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A tidy enclave in Southwest Baltimore

Gwynns Falls residents take pride in community

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In the heart of a little Southwest Baltimore neighborhood are signs saying "Welcome to Wellesley Park" and "Sustain us love."

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It goes by the name of Gwynns Falls, and its rowhouses sit tucked behind a bunch of businesses, including a paint brush factory, Carroll Awning and A-1 Three Brothers auto repair, which front on busy Frederick Avenue. When I approached them, I saw how tidy Stafford, Sunset and Longwood streets were. I soon learned that the Gwynns Falls enclave had recently won a \$5,000 city-sponsored award for the cleanest community in its quadrant of the city.

The neighborhood association's president, Chris Schulze, said he moved here three years ago with his wife, Andrea, a student at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. They like the mix of black, white and Hispanic families living together.

"We decided that if we were coming to the city, we would rather live where life can be difficult," he said between classes at Beechfield Elementary-Middle School, where he teaches. "We didn't want to be hidden from the troubles. We wanted to bring back hope."

Schulze, who grew up in rural western Massachusetts, bought a house for \$35,000. It came with a backyard, and they keep four hens because he wants to bring a "a little bit of the country here." He also worked with fellow community members to create Wellesley Park out of a space where derelict buildings had been torn down. He restored a sense of neighborhood goodwill though some energetic weekend cleanups.

He knows the neighborhood through its children. He teaches health and physical education at nearby Beechfield, and many of his students reside in his community.

Schulze is a member of the Church at Baltimore, an Augusta Avenue stone building that once housed the St. James Episcopal congregation. He said that about 60 percent of the congregation lives in the Irvington and Gwynns Falls neighborhoods. Many have ties to the Mennonite church or have a background in the Anabaptist faith. There are also former Amish people who worship at the church. He said that the

congregation is committed to serving Southwest Baltimore. Many have made a decision similar to his. To help Baltimore, they feel, you have to live there and try to make a difference.

"We want to spread the love where love appears vacant," he said. "Gwynns Falls tends to be less troubled than other Southwest Baltimore neighborhoods, but a gentleman was shot in front of my house last year, and there was another shooting last week. There are many drug-related issues here. There are drug-addicted people who live in the neighborhood."

Gwynns Falls once belonged to the family of Charles Carroll of Carrollton and was later associated with his granddaughter, Emily MacTavish. The neighborhood once had its own Pennsylvania Railroad station. This commuter train stop was known as Carroll or Frederick Road station.

"The challenges of trying to move a neighborhood forward are great, but I love the history, heritage and architecture in Baltimore," said Gwynns Falls resident Gary Pearson. "I've made it my personal mission to keep about six blocks around me clean and trash-free. It's my small contribution to the ongoing renaissance."


He said that when he's discouraged, he reminds himself that there are people in every Baltimore neighborhood who want to see their community safe, decent and attractive.

"While at a light at Baltimore and Schroeder on Friday, I saw a young man walk halfway across a field and pick up a piece of trash and then walk to a trash can and deposit it," he said.

Pearson told me that the trash banes of Gwynns Falls are the pizza delivery fliers that blow all over the neighborhood. It's frustrating, he said, because many of the shops distributing the fliers are in Arbutus, across the city line.

"There are still people who discharge trash in the street," Schulze said. "But in the three years I have lived here, there has been a vast improvement. People trust each other more and they are more respectful of each other."

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