhood.

At mid-century, many Gold Coast back yards were filled with junk and rubble. So, in 1955, the North Dearborn group came up with the idea of a Garden Walk to encourage landscaping improvements and boost community pride. Only five families took part that first year, showing off their back-yard greenery and plantings to visitors, but the idea soon took off. And, more than 40 years later, the annual Garden

hundreds of architecturally or historically interesting buildings from tearing it down to make way for a high-rise. And, in the long run, there was no economic reason for the owner to keep the old building up. The handwriting was on the wall, and it appeared, Study says, that the Gold Coast some day would be "just one high-rise after the other."

with six-or seven-figure sales prices. Reuben Hedlund, a prominent Chicago lawyer and former chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, lives with his wife, Cynthia, in just such a condo, one of nine constructed out of the 91 rooms of the old Patterson-McCormick mansion at 1500 N. Astor St.

"We're in the upper two floors, in what had been a guest bedroom and



The glow of Lake Shore Drive is right outside the front door of Bill, Carolann and Billy Randall.

## WHEN YOU START OVER-BUILDING, YOU START LOSING

### THE TREASURE YOU HAVE.'

Lake Shore Drive and the Loop.

For 10 years, the North Dearborn Association lobbied to have Dearborn and State dead-end at North Avenue instead of linking with the drive. But it wasn't until 1967, when representatives of the group, including Study, were able to meet with Mayor Richard J. Daley, that the link was cut.

As Study recalls, the group members were polite when speaking to the mayor, and Daley was polite in return. "He said, 'we are very aware that we get more taxes from your area than anywhere else in the city.'"

An unforeseen benefit of the change was a sharpening of the identity of the Gold Coast. No longer did the

Walk attracts dozens of participants, including many from other sections of the Gold Coast and from outside the neighborhood as well.

In those early years, community activists were also quick to report building code violations, bringing the wrath of the city's building department down on lackadaisical owners. But the effort often backfired. Sometimes, owners responded by fixing up their structures. But, at other times, they used the potentially high cost of repairs as an excuse for selling out to a high-rise developer.

It seemed to be a losing battle. There was no legal way for neighbors

But then the neighborhood caught a couple of breaks.

The first was the invention of the condominium. Before 1963, it was possible to own a free-standing home or townhouse or to be a co-owner of a co-operative apartment building. But with the condominium, it was, for the first time, possible to own a separate and distinct portion of a larger structure.

What this meant for the Gold Coast was a stay of execution for many of the mansions and large homes. Now, it was financially possible, indeed, profitable for a developer to take over one of these white elephants and trans-

the attic, which they called the boxing room—where you kept boxes," Hedlund says.

He purchased the condo in 1986, and, a year later, he and Cynthia were married in the building's courtyard.

For a fan of art and architecture, like Hedlund, the condo and its setting are a dream.

"Living there makes every day that much better," he says. "The building, the stonework, the ornamentation, the main stairwell—it's beautifully designed."

And, Hedlund says, there's an additional pleasure that comes with living in the mansion and living on the Gold

for its rotating circular bed, became the site for stern warnings about activities such as doing homework in the halls and making noise late at night. Security guards required students to sign in or out, and the school banned overnight guests. (That hardly stopped the students from continuing the Playboy Mansion's libidinous tradition. "We just ended up sleeping with each other," recalls Scott, now a Seattle resident and book author.) And though administrators had originally intended

the forbidden areas. But at those times the students were warned beforehand. "We'd usually get a finger-waving lecture," says Blum. "Mostly, they told us to stay out of sight."

Not surprisingly, the art students never blended well into the Gold Coast surroundings. The first time it snowed in the city, Srott and his dormmates scrambled into the mansion's front yard. For him, the moment remains crystalline.

"Here I was, this working-class Texas boy who had never seen snow

dents of North State Parkway were happy to see the signs that LR Development posted outside the mansion in 1993. Playboy Enterprises had formally donated the mansion to the art school in 1989, but the building came with a \$500,000 annual maintenance cost, and it remained underused. So within a year of the donation, the school decided to convert the quirky asset into cash. Unfortunately, the real-estate market was slumping, hard. After first hoping to sell the whole building as a

the time, though. Abrams was relatively new to the business: the Playboy Mansion marked a significant step for him.

"That was our first high-end, super-luxury development," he says. "And it was risky. That's why it had been on the market for a couple of years; over 100 developers had already looked at it and passed."

By the time Abrams took it over, the building had been vacant for several years. Water damage had marred some

**• To us. IT'S ... A PLACE FOR OUR FAMILY TO BE TOGETHER. •**

to make the whole house accessible to students, within a few years much of the mansion was off-limits, including the bowling alley, the pool and its grotto bar, hidden behind a waterfall. The students rummaged through every inch open to them for memorabilia.

"We found a Bunny costume in the laundry room," recalls Srott. "And I still have a little cocktail-party serving bowl with a Playboy emblem on it." Blum recalls finding a chair with straps in a closet, calling the contraption "pretty freaky, if you know what I mean." Occasionally, the school would use the building for receptions or events and open

like this before, all giddy about living in a rich neighborhood full of beautiful houses, straight out of a John Hughes movie," he remembers. "So we had a huge snowball fight with these flakes coming down around us, a total Norman Rockwell kind of moment"

But when the students went back into Hefner Hall, they were met with a stern rebuke from the administrator, who had been inundated with complaints from the neighbors.

Nobody likes a construction site next door, but it's a fair bet that resi-

single unit, the school was forced to break it into two parcels, the original mansion and its south addition, built in 1914. And in an era when people who want to live in mansions had mostly migrated to the North Shore, the only viable option for the main building seemed to be to divide it into condominiums.

The buyer of the main building at almost \$175 million, based on real-estate records, was Bruce Abrams, now a prominent Chicago developer specializing in posh projects such as the Park Tower on Chicago Avenue and Mayfair on East Lake Shore Drive. At

areas, and the students had inflicted their share of abuse. The 2,000-square-foot ballroom, he decided, was too spectacular to destroy. But the pool, bowling alley and grotto bar were eliminated to make room for an underground parking structure. And the driveway on State Parkway, which had witnessed the limousine exits of everyone from Frank Sinatra to the Rolling Stones, was turned into a quiet front yard.

Judging them architecturally incompatible with the original mansion, Abrams razed the rear additions Hefner had commissioned to house the

*Continued on page 46*

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 Mity Nice Grill® / Mon Ami Gabi™ / Nacional 27™ / The Original Gino's East™ of Chicago  
 Papagus® / Greek Taverna / P. J. Clarke's® / R. J. Grunts® / Scoozit!® / Shaw's Crab House®  
 Shaw's Seafood Grill® / TRU™ / Tucchetti / Tucci Benucch® / Twin City Grill™ / Yong™ / Wildfire®

