

Eastside Neighborhoods...

Bellevue

More than just a bedroom community

Through the first half of the 20th century, strawberries and blueberries and a host of other truck-farm products gave the community its start on the east side of Lake Washington.

At the time, the direct route across the lake was by ferry, from the foot of Seattle's Madison Street to nearby Kirkland. That gave Kirkland, and not Bellevue, the clout to first incorporate in 1905.

Bellevue didn't become a city until 1953, after a bridge of concrete pontoons was floated across Lake Washington. Completed in 1940 as World War II loomed, the Lacey V. Murrow Floating Bridge connected Seattle to Mercer Island, where work crews also were replacing an awkward wooden bridge that since 1923 had spanned the narrow East Channel to reach the mainland Eastside.

The floating bridge, and the east-west highway that accompanied it, opened the floodgates to a suburban way of life that flowered through the next 40 years and gave Bellevue its nickname, Seattle's bedroom

Neighborhood followed neighborhood as housing developers fell driveway over cul-de-sac in love with Eastside real estate.

Today, Bellevue is a commercial, retail and residential powerhouse. With nearly 110,000 people, it is the state's fifth-largest city and home to one of the region's largest shopping center, Bellevue Square.

As host to dozens of high-tech companies, Bellevue has a skyline now made up of glass-clad skyscrapers as well as towering evergreens. The city also has a park system to rival any in the Northwest.

But be forewarned, driving across the floating bridge during rush can be a real nightmare.

Bothell

Popular steamboat stop grows up

Bothell was a popular steamboat stop along the Sammamish River when it became a town in 1908. Logs were felled in the heavy forests north of town, then floated into a North Creek flume toward shingle mills on the river, or rowed via Lake Washington log booms to Seattle and Ballard. The town lay in a fertile valley yielding milk, butter, eggs, potatoes, hay, corn and other crops.

In 1917, when the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks were finished and dramatically lowered Lake Washington, Bothell's identity as a transport point for natural resources began to change. The Sammamish River became known as the much smaller, less navigable "Sammamish Slough."

Growth in the past 30 years has changed the town even more dramatically. Bothell now touts itself as the "gateway to the state's high-tech corridor," home to Immunex (soon to be Amgen Inc.) and other biotech and tech companies along with the University of Washington's Bothell campus and Cascadia Community College.

Tech industries and growth have transformed the valley from fields of crops and clover to office parks and a cloverleaf -- the elevated intersection of Interstate 405 and state Route 522.

Nevertheless, Bothell has preserved its rural character, with popular attractions like the Country Village, and its history, with the log cabin, museum and schoolhouse at Bothell Landing. And walkers, joggers, bicyclists and skaters enjoy the Sammamish River Trail, which begins at Bothell's Blyth Park and connects with Seattle's Burke Gilman Trail.

Clyde Hill / Medina / Yarrow Point / Hunts Point

Clyde Hill: Small, exclusive enclave born of independence

Barely a mile and a half square, this city of 2,900 occupies the hill between Bellevue and Medina on the east side of Lake Washington.

Like Bellevue, Clyde Hill was incorporated in 1953.

And like the small towns surrounding Bellevue, Clyde Hill was created in an effort to preserve its independence, control lot sizes and prevent commercialization.

Homesteaded in 1882, it didn't show up as Clyde Hill until the late 1940s, when the neighborhood formed a community club and had to pick a name.

It came from a road called Clyde, so called because the pioneer who named it was a Scot whose memories of the Firth of Clyde were triggered by the lake and its setting.

Clyde Hill is served by an elected mayor and City Council and has its own police department, but it contracts with Bellevue for fire protection.

Medina: One of the priciest zip codes in the country

A little more than 1.5 square miles in size, Medina is where billionaire Bill Gates lives with his family.

Located just west of Bellevue on a chunk of Lake Washington waterfront, Medina is also where \$60 million guarantees you at least three bedrooms, a couple dozen baths and an extra long driveway.

As a residential city with one of the priciest zip codes in the country and about 3,000 residents, Medina also comes with a set of neighbors edgy over rising real estate taxes and anxious to see a pledge from city leaders that says the days of mega-mansions are over.

According to the 2000 Census, the median value of a Medina home was \$790,000.

Incorporated on July 26, 1955 -- just two years after Bellevue became a city -- Medina is a city where the median family income today is nearly \$150,000 a year.

In the 1870s, Seattle businessmen began buying Medina real estate, if not to build mansions, then to cut down its trees to start farming.

Miller Freeman lived there. His son, Kemper, built Bellevue Square, and his grandson, Kemper Jr. now owns it.

Other residents included James Clapp, a member of the Weyerhaeuser timber clan, and James G. Eddy, lumberman and shipbuilder.

Thomas L. Dabney is considered the first permanent resident. In 1891 he built a dock that eventually attracted Lake Washington's fleet of small ferry boats.

Great wealth has always characterized this community, which leads the parade of three so-called "Gold Coast" communities noted for their residents' affluence and influence.

Medina has the 160-acre Overlake Golf Club (private, of course), which buffers the locals from general passers-by. Its Evergreen Point anchors the east side of Lake Washington's northern-most floating bridge, which was completed in 1963.

Yarrow Point: Comfortable living along Cozy Cove

Yarrow Point elects its own mayor and five-member Town Council, which promises "to prudently preserve and enhance Yarrow Point's environment and to actively encourage community involvement in government."

In truth, this community of 405 homes and 1,018 residents barely qualifies as a "point." Only its northern tip protrudes into Lake Washington.

While its eastern border is moored tightly to the Kirkland mainland, its western side is embraced by Cozy Cove, and the living nearby is high-brow. According to the latest U.S. Census, the median home price is at the \$800,000 level and the median family income is \$126,000 a year.

Of particular interest in the community is the Wetherill Nature Preserve, a 16-acre wild area and wetland between Yarrow Point and Hunts Point that is bordered on the south by state Route 520.

Hunts Point: Exclusive, waterfront property on most every lot

Waterfront abounds on this third of a square mile finger of land that points north into Lake Washington.

Wholly residential, Hunts Point was founded by Leigh J. S. Hunt, a Yarrow Point pioneer, industrialist and publisher of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer who bought the place so he could cut down the trees that were blocking his view of Seattle.

Or so the story goes.

Like nearby Medina, the town of Hunts Point is as wealthy as they come in King County, with a median family income over \$200,000 and a median home value of \$1 million.

The water that cuddles Hunts Point -- Fairweather Bay to the west and Cozy Cove on the east -- was largely "created" out of little more than a bog in 1916 when the Lake Washington Ship Canal and Ballard Locks were completed.

The canal/locks connected Lake Washington to Lake Union and dropped the level of Lake Washington by nearly 12 feet.

Completion of the Evergreen Point Bridge and construction of state Route 520 in 1963 created enough fill to produce solid ground in places where there had only been marsh.

A threat by King County and some property owners to allow the platting of small lots in the 1950s drove the movement toward self government and ultimately created the town of Hunts Point in 1955.

Today there are 204 lots, 165 of which are waterfront. One is still undeveloped.

In the years since the 1990 U.S. Census, the town's population has fallen to 455 people, down 12 percent from 514.

Issaquah

Onetime logging town is booming

The sawmills and logging trucks disappeared long ago from this Sammamish Valley city 15 miles east of Seattle.

But the eviction of Linn Emrick's Parachute Center and Skyport from its home along Interstate 90 signaled the real beginning of the end for Issaquah as a quaint and cozy place at the south end of Lake Sammamish.

Emrick's little airfield specialized in hauling up parachutists and sailplanes. Sunday drivers often watched, some using the highway shoulder to park and gawk.

No gawking now.

In its place since 1986 have come shopping centers and parking lots and enough daily traffic to clog the 10-lane freeway that now splits the valley.

At the same time, Issaquah has been experiencing a population explosion that has more than doubled its size since 1980. The 12,900 mark was reached in 2001 and more people appear to be on the way.

Just 20 years ago, Issaquah was a community that barely covered the flood plain along Issaquah Creek. Today it spans parts of Cougar Mountain, much of Squak Mountain and the side of the Sammamish Plateau known as Grand Ridge and now called Issaquah Highlands.

With the median value of homes edging toward \$300,000, median family incomes have risen accordingly.

But deep roots remain in a city that was incorporated 110 years ago as Gilman, the train stop at Squak Mountain. (Gilman Boulevard and the cluster of small shops called Gilman Village carry that historic name.)

With its October Salmon Days, the city still celebrates the return of salmon into Lake Sammamish and Issaquah Creek.

And it has kept electing mayors since 1892, when Frank W. Harrell became the first, of Gilman. Even after the city became Issaquah in 1899, he was returned to office every two years until 1918, according to Issaquah History On-Line.

From blue collar to white, but not overnight

Today, this city of about 45,050 residents has earned a reputation as a clean residential area with art galleries, lakeside views, good sailing opportunities and youth sports.

But if the stars had lined up for founder Peter Kirk back in the 1880s, steel would have been a noticeable part of the city's legacy. The British businessman landed in this area with a dream to turn it into a "Pittsburgh of the West." He thought the mineral-rich Snoqualmie Pass and ocean shipping would bring him a fortune.

Factories and towering smokestacks, though, never joined the hills and roads east of Lake Washington -- thanks to an 1893 stock market tumble. That crash closed his Moss Bay Iron and Steel Works.

Ships did play an important part in the area's economy. Early on, the east side of Lake Washington was connected to the west by a ferry that plied a route to the streetcar tracks at the eastern foot of Seattle's Madison Street. The proximity to the lake gave rise to the building of ferries. And during the 1940s, ships were built for the U.S. Navy.

The area also saw the state's first wool mill start in 1892. Wool milling became an important part of the economy.

Incorporated in 1905 and named after Kirk, the city has grown by annexing other neighborhoods, such as Totem Lake, North Rose Hill and South Juanita. Kirkland now stretches from its Houghton neighborhood bordering Bellevue on the south, to include the Juanita Bay area to the north.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Kirkland threw off its blue-collar image to redefine itself as an upscale beach town with a high median family income and increasingly expensive homes.

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● Mercer Island

A bridge away and a world apart

Known by American Indians as a foggy place, and named for Seattle pioneer Thomas Mercer, Mercer Island entered the modern era July 2, 1940, when a bridge of concrete pontoons, the first of its kind, was floated across Lake Washington.

It connected the island to Seattle on the west, and on the east to U.S. 10, the Sunset Highway to Chicago.

The Lake Washington Floating Bridge also turned the island from a farming community with a smattering of summer homes into a Seattle suburb with million-dollar houses, a median home value of more than \$500,000 and a school district with an ethos all its own.

Neither Eastside nor Seattle, islanders consider themselves in a world apart.

Incorporated within two months of each other as city (most of the island) and town (just the business district) in 1960, Mercer Island became a single entity in 1970 with city business conducted by a city manager through an elected City Council.

There were just 1,900 residents when the Lake Washington Floating Bridge was completed in 1940. Today, nearly 22,000 people live here.

● Redmond

'Salmonberg' goes high-tech

When the first Europeans encountered the Sammamish River Valley in 1871, they found so many salmon that they called the place Salmonberg.

Twelve years later it was named officially for its postmaster at the time, Luke McRedmond.

Located along the Sammamish River at the eastern terminus of State Route 520, the 16.6-square-mile city lies at the north end of Lake Sammamish about 11 miles east of Seattle.

Salmon still migrate up the stream on their way into Lake Sammamish and to the creeks that feed it. But dikes and ditches built for flood-control contributed to a reduction in their numbers. Redmond is leading an effort to reclaim the river for fish.

Incorporated in 1912 at a time when logging and agriculture fed the town, Redmond today contains the world headquarters of Microsoft and the national headquarters for Nintendo of America.

Eddie Bauer, Safeco, AT&T Wireless and a host of medical companies, including Medtronic Physio Control and Space Labs Medical, have regional offices here or call Redmond home.

Dozens of small city parks and school yards combine to make Redmond a highly livable - and walkable -- community.

In addition to Sammamish River Regional Park, the city's more major attractions include King County's sprawling Marymoor Park and the Willows Run golf course, bookends for the city south and north.

A complex of soccer fields known as Sixty Acres is just a chip shot east of the links on the river's flood plain.

Redmond has a council-mayor form of government with a full-time mayor and a part-time City Council.

Woodinville

Country charm, suburban living

Trees in this former logging town were once so important that residents lived in large stumps or used them for shelter from wet weather.

Although the city was incorporated in 1993, its history dates to 1870, when George Rutter Wilson and Columbus Greenleaf claimed land in the area.

Ira and Susan Woodin became the first family to settle in the area, along with their daughters. From their home, the Woodins operated the area's first post office, church and school.

Loggers eventually moved to the area, and farmers soon followed to work the cleared land. Today, this city, primarily made up of single-family homes, still evokes a country charm. Many residents either work on the Eastside or commute to Seattle and other cities.

At least 12 wineries -- one for every 766 residents -- attract visitors who want to enjoy the outdoors and drink samples from boutique and larger companies.

Residents and visitors can meander from wineries on Northeast 145th Street along a Sammamish River path to the city's Wilmot Gateway Park. You can also enjoy strolling, jogging and biking in the park.