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Historic Kenwood Comes Back

St. Petersburg's historic Kenwood neighborhood is coming back. A decade ago, many of its pretty little 1920s and '30s Craftsman bungalows were boarded up and their yards were filled with weeds and debris. Crime was rampant, and the remaining residents, mostly renters, wanted out.

These days, neighbors greet each other by name and host covered-dish suppers on their front porches. Families stroll brick streets to the park and to the nearby Grand Central business district. Gardens are lovingly tended, with an annual cash prize awarded by the neighborhood association for best landscaping.

Kenwood homeowners are a generous, genial group willing to roll up their sleeves and build a park pavilion, raise funds for civic projects, lobby on behalf of historic preservation and stage an annual home tour.

Dedication and sweat equity have yielded a radical real estate turnaround. Predominantly single-family now, Kenwood was recently listed in *Cottage Living* magazine as one of the Top 10 cottage communities in the United States.

Prices have soared; real estate pros say a 3,260-square-foot bungalow that sold for \$82,400 in 1999 and \$235,000 in 2003 would fetch about \$280,000 today.

The hard work has paid off in other ways, too. In 2003, Kenwood was named to the National Register of Historic Places.

Besides boasting one of the highest concentrations of Craftsman bungalows in Florida, Kenwood also encompasses painstakingly restored Tudor, Mediterranean and Colonial Revival homes.

Any significant renovations must go before the city of St. Petersburg's Historic Review Board, which makes certain that authenticity is maintained. So far, residents have successfully reopened nearly 200 of the 240 formerly enclosed front porches.

Charles R. Hall originally developed the 160-acre tract, located two miles west of downtown St. Petersburg in the Seminole Park district, in 1912. Most homes were built on-site, but during the mid-'30s 170 homes from nearby neighborhoods were moved to the neighborhood.



Kenwood's residents have spruced up the community's old bungalows, including the one pictured above. Right, Craftsman House Art Gallery owners Jeff and Stephanie Schorr flank neighbor and realtor Debbie Cunningham.



JIM STEIN PHOTOGRAPHY

Many Kenwood residents also own local businesses, and the neighborhood's strong sense of civic pride creates a loyal clientele.

Neighbors create welcome baskets for newcomers filled with coffee, baked goods, pet treats and houseplants.

Residents are also expected to decorate for the holidays; rumor has it that after the Dec. 15 deadline, unadorned homes will be festooned by a roving pack of marauders calling themselves the Kenwood Elves.

The annual Bungalowfest home and garden event, scheduled this year for Nov. 3 and 4, offers both an evening stroll with wine and hors d'oeuvres and a daytime open-air trolley tour. For details, visit www.historickenwood.org.

Debbie Cunningham, a licensed real estate broker with Debbie Cunningham & Associates Keller Williams Realty, has lived in Kenwood almost 20 years. She's a regular on Wednesday nights at the Craftsman House Art Gallery.

"We have a happy hour, answer Historic Kenwood trivia questions and win prizes," Cunningham explains. "Everyone goes and we have a great time."

Cunningham has no intention of selling her 5,000-square-foot Mediterranean Revival home, which she bought for \$210,000 in 1998 and is today valued at \$800,000.

Why should she? "This is the best neighborhood in the country," she says. ↑