

Residents of lakes love their oasis in town's back yard

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Fog hovers over the glass-like lake as the sun rises and the only sounds to be heard are the birds engaging in their early morning chirping.

For most of us that is an experience only enjoyed when renting a cottage way up north.

But for some Whitchurch-Stouffville residents, it is what they get to wake up to every morning.

"We tell people it's a terrible place to live because we don't want anyone to disturb our utopia," laughed longtime Musselman's Lake resident Joan Ransberry.

She is among the 625 residents, according to Homefinder.ca, who live in the lakeside community just north of Stouffville.

Ms Ransberry, a former award-winning reporter for The Sun-Tribune, moved from Whitby to Musselman's Lake 17 years ago. But she wasn't looking for waterfront property, just something affordable within York Region. It was her real estate agent who convinced her to look at the 850-square-foot cottage on a large, waterfront lot she now calls home.

"It was a spur-of-the-moment decision, like the best decisions in my life," she said.

"You see the calmness of it. It's a

beautiful lake. ... It's like a little oasis ... a wee spot of heaven here," Ms Ransberry said.

"Once you get there, it's very hard to leave," said Lesley O'Connor, an agent with Gallo Real Estate.

Homes available for resale at Musselman's Lake currently run between \$374,900 to \$1.3 million, according to Homefinder.ca

But Musselman's Lake hasn't always been so heavenly.

It was once home to the infamous Boyd Gang bank robbers, as well as many motorcycle gangs.

And according to Ms O'Connor, Stouffville residents don't appreciate it or Preston Lake.

"They don't really get how much the Toronto folks love those areas. ... The jewel in our own back yard isn't as sparkling as if you have to travel for it," she said.

The seedy reputation has turned around, as seasonal cottagers have become permanent, year-round residents.

Now, some of those cottages are being torn down and replaced with larger, modern homes, which Ms Ransberry said is fine with her and likens it to urban renewal.

"No cookie-cutter stuff going on," she said.

A few businesses have even made Musselman's Lake a bit of a

tourist attraction.

Cedar Beach Trailer Park opened in 1929 and about 20 years ago, Charlinda Belgium Chocolates came to town.

George's general store on the north side of the lake is a popular stop for cyclists and a place where the locals gather to informally catch up on what's happening in town, she added.

'WEE SPOT OF HEAVEN'

Margaret and Archie Paterson have lived on Island Lake, which is on the York-Durham Line just south of Aurora Road, for more than 40 years.

They moved into a house in 1970, then built one across the street a decade later.

Their grandchildren live next door and only in a small community like Island Lake can they kayak to grandma's in the summer and skate over in the winter.

"It's like living in a cottage," Mrs. Paterson said. They only have three other neighbours.

But there are now estate homes across the lake and more of them on the other side of Aurora Road, which has turned their quiet, dirt road into a paved speedway.

"That's our only downside," she said of the area.

Preston Lake, which is in the Bloomington Road and Woodbine Avenue area, is actually three separate communities within one: the north and south shores, as well as the beach club.

Homes currently available for resale range in price from \$479,900 to \$2.08 million, according to Homefinder.ca

Development at the lake began in the early 1800s when roughly 2,600 acres of land was granted to Frederic Baron de Hoen for his service as a Hessian soldier for the British Army in the American War of Independence.

The story goes that Mr. de Hoen sold a portion of the land to Peter Reesor, in exchange for a horse and saddle. The Reesor family, along with more Pennsylvania Dutchmen, settled in the area.

Around 1900, the area was known as Reesor Lake.

It was renamed Middleton Lake, after the Middletons purchased land from the Reesors. In the 1920s, the Middletons sold to the Prestons, who developed the lakeshore into a summer tourist resort.

In the 1930s, development on the north side of the lake began.

Development of cottages on the south side began in the 1950s and a trailer park on the west shore

emerged in the 1970s. Two decades later, the trailer park was replaced with an estate subdivision.

LAKE LIVING

Musselman's Lake demographics:

The total population is 625

There are 236 households

The average household income is \$94,401

Only 8 per cent of residents own their home

Most (93 per cent) of the homes are detached

The majority of residents are split between 20 to 44 (33.28 per cent) and 45-64 year olds (33.12 per cent)

There are 2.62 residents per home

Preston Lake demographics:

Total population is 716

Total number of households is 219

The majority of homes are rentals (88 per cent)

Virtually all (97 per cent) of the homes are detached

The largest age group (33.38 per cent) is 45 to 64 years old

The average household income is \$198,386

There are 3.18 people per home

source: Homefinder.ca

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