

Newlight maintains its rural nature

A sense of neighborhood and a low incidence of crime prevails in the area of changing racial mix.

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In the mid-1970s the word "redevelopment" struck terror in the hearts of Norfolk residents who were displaced when that city was leveling older neighborhoods to make way for better roads and modern housing.

Certainly that was the reaction of Alice Green, a longtime civic activist who fled Norfolk and found refuge in Newlight, a Virginia Beach community straddling Indian River Road between I-64 and Kempsville Road.

Green and her husband, Melvin, a brick mason, had moved to Norfolk from South Carolina in 1951. After renting for a few years, they built a home in the Norview area, right behind the high school.

"We could sit on our back porch and watch the football games," Green recalled.

Then redevelopment started and the Greens' new home, along with others, was demolished to make way for the Rosemont renewal project.

Knowing that Newlight was considered a good place to live, the family built a house there in the early 1970s. It was on General Street just off Indian River Road.

They had barely settled into the rural-like enclave of 75 homes and 240 residents when Green picked up a newspaper and read that Newlight was targeted for an urban renewal project.

"I got on the phone and called everyone I knew," Green said. "I didn't want to lose another new house."

The city of Virginia Beach had decided to invest in 12 low-income, mostly black neighborhoods, like Newlight, that had been left behind by Virginia Beach's development boom. The city committed to extending public water and sewer lines, paving dirt roads and rehabilitating housing in the neighborhoods using federal grants and city money.

During the 10 years after that announcement, Green kept a close watch on the water and sewer installations and the road pavings that made her neighborhood a model for urban renewal, Virginia Beach style. She also became president of the neighborhood's civic league.

In the end, Green was satisfied with what took place, even though she still worries about business development along Indian River Road and increased traffic from new homes.

Norfolk's brand of redevelopment also brought Shirley Stancil's father, the late Thaddeus Wilson Sr.,



Staff photo by D. KEVIN ELLIOTT

Among those who were drawn to Newlight after the work was completed were Ed and Jean Chamberlin, the second white family to move into a cluster of 16 homes built on Brittingham Court south of Indian River Road. They moved there from rental property at the Oceanfront.

to Newlight in 1953. Wilson invested in three acres of land at the northeast corner of General Street and Indian River Road when the widening of Tidewater Drive claimed the family's Norfolk home.

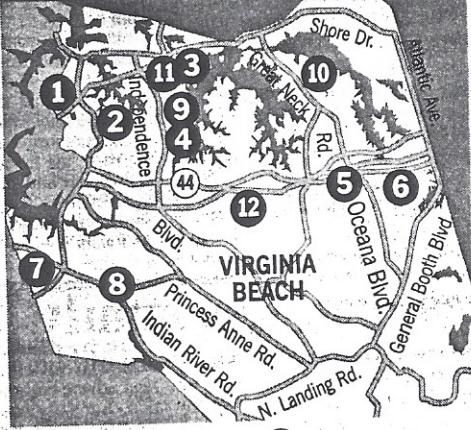
The land, Wilson reasoned, would provide enough space for his children to build homes of their own. Five houses now stand on Wilson's original homestead. Connected by walkways and surrounded by flower beds, fruit trees and vegetable gardens, all remain occupied by family members.

Wilson's daughter and son-in-law, Shirley and William Stancil, moved into their comfortable brick ranch in 1955 and stayed to raise a son and a daughter. The son is now a Virginia Beach businessman, the daughter a Philadelphia area teacher who recently received a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania.

"It's been a lovely place to live," Stancil, a retired Navy man, said as he showed his tidy, half-acre vegetable garden to a visitor. "It's right close to everything, but it's still like country out here."

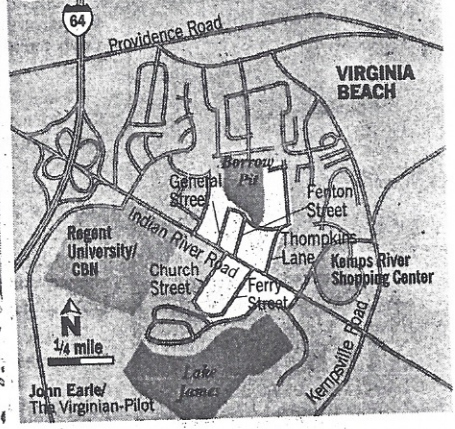
Although he can remember the days when traffic was almost non-

The target neighborhoods



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

8 Newlight



- About Newlight**
- Houses at start: 75
 - Occupied houses deemed uninhabitable: 12
 - Population at start: 240
 - Percentage of land undeveloped: 53%
 - Work completed: Water, sewer, streets, drainage, housing work completed.
 - Public money invested: \$1.9 million



This is the fifth of 10 profiles on city's Target Neighborhoods. Next: A look at Beechwood in Friday's Beacon.

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existent on Indian River Road, he is not overly concerned about the widening, which has converted the sleepy two-lane thread connecting Military Highway with Pungo to a four-, then a six- and eight-lane highway.

"I saw it coming years back when the interstate went through," he said.

When the city undertook the water, sewer and paving project, officials asked Stancil to serve as the volunteer citizen coordinator. He was charged with keeping neighbors informed about what was going on and relaying their concerns and complaints back to the city.

"It was a happy moment," he said of the time 10 years ago when the project was completed, "a glorious thing to happen in the community. You saw your tax money working for you to the point where others want to come in and build and be with you."

Among those who were drawn to Newlight after the work was completed were Ed and Jean Chamberlin, the second white family to move into a cluster of 16 homes built on Brittingham Court south of Indian River Road.

Five years ago they were living in Oceanfront rental property, thinking they'd never afford to buy a home.

Then they heard about the new homes in Newlight and the low-interest loans offered to first-time buyers.

"\$500 down, \$500 a month, it was cheaper than renting so we decided to buy," Jean Chamberlin said.

Five year later, they still consider the snug three-bedroom, two-bath home the answer to their dreams. The neighborhood suits them well, too.

Ed Chamberlin is vice president of the civic league, and the Chamberlins have made many friends among longtime Newlight residents.

"We don't consider it black or white over here," he said. "We're all just neighbors."

His thoughts were echoed by Stancil and Green, who look favorably on the neighborhood's changing racial mixture.

The three also are positive about the sense of neighborhood and the low incidence of crime in the area, although they do admit to some concerns.



Staff photo by D. KEVIN ELLIOTT

William Stancil shows off a vegetable garden behind his home near General Street and Indian River Road. Stancil and his wife, Shirley, moved into their comfortable brick ranch in 1955, on three acres of land originally bought by Shirley's father in 1953.

For Chamberlin, whose epilepsy keeps him from driving, the concern is transportation. "We need at least a trolley running out here a couple of times a day," he said, "something that will let us get to the shopping centers and connect with TRT buses."

Other concerns include encroaching business development along Indian River Road and an increase in traffic along the once quiet Thompkins Lane, where cul-de-sacs containing 50 new homes and a Church of Christ with a Filipino-American congregation have been built recently.

When the Kempsville Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses sought to build a Kingdom Hall in the neighborhood, residents opposed it, just as they have several new busi-

nesses hoping to locate on Indian River Road.

For Green, a developer's nearly completed filling of a scenic lake that had stood for years on a borrow pit site has been especially disappointing.

"People fished there and sailed boats and everything," she said. Even though the Newlight Civic League joined forces with residents of the adjacent Homestead neighborhood to oppose the fill project, they were unable to stop it.

"It's a shame that the lake had to go," Green said.

A large, two-story house is now under construction near what little is left of the small body of water, a tangible symbol of the pros and cons of progress in the revitalized neighborhood.