

**IN OUR
SEARCH FOR
A NEW ADDRESS,
MY WIFE AND
I DISCOVERED
THE REAL
VALUE OF
COMMUNITY**

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR



When my wife and I were shopping for our first home to buy three decades ago, I diligently scanned the

real estate listings, noting the square footage of each house on the market, its asking price, its nearness to our jobs, a supermarket, and decent schools for our small daughter.

My wife, though, landed on another measure of a property's possible fit, something not easily conveyed in the common metrics of the housing industry. After we toured a place that was for sale, my wife took me along to meet the prospective neighbors on either side. She shrewdly understood that they'd have a better sense of life on the street than any real estate agent.

Meeting potential neighbors had other benefits, too. As newlyweds, we'd learned in renting our first modest home that happiness often relied on how well we connected with the folks

The quality of your neighbors is hard to sum up in a real estate listing, but it's what really makes a house into a home.

next door. We'd been lucky so far, becoming fast friends with an elderly couple across the fence who'd embraced us as a surrogate son and daughter. Could we strike gold again?

When we met Bobby and Ethel Hamilton, who lived a few feet from the house we'd eyed as a possibility, we sensed our winning streak hadn't ended. Bobby and Ethel quickly welcomed us as family, even offering to help us move in if we agreed to seal the deal. We quickly closed on the house.

Soon, other neighbors stopped by and made us feel even better about the choice we'd made. In our first week on the block, Katherine Braithwaite brought us a dinner she'd made across the street. Rose Chauser, another neighbor, came over and watched our daughter when we had a babysitting emergency.

Over the years, these dear souls became an extension of the home we'd made. As the seasons passed, each one slowly left the scene, and my wife and I became the elders of our street. It was sad to see the Hamilton place empty, though it wasn't empty for long.

One morning, as I was on the porch, a young man named Ryan Barbay walked up the driveway and introduced himself. He and his wife, Chelsea, had bought the Hamilton house, and he wanted to get a sense of the neighborhood.

I promised to be the kind of neighbor for him that the Hamiltons had been for me.

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