

Seeds took root at Newsome Farm

Improvements over time helped develop an integrated setting one resident called 'An ideal community.'

BY LORI A. DENNEY
STAFF WRITER

In 1977, skepticism in Newsome Farm ran rampant.

"Bigwigs" from the city came into the neighborhood announcing plans to rehabilitate dilapidated homes, construct a drainage system, pave the roads and add concrete sidewalks.

Officials promised that every resident, longtime or new, would be connected to city water and sewer.

Twenty years ago, the city decided to invest in 12 low-income, mostly black neighborhoods, like Newsome Farm, that had been left behind by Virginia Beach's development boom. The city has spent more than \$50 million in federal and local funds since then to extend public water and sewer lines, pave dirt roads and rehabilitate housing in the neighborhoods.

All of these improvements, Newsome Farm residents said they were told, would take place over a 10-year span. It was three years before the work actually started.

"Miracles. That's what some thought we were being promised," said Sadye Shaw, a longtime resident and president of the Newsome Farm Civic League. "They (residents) didn't trust city government and it was hard for us to get them to trust what was going to be done."

At the time the neighborhood, off Newtown Road in the Bayside area just west of Lake Edward North and south of Lynnbrook Landing, was comprised of some 70 homes built on old farm land.

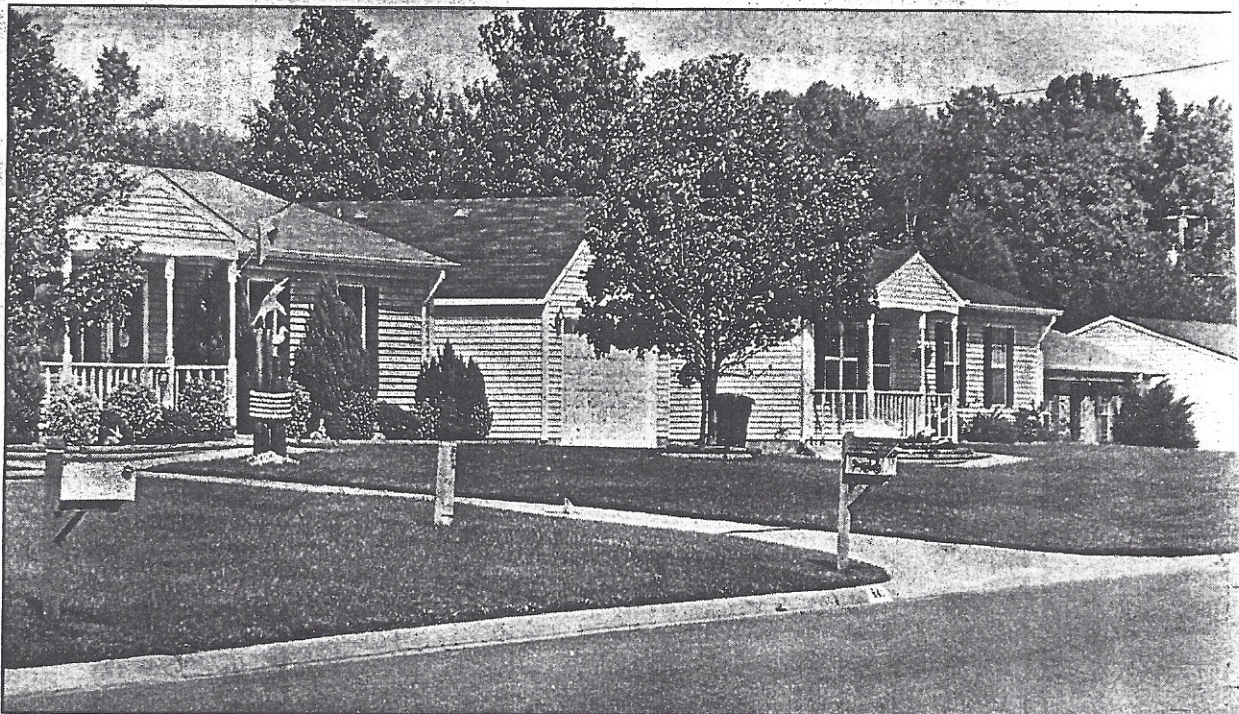
When Shaw's husband, Norman, built their home on Daniel Smith Road in 1963, there were no street lights, no trash or mail pick-up except on Newtown Road and water stood knee-deep on the dirt roads when it rained.

Shaw was instrumental in forming a neighborhood civic league soon after residents were first approached about improvements.

"I just forced myself on them," said Shaw, who was still considered a newcomer in the neighborhood during the '70s even though he had been there for years.

Throughout the improvement years and even now the civic league has remained a driving force.

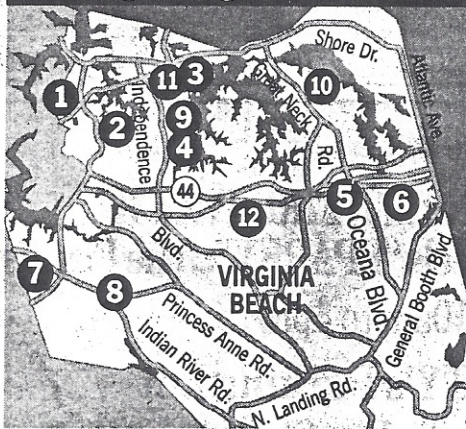
"The best lesson we ever had was when the nursing home opened," said Shaw, a retired program advisor for emotionally disturbed children with the city of Norfolk. "We struggled to keep the



Staff photos by CHARLES MEAD

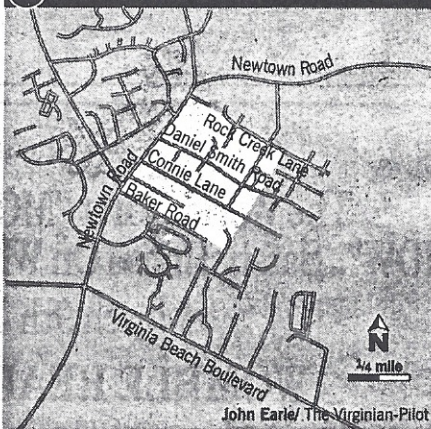
The first seven homes built as part of the redevelopment were built through low interest loans and other programs offered by the Virginia Beach Community Development Corporation and the Virginia Housing Development Authority. The remaining development came from private developers

The target neighborhoods



- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| 1 Burton Station | 7 Queen City |
| 2 Newsome Farm | 8 Newlight |
| 3 Lake Smith | 9 Gracetown |
| 4 Reedtown | 10 Mill Dam |
| 5 Atlantic Park | 11 Beechwood |
| 6 Seatack | 12 Doyletown |

2 Newsome Farm



About Newsome Farm

- Houses at start: 63
- Occupied houses deemed uninhabitable: 7
- Population at start: 202
- Percentage of land undeveloped: 47%
- Work completed: Water, sewer, streets, drainage, housing work completed.
- Public money invested: \$5.2 million



This is the fourth of 10 profiles on the city's Target Neighborhoods. Next: A look at Newlight in Wednesday's Beacon.



"... And the change of the residents' attitudes has been tremendous.

There's real pride in ownership."

Sadye Shaw, civic league leader

peace we had in here. There were all kinds of businesses applying to come in. Green got into everybody's eyes."

Several times homeowners were approached by companies trying to buy property in the neighborhood. Rather than fight each other about who would sell to whom, the

residents came up with an informal agreement. They decided that whenever anyone was approached to sell his or her property, the civic league would be informed and would vote on whether to allow the sale or not, said Shaw.

Along with the nursing home that fronts directly on Daniel

Smith Road, the neighborhood has a smattering of businesses and organizations including a church, two service garages, a Chinese cultural club and a trucking concern.

Most, except for the cultural club and nursing home, were already there when the redevelopment

ment started.

Since the agreement made years ago, members of the neighborhood have voted several times to not allow a business in. Nor did they want apartment buildings built, said Shaw. They are only interest-

Please see following page

SPECIAL REPORT: TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS

Continued from previous page

ed in having single family homes built.

Prior to redevelopment the neighborhood was comprised of mainly black families.

The first seven homes built as part of the redevelopment were built through low interest loans and other programs offered by the Virginia Beach Community Development Corporation and the Virginia Housing Development Authority. The remaining development came from private developers. Most of the newer homes have been bought by an equal number of white and black families, said Shaw.

"Now, we have the whole gamut of folks. Blacks, whites, islanders, you name it and we have it," said Shaw. "We integrated with no problems. Now, we feel we're an ideal community."

Seventy-three-year-old Luvenia M. Tyson agreed. She's raised five children in Newsome Farm and has no desire to leave.

"It's a nice neighborhood," said Tyson, who lives on Connie Lane. "Everyone tries to look out for each other."

It's not unusual to see neighbors sharing a vegetable garden or helping to spruce up an older person's yard, Tyson said.

One of her neighbors even went out and bought her a new window air conditioner when the heat became unbearable last summer.

"It's not even unusual for a neighbor to knock on the door and say, 'I need a hug today,'" said Tyson. "And, of course, they get it."

If you blinked twice you'd miss Newsome Farm altogether. Even with the improvements, completed in 1991, the neighborhood has kept a homey atmosphere, even though it's just blocks from one of the area's busiest corridors, Newtown Road.

Today, the neighborhood, composed of five main streets and a few, smaller, side streets, is home to some 200 or more residents.

"There have been so many positive changes," Shaw said. "And the change of the residents' attitudes has been tremendous. There's real pride in ownership."

Last year, residents held their first block party, an event they hope to do every year, said Shaw.

Residents also worked on a yard sale and bake sale to raise money for a neighborhood basketball court.



Staff photo by CHARLES MEADS

Robert Black, a Newsome Farm resident, stands with pride in front of his manicured yard and a house with a new front porch. With the improvements, completed in 1991, the neighborhood has kept a homey atmosphere, even though it's just blocks from one of the area's busiest corridors.



Photo courtesy of City of Virginia Beach

This dilapidated home in Newsome Farm was an example of the some 70 that were built on old farm land off Newtown Road in the Bayside area.