

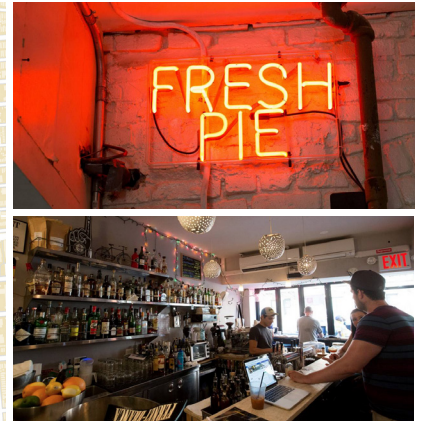
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A PLACE IN BROOKLYN WHERE 'HI' CAN BE HEARD

SEPT. 18, 2015 • BY KATHLEEN LUCADAMO



When Rebecca Fitting returned to the Brooklyn neighborhood of Prospect Lefferts Gardens last year after a six-year hiatus, a lot had changed.

The LeFrak Center at Lakeside, long under construction in Prospect Park just off Lincoln Road, had opened with ice skating, roller skating and a splash area for children. There was a new bakery, Pels Pie Co., that serves beer. And the number of brunch places had multiplied.

Still, the 41-year-old Ms. Fitting said, the neighborhood hadn't lost its West Indian flavor and small-town feel.

"People say 'hi' to each other here. That's not something you see a lot of in New York," said Ms. Fitting, who with her toddler moved from Clinton Hill to a junior one-bedroom.

Prospect Lefferts Gardens, bordered by Ocean and New York avenues between Clarkson Avenue and Empire Boulevard, boasts landmarked homes, large in scale and lower in price than in nearby Park Slope. While families seek homes, artists and young professionals are gobbling up rentals in new construction, said real-estate agents. Prices range from \$3 million for single-family homes to \$300,000 for studios.

"It looks like an extension of Park Slope lately," said Keith Mack, a broker with the Corcoran Group who has lived in the area for 15 years. "The secret is out. It's a destination now."

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Mr. Mack said he sold four homes last year—each went for more than \$2 million—in the Lefferts Manor Historic District, which stretches roughly from Flatbush to Rogers avenues and Fenimore Street to Lincoln Road; he estimated similar homes in Park Slope average for about a third more.

“They are coming from Manhattan, Westchester, the West Coast,” Mr. Mack said. “They are finding the same-sized house and same details they can find in Park Slope.”

Now, real-estate agents said, families also are scooping up fixer-upper homes on side streets outside the historic district, while single adults stick with rentals.

Not everyone is thrilled with gentrification. One local group sued to stop the construction of 626 Flatbush Ave., arguing the 23-story rental tower was too tall and needed a proper environmental review. A judge ruled in the developer’s favor in February, and the high-rise is under construction.

At 123 Parkside, a hospital-turned-luxury building with a roof deck just outside Prospect Lefferts, rent for one-bedroom apartments run about \$2,400 a month. Two residential towers on Clarkson Avenue are also in the works.

Bill Sheppard, a broker with Brown Harris Stevens and longtime resident of Prospect Lefferts Gardens, counted at least 10 new developments in the area.

“I’ve seen many changes, but on the other hand there’s a historic district, so it’s stayed pretty much the same,” he said. Sale prices have gone up 50% in the past three years, he said, adding that bidding wars are common because turnover of historic homes is low.

“There are never many properties available. Every year there are more buyers and the supply is about the same,” Mr. Sheppard said, though he noted many older homeowners are opting to sell and capitalize on the high prices.

Gentrification shows no signs of easing: Dessert guru Michael Allen is opening a shop in Prospect Lefferts Gardens. The Maple Street School, a cooperative preschool, is expanding to a new location in the fall of 2016. “We used to beat the bushes for students 20 years ago,” said Mr. Sheppard, who sent his daughter there. “Now it’s competitive.”

Ms. Fitting, who owns Greenlight Bookstore in Fort Greene, said she does all her errands locally but worries area businesses and longtime residents won’t survive the rise in rents.

“You get a quality of life here that is almost affordable,” she said. “Nothing is affordable anymore.”

Parks: The area is bordered by the southeast portion of Prospect Park, which houses the Parade Ground with ball fields and the LeFrak Center at Lakeside, where there is a skating rink and sprinklers.

Schools: Prospect Lefferts Gardens is in District 17, but many parents send their children out of the neighborhood or to progressive schools in the area including Maple Street School, Lefferts Gardens Montessori and the Lefferts Gardens Charter School.

Restaurants: Popular cafes include Blessings on Flatbush Avenue, Erv’s on Beekman Place and Gratitude Café on Rogers Avenue. For sweet stuff, Pels Pie Co. and Jamaican Pride are tasty stops, while Midwood Flats is best for dinner or brunch. Traditional Caribbean food can be found at De Hot Pot.

Shopping: Parents flock to Play Kids for toys and gifts. Grocery stores, nail salons and pharmacies line Flatbush Avenue.

Transportation: The area is served by the 2, 5, B and Q trains, and several bus lines.