

Best Places to live in NY

JASON SHEFTELL

A view of the Oval and some of Parkchester's 171 buildings. Below, a 7-foot terra cotta figure decorating the buildings



LIFE on the OVAL

Parkchester can save you green while surrounding you with greenery

Lush walkways lined with London plane trees, playgrounds around almost every corner, small fields of grass surrounded by benches – life in Parkchester, as the name implies, is like living in a park.

But Parkchester is as much about the people as the landscape. The 171-building complex in north-central Bronx is one of the city's most successful neighborhoods. A bastion of housing for hardworking New Yorkers, where one-bedroom rents start at about \$950 and two-bedrooms at \$1,300, the complex mirrors

New York City in diversity. African-Americans, Hispanics, South Asians, Caucasians and Africans live side-by-side, following various religions and raising families.

What separates the neighborhood, reachable by the 6 train, are well-kept grounds, polite neighbors, green fields separating buildings, superior retail (including the second Macy's ever to open) and a central fountain called the Oval that draws people night and day. Kids are everywhere. Fashionable students mix with seniors who have lived at the complex for over 40 years.

On summer days, the walkways

are as plush as Central Park. With a total of 6,382 sponsor rental units owned by a partnership of New York-based Mall Properties, Community Preservation Corp. and the O'Connor Capital Partners, Parkchester is one of the most efficiently run housing complexes in the country. Dating back to 1941, it has more than 40,000 residents. There are schools and churches in walking distance, and every fifth young man sports a Yankees hat. People are proud to live there, with vocal tenants and a dedicated management staff ensuring a peaceful and well-maintained life.

"Parkchester is such a wonderful New York story," says Andrea Olshan, chief operating officer at Mall Properties. "Generations of New Yorkers have grown up there. There's just a selfless dedication to making sure that the quality of life stays high. At Parkchester, helping others is a way of life."

From civil rights activists to families to young adults starting out in large units with hardwood floors and views of the plush life, here's a look at the people and places that make this important New York neighborhood go.

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JEANNE NOONAN; (INSET) ENID ALVAREZ/DAILY NEWS

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▲ ANGEL DEJESUS AT HOME
CHEERLEADING COACH

Angel DeJesus is a cheerleading coach in New Jersey. Every day, he takes the Cross Bronx Expressway to the George Washington Bridge and back to his one-bedroom apartment in the South section of Parkchester. He looked all over the city before he decided to rent in this Bronx enclave.

“My apartment is so big and there aren’t any hassles,” he says. “It’s a very quiet community, and that’s why I love it

so much. I’ve been here six months and already it feels like home. I feel safe here.”

DeJesus entertains often in his apartment and goes at night to Chelsea and SoHo. His friends come over on weekends. They were shocked by the size of his apartment and the convenience of the stores and shops.

“Laundromats, restaurants and a movie theater are all here,” he says. “There’s no loud music booming. I can live my life in peace, and that’s what I was really looking for. I felt instantly connected to Parkchester.”



ANTHONY LANZILOTE

◀ LADY ANNE DUNBAR, HEAD OF THE NORTH CO-OP BOARD

Lady Anne Dunbar is a fighter for good causes. She helped integrate Parkchester in 1969, when she moved there, and she started the area’s first NAACP group. She lobbied for better educational facilities for New Yorkers born mentally disabled, and she rode with the Freedom Riders to Mississippi. She wears all kinds of pretty hats. Her smile lights up a room.

For the North section, where she owns a home, she worked

to improve the landscaping. “I worked with Nelson Rockefeller, and I learned how to make change,” she says. “You need to build a case and show people how they will benefit. This is a city within a city. It’s affordable, and it’s beautiful. We work very hard to keep it that way. I will fight to keep Parkchester the way it is now, and I’ll go down fighting, hat and all. It’s our community.”

Always an elegant woman, she says it with a serious grin.



GETTING THERE: Take the 6 train to Parkchester. Transit time is 46 minutes from midtown.

PRICES: “Traditional” one-bedrooms start at \$950, with three-bedrooms renting for \$1,600. “Premier” apartments with granite countertops and high-end appliances start at \$1,300. Call (718) 319-8043 or see Parkchesternyc.com.

AMENITIES: AstroTurf baseball fields, the Oval, a historic movie theater, living amid green fields, incredible maintenance and grounds.



JEANNE NOONAN

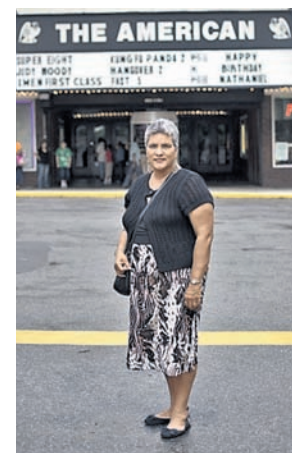
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Dedicated to helping local seniors, Parkchester Enhancement Program (PEP) throws annual tag sales

JOAN KILCULLEN, TEACHER

After moving from East Harlem near 112th St., Joan Kilcullen found Parkchester when co-workers told her it was a wonderful place to raise kids, and somewhere a single woman could feel safe. She and her daughter have lived there since 1976.

“I love the fountain and how it branches out from there to all the retail,” says the Manhattan-born Kilcullen. “The flowers, the diversity. I don’t want to leave. Parking can be tough, but that’s the only complaint I have. When you live here, you want to protect the neighborhood so it works for everyone. I moved away to Riverdale and came back two years later. I missed it.”



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THE RODRIGUEZES AT ST. RAYMOND, RAISING A FAMILY

The Kardashians wish they were half as funny as the Rodriguez family. This family of five with a son-in-law on the way will keep anyone laughing, including each other. Having moved to Parkchester 34 years ago, Angelina and Irving raised three children on these streets. They go to St. Raymond’s Parish every Sunday, and their kids graduated from PS 106 and MS 180. Now, daughter Tiffany works in finance and her twin Melissa went to FIT.

“We played in these playgrounds

growing up,” says Tiffany. “Parkchester is a part of us. I loved just walking outside the building and hearing the birds. You really feel like you’re away from the city. You just can’t get this space in Manhattan. This is luxury to us. It’s become the upcoming neighborhood that it was supposed to be.”

After church, the entire family eats Mom’s home-cooked meals in their apartment overlooking the Oval. They use the neighborhood as an amenity, going to the Bronx Zoo, Yankee games, Orchard Beach and the Botanical Gardens. They also like the efficient way Parkchester is run.

“As soon as you call to get something fixed, they come right away,” says Angelina. “That always amazes me. It wasn’t always like that.”

St. Raymond, the neighborhood church with over 1,000 people in the congregation, has become an important part of their lives.

“It’s about community and religion,” says Irving. “Parkchester is a very family-oriented area. The morals and values of the people who live here are the foundation of the neighborhood.”



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▲ CARLOS ORTIZ AT THE OVAL
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEASING AND MARKETING AT PARKCHESTER

Carlos Ortiz has lived in Parkchester for six years and worked there for five. He runs the open houses, meeting new and prospective renters. “I love the process of meeting everyone before they move in,” he says. “I get to hand people their keys, which is exciting.”

When he can’t sleep, he walks down to the Oval, sometimes as late as 1 a.m.

“The water is very soothing,” he says. “I am always amazed at how crowded it is there so late at night. I guess other people can’t sleep as well.”



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