



A typical Pimmit Hills street scene.

By Larry Morris—The Washington Post

Pimmit Hills: Coming of age as a neighborhood in Fairfax County

By Maggie Locke

Washington Post Staff Writer

It was only intended to be a simple little newsletter—one that announced Boy Scout meetings, community cleanup days and hints for homeowners.

And for 25 years, that's what the Pimmit Hills Dispatch has been to the 1,675 households in the Pimmit Hills subdivision about three miles east of Tysons Corner.

But the dozens of home-typed monthly issues of the Dispatch also tell the story of a neighborhood—from its birth in 1950 to its maturity in 1977. That story reflects the devel-

opment of Fairfax County's philosophy of growth, from unencumbered development to a complex system of land use controls. That story traces the recent past of the United States, from neighborhood civil defense classes in answer to the Red Scare of the '50s, to parent forums in answer to the drug scares of the '60s and '70s.

The newsletter is the mouthpiece for the Pimmit Hills Civic Association that some say has helped keep Pimmit Hills, one of Fairfax County's oldest tract home developments, from becoming "the slum it was expected to be when it went up in a hurry after World War II," according to a former Pimmit Hills resident.

Pimmit Hills, along with two other older Fairfax County subdivisions, recently gave collected editions of their newsletters to the Fairfax County Library. The Hollin Hills, Holmes Run and Pimmit Hills newsletters, now neatly bound in blue volumes at the main library in Fairfax City, all recount the days when the lack of streetlights and gutters and telephones were major concerns; when saplings, newly planted by tract developers, replaced trees razed for the new homes.

Pimmit Hills, a forerunner of the massive suburban home develop-

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ment that now characterizes Fairfax County, has a lot in common with these two neighborhoods. Unlike them, it lives with the reputation of being a lower income neighborhood.

Only in affluent Fairfax County. Compared to the median cost of \$65,000 for a Fairfax County home, the average price of a Pimmit Hills home is between \$40,000 and \$45,000.

"It's the name that did it to Pimmit Hills," says Ernest Dailey, one of the neighborhood's original residents, who bought his corner lot brick home in the early Fifties for about \$12,500. "They started building those little asbestos shingle houses that sold for under \$10,000, put on the name Pimmit Hills, and ever since people have the idea it's not good enough for Fairfax County."

His son, Harry Dailey, 25, who recently won a gold record as bass player in the Jimmy Buffet band for the recording of "Margaritaville" remembers that he and his friends used to call the neighborhood "Primitive Hills."

"There was one group of kids that gave the whole neighborhood a bad name," he said. "And then there was that motorcycle group called the Pagans that moved in for a while. They didn't help any. Most of the kids were just regular kids, in spite of the reputation."

Harry Dailey, a graduate of Marshall High School, no longer lives in Pimmit Hills, but often returns to visit his parents.

"When I come back, I still see the people I used to play in the streets with as little kids. It's a good place."

"It's got a reputation it doesn't deserve, but the Hills will never live it down," says another former resident. "All because the homes are cheaper here. And \$45,000 isn't what I call cheap."

The president of the Pimmit Hills Civic Association, Carl Zimmer, says he and other pioneer resi-



over in the Hills," he added. "They've got one of the strongest civic associations I've ever seen— people who take pride in their community. They've given me all the support and cooperation I could want."

Driving through Pimmit Hills, one senses a community that has come of age. Large shade trees hover over most of the small homes. Their front doors sit square in the middle of their facades and usually there's a large picture window to the side. Unlike more affluent neighborhoods where sprawling green front lawns sit unused, many of the fenced-in quarter-acre lots have tire swings hanging from trees, and bicycles and toys scattered about.

The houses, which some in the county call "crackerboxes," have grown with enlarging families. The basic Pimmit Hills house, with three bedrooms and no basement, has sprouted sunporches, carports, garages and extra bedrooms. Aluminum siding has replaced much of the asbestos shingling. Color coordinated shutters and awnings decorate some homes.

Mothers push carriages over the sidewalks that the civic association banded together to get more than 20 years ago, along with gutters, streetlights and better sewer facilities.

There is a small county park, Olney Park, at the back of the development bordering the Dulles Access Road right of way, and another larger one that may be built adjoining nearby land set aside for a new library. A smaller branch library, tucked away in the basement of one of buildings in the Peach Tree of McLean complex, serves as a sort of hub of community activities with its teenage job referral service, crafts projects and afternoon movies.

"It's probably got more cohesiveness as a community than any in McLean," says Harriet Bradley, former supervisor of the Dranesville district. "Unfortunately, McLean has developed into a community of snobs, who look down their noses at Pimmit Hills, forgetting that their sons and daughters will probably start off in those houses. And we are desperately

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The president of the Pimmit Hills Civic Association, Carl Zimmer, says he and other pioneer residents feared at first that Pimmit Hills would attract only transients "with the number of military and renters we had here then."

But times have changed. Just as the peach orchards and grazing fields that once surrounded the Hills have become town house complexes and shopping centers, many Pimmit Hills houses have become "starter" homes for young families.

Some of the original residents still live there as retired couples; other well-established families with both pre-schoolers and teenagers have made their permanent home there. Some original residents have moved out and rented their homes to others.

But Zimmer, like other association members, are delighted that younger families are moving in, "investing a lot of money in their property and are willing to keep it up."

A few professionals, some government workers and military personnel live in Pimmit Hills. Many of the residents are also "working class." Draftsmen, printers, construction workers, mechanics, accountants all live in the Hills, along with many single-parent families.

"Pimmit Hills suffers from problems that automatically come with a high density population," says Capt. Ronald Watts of the McLean substation.



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Carl Zimmer, president of the Pimmit Hills Civic Association.

"They've got problems with vandalism, kids loitering and domestic problems, but on the other hand, there are hardly any burglaries. The drug problems are no worse there than anywhere else.

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One of the owners of the land where part of Pimmit Hills was built, the late J.C. Storm, also looked down on asbestos shingle houses and refused to sell his land to develop them, according to Bonnie Lindamood, who lives in a white frame house that was built before Pimmit Hills. When Storm finally sold, she said, it was to a developer who built some of the brick homes located in different sections of the community.

Next to Lindamood's home are the converted dining hall, dormitory and cabin that had been part of a Girl Scout camp before Pimmit Hills was built.

Lindamood, who says she has lived in Pimmit Hills "as long as just about anybody," says she watched the Hills "go through sort of a depression in the late sixties and early seventies, when there was more trouble with the kids and everything than ever before."

"Now it looks like it's getting stable again," she says. "Houses in the county are so expensive that more people are buying Pimmit Hills homes and hanging on to them. The Hills isn't anything fancy, but when you start seeing homes sell for more than \$55,000 in here, it's holding its own in Fairfax County."