

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

Patterson Park: The best back yard in Baltimore

By Dan Collins
Examiner Correspondent

For most neighborhoods, a park is a pleasant perk — a nice addition to the local way of life. Sometimes a park is much more — it becomes the heart of a community, as the residents of the Patterson Park neighborhood are quick to point out.

"Patterson Park is where the history and amenities are. The ethnic festivals, the evening summer concerts, the playground and pool for kids, trails for jogging and walking.

"And, of course, the Pagoda, one of my favorite Baltimore landmarks," said Gregg Wilhelm, executive director of the CityLit Project, and a resident of the region for nearly five years.

"We love the fact that our jogs take us through beautiful Patterson Park, through blue-collar Highlandtown, by the old breweries, down to the waterfront, to Fells Point," said Wilhelm. "We walk to Canton, to Fells, and it is not a bad walk to the Inner Harbor."

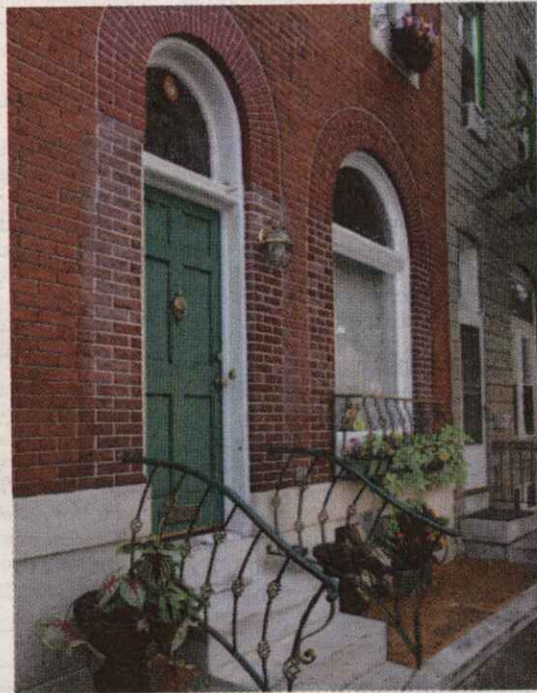
A designated historic district, the 155-acre park is located between Canton to the south, Butchers Hill to the west, Highlandtown about a mile down Eastern Avenue to the east and the city's Library Square on the north.

Patterson Park was designed by famed architect Frederick Law Olmstead at the close of the 19th century. The first athletic park in the country — and the first to offer a track and field facility — the park took its name from Baltimore's elite Patterson family. (In 1803, Elizabeth "Betsy" Patterson married Jerome Bonaparte, the brother of Emperor Napoleon I of France.)

"It's more than a park, it's a place where parents can bring their kids to the playground, young people can fish in the pond, athletes can play every sport imaginable, exercise enthusiasts can jog and bike, everyone can enjoy the festivals or you can just do nothing," said Mike Mitchell, former president of the Patterson Park Neighborhood Association and Executive Director of the Chesapeake Habitat for Humanity.

Megan Drane, a Realtor with Coldwell Banker, notes that the park offers "a great balance of open space, giving residents the feeling that this sprawling playground is all their own. There are tennis courts, ball fields, a boat lake, ice rink, community pool, plenty of space for walking your dog.

"The Creative Alliance provides events such as festivals, screenings, exhibitions, concerts and so much more on a regular basis so there is plenty to keep yourself busy.



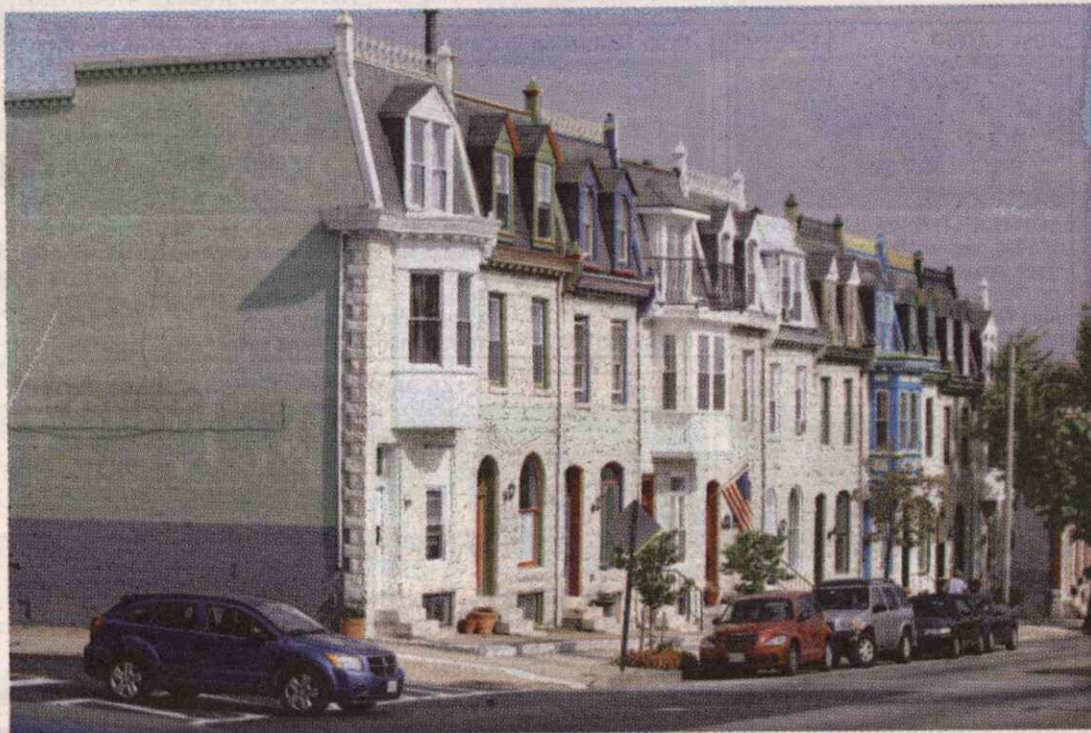
"Just talking a walk through this neighborhood will get your creative juices flowing," Drane said.

It's little wonder that the Patterson Park tag line is "The Best Backyard in Baltimore," said Heather Hairston, a neighborhood resident and an architect with traceARCHITECTS at 2901 E. Baltimore St.

"Our neighborhood has held a wonderful block party called 'Blockenstein' for the last two years. This year, we received a Comcast grant to help expand the organization," said Hairston. "We had a flea market, a neighborhood cookout and raffle in May that helped to raise money for the Southeastern District Police Community Relations Council Christmas project."

There's a lively, expressive energy to Patterson Park that comes from "a great mix" of neighbors, Wilhelm said. "Mainly young professionals, African-Americans, Latinos, a Baltimore Blast player, and one Ukrainian family from back in the day.

"Every October [Wilhelm's] neighbors congregate on the 100 block of Curley Street for the annual 'Curley-Q' party to get to know one another better," he said.



PHOTOS BY ARIANNE STARNES/FOR THE EXAMINER

Baltimore Street is shown in the Patterson Park neighborhood of Baltimore.

10 Things Patterson Park

Sense of community

"This is a very hands-on, active, vibrant community. You aren't just buying a home here, you are buying into a neighborhood committed to improving their community," said Magan Drane, local Coldwell Banker Realtor. "Kudos to the Patterson Park CDC (Community Development Corporation), Friends of Patterson Park and the Patterson Park Neighborhood Association," said resident Gregg Wilhelm.

Fine dining

Patterson Park neighborhood resident Mike Mitchell lists area restaurants Three and Roman's as his "favorite amenities." Roman's is located at 2 South Decker and is one of the oldest family-owned bars in Baltimore. Three features American contemporary cuisine and a casual chic style.

Fun on ice

Originally built in 1967 and named after the late Baltimore City Councilman Dominic "Mimi" DiPietro, the DiPietro Family Ice Skating Rink regularly hosts a hockey clinic and can be rented for groups and private parties. There's also a changing/warming house with a fireplace, concessions, and a skate shop.

Bike Jam

The Baltimore Bike Jam is the Mid-Atlantic's largest cycling festival, held in May at Patterson Park. The Bike Jam features a full day of high caliber pro-am cycling, including The Kelly Cup Pro Race, as well as games, bike safety clinics, live music, and more. Free and open to the public, the Bike Jam regularly attracts over 1,000 participants.

Take the high grounds

Patterson Park area resident Greg Wilhelm calls the coffee at High Grounds at 3201 Eastern Ave. one of his favorites. High Grounds Espresso and Books features a coffee shop, roasting operation, a sandwich menu, and a varied selection of baked goods, as well as a diverse selection of books available for both browsing and purchase.

Creative alliance

Located at 3134 Eastern Ave., the Creative Alliance seeks to bring together artists and audiences "to experience spectacular arts programs and engage in the creative process." (learn more at creativealliance.org). The Creative Alliance offers workshops, seminars and talks of all kinds, everything from portrait photography to children's classes to Spanish instruction. The Creative Alliance is headquartered at the former Patterson Theater, now a



multi-purpose arts center featuring two art galleries, a 180-seat theater, a classroom, media lab, offices and more.

The lantern parade

"A fabulous Baltimore spectacle with more than a thousand candles lit, paper and bamboo lanterns, carried through Patterson Park by the folks who made them. Add in the influence of Lewis Carroll's wildly imaginative world, Crazy Creative Floats, a new parade route, a Grand Finale Monster Raising Party, bands and more, the parade is a must-see," Drane said.

School's in session

Mike Mitchell puts the Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS), located at 27 N. Lakewood Ave., as high on his list of favorite things about his neighborhood. One of 41 Baltimore City Public Schools to be part of the City's Community School Initiative, PPPCS offers instructional programs, health and mental health services, adult education and parenting workshops, after-school clubs, academics, the arts and more.

A real page-turner

The first new library construction in Baltimore in more than 30 years, the Enoch Pratt Southeast Anchor Library in Highlandtown opened in May 2007. The 27,000-square-foot library features a glass atrium, a piazza and reading garden, children's and teen's areas, the Pratt Center for Technology training with public computer classes, more than 50 computers, 80,000 volumes, a Spanish collection, etc.

The Pagoda

Offering a stunning view of Baltimore, the octagonal, 60-foot high, 4-story Patterson Park Pagoda (originally known as the Observation Tower in 1890) was restored in spring 2002. The Pagoda is open noon to 6 p.m. Sundays, May through October with appointments and special group tours welcome. Learn more at pattersonpark.com.