

Sensible, Even on Scarlett Drive and Rhett Court



Alex Trautwig for The New York Times

HISTORIC ECHO Merging the surnames of two families of early European settlers, the Carll Burr House, a landmark in Commack, is still in private hands. The Burrs once bred and raised trotting horses; today the area is better known for its schools and its affordable real estate. [More Photos »](#)

By AILEEN JACOBSON

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WHEN Maria Diomataris and her husband, Tony, moved to Commack seven years ago from Old Bethpage, they were looking for good schools and a larger property. “The prices were ridiculous in our area,” Ms. Diomataris said. They bought a two-story contemporary on half an acre for about \$625,000, she said.

Multimedia



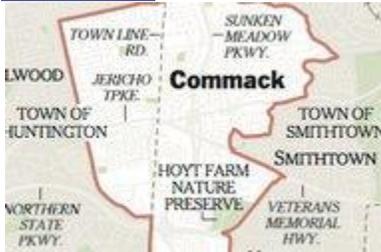
Slide Show

[Living In | Commack, L.I.](#)



Graphic

[On the Market](#)



Map

[Commack, L.I.](#)

The Long Island Expressway is embedded in the southern border of Commack, in the heart of [Suffolk County](#); the Northern State and the Sagtikos-Sunken Meadow Parkways crisscross it, and major roads pass through. But tucked behind the highways and the shopping areas on Jericho Turnpike, Veterans Memorial Highway and other busy streets are quiet neighborhoods, most created from the 1950s to the 1980s.

“The Commack buyers are coming in for the schools,” said William Tarantola, an agent in the Smithtown office of Coach Realtors, part of Christie’s International Real Estate, who has lived in Commack most of his life.

The schools have been excellent for the Diomatarises’ son, Dean, now 13, and their daughter, Gina, 9, who have found caring teachers and fun activities. “My son is in basketball and trying out for wrestling,” Ms. Diomataris said. “My daughter was in the chocolate club. It’s great. They make things out of chocolate and then eat them.”

Among the many shopping areas, she said, the family favors a section of Jericho Turnpike that has a yogurt store, a pizzeria, a Greek taverna and a bowling alley. “We’re really happy here,” Ms. Diomataris said.

As far as a Main Street is concerned, said Bruce Ettenberg, the president of the [Commack Community Association](#), “as close as you get” to one is the stretch of stores on Veterans Highway that includes a Macy’s, a Target and a Toys “R” Us, all connected by a parking lot.

Like the Diomatarises, Mr. Ettenberg and his wife, Debra, moved to Commack with their two children because of the schools and because it was more affordable than places closer

to [New York City](#). But the Ettenbergs came 40 years ago, from Kew Gardens, [Queens](#). They were able to buy a four-bedroom colonial on half an acre for \$40,000, “which was a lot of money for us in those days,” Mr. Ettenberg said.

Besides having no real downtown, he said, Commack straddles two towns, Huntington and Smithtown, with Townline Road the dividing line. Residents of one town are not allowed access to some parks and other amenities in the other town. Also, he said, the boundaries are confusing because they’re different for the ZIP code (11725), the school district, the fire district and what in official parlance is the “census-designated place” of Commack.

To attract residents from both sides, he said, his group alternates its meetings between the [Commack Public Library](#), on the Huntington side, and the Commack branch of the [Smithtown Special Library District](#), which he helped to establish in 2001, he said, because residents on the Smithtown side felt they had the poorer library, which is now much improved. Among current issues, he said, is a campaign to keep 18-wheel trucks off two-lane Townline Road.

Debbie Virga, the community relations consultant for the schools, says the district runs several programs intended to foster neighborliness, including one that invites older residents to theatrical and other events in the schools. A 9/11 remembrance every year also attracts thousands to the high school football field, site of a memorial featuring a piece of World Trade Center steel. “People moved here because of the schools,” Ms. Virga said, “but they stay here because of the people.”

WHAT YOU’LL FIND

Commack started as a country village with two hotels, a general store, a large school building, two churches, several shops and many large homes and farms, Bradley L. Harris wrote in his 2000 book “Commack ... A Beautiful Place,” which covers local public education from 1899 to 1999. Like much of the rest of [Long Island](#), Commack saw explosive growth from 1954 to 1966, fueled by the need for housing after [World War II](#).

Because developers usually built whole neighborhoods, Mr. Ettenberg said, similar houses are found within each area, with sometimes-whimsical street names conferred at the outset. In one section, streets are named for sweets: Peppermint Road, Candy Lane, Marshmallow Drive. Another area uses plant names like Cornflower, Wood Sorrel and Wintercress Lanes, while a third has Native American names like Pawnee, Seneca and Seminole Drives. There’s

even a small “Gone With the Wind” pocket featuring Scarlett Drive, Rhett Court and Ashley Circle.

More houses were built in the 1980s in the northern part of Commack, said Joanne Christoforou, an associate broker with Re/Max Beyond in Smithtown. Many of the newer houses are more expensive and spacious, and closer to North Shore [beaches](#), she said.

Some residents are now renovating the older houses, said Ronni B. Tranes, an agent in the Commack office of Coldwell Banker. “There are all different kinds of floor plans — whatever fits your needs, large or small,” Ms. Tranes said. The Hamlet, a gated community, offers upscale condominium town houses, she said.

Commack covers 11.97 square miles. It is surrounded by East Northport and Kings Park to the north, Smithtown and Hauppauge to the east and Dix Hills and Elwood to the west. Census data published in 2011 cited 92 percent of its 36,124 residents as white, 0.9 percent as black and 5.4 percent as of Asian heritage; median household income is \$108,311.

Frank Brecher, a manufacturer’s representative for heating and hot water products, said he had felt comfortable about Commack when he moved here from Wantagh in 1999. In Commack, he said: “There are no millionaires, no airs, no one with attitude. Everyone’s just a regular Joe.”

WHAT YOU’LL PAY

A recent perusal of [mlsli.com](#) turned up 90 houses for sale, with all but two listed above \$300,000 but only one over \$1 million: a 2004 home on 1.04 acres at \$1.25 million. As for condominiums, 17 were listed, ranging from \$319,00 to \$879,900.

Homes are starting to move faster, said Mr. Tarantola of Coach Realtors, who ascribed the shift to low interest rates. In 2011, he said, the average sale price was \$525,000 and the average number of days on the market was 150. In 2012, the average rose to \$550,000 and time on the market dropped to 120 days. “If homes are priced competitively,” he said, “they’re moving.” As proof of that, he cited the rise in the number of sales, to 288 last year, from 174 in 2011.

THE SCHOOLS

Donald James, the superintendent of the [Commack School District](#), put total enrollment at 7,200. Most students live in Commack, but the district also draws from small portions of

East Northport, Dix Hills and Smithtown. There are four primary schools, two intermediate schools, one middle school and one high school. Last year the high school won the highest rating in Suffolk County (and No. 95 in the nation) in a U.S. News and World Report ranking of public high schools. SAT averages in 2012 were 531 in reading, 571 in math and 538 in writing, versus 483, 500 and 475 statewide.

WHAT TO DO

The Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center, which has an open membership policy, offers an indoor pool, summer camps, social services, classes, clubs, youth programs and a season of musicals. A private [golf](#) club offers different levels of membership, and public golf courses are available in nearby communities. Ms. Christoforou, the Re/Max broker, who has lived in Commack 30 years, says many residents visit North Shore beaches, including [Sunken Meadow State Park](#) in Kings Park. “People exercise on the boardwalk there in the morning, or jog on it,” she said. “I walk more than jog.”

For residents on the Smithtown side and their guests, the 133-acre Hoyt Farm Nature Preserve is a popular spot. It includes nature trails, picnic tables, summer concerts, demonstrations of maple sugaring and a farmhouse that once belonged to John Wicks, who built its central portion around 1770. In 1910, Edwin C. Hoyt bought it, added two wings and grew apples and peaches. Some of the apple trees remain.

THE COMMUTE

Driving to [Manhattan](#) takes about an hour in light traffic. Residents take the Long Island Rail Road from Deer Park, Kings Park, Northport or Huntington. The ride from Deer Park takes as little as an hour; a monthly ticket costs \$299 and a peak one-way fare is \$13.50. From Kings Park, on a different line, a direct ride takes an hour and seven minutes, but most trains require a transfer and take longer. A monthly is \$334 and a peak fare \$16.25. The ride from Northport is about 10 minutes shorter. Fares are the same as for Deer Park, as are those for Huntington, which is closer to Manhattan and has more direct trains.

THE HISTORY

Native Americans named the area Winnecomac, meaning “pleasant land.” Among Europeans who started arriving in the 1600s were Harneds, Morelands, Carlls and Burrs. A Carll farm given to the school district in 1969 is now the subject of litigation. The Burrs bred and trained trotting horses and built a track where the high school is today.