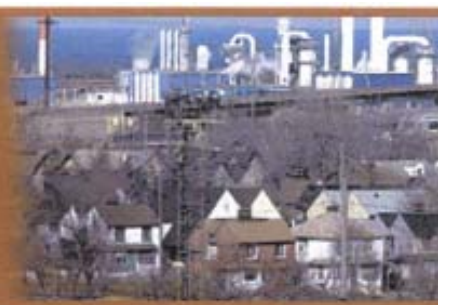




Our Pride. Our Towns.

A look at Calumet Region communities.



A community of many faces



East Chicago's Marktown neighborhood with what is now BP Amoco in the distance.

A community of many faces

BY JIM MASTERS
Times Correspondent

Just east of Chicago, along the Lake Michigan shore, lies the city of East Chicago — a community of many faces.

It's a steel town, a beach community, a beacon of freedom and prosperity for Mexican immigrants and the longtime fortress of Democratic party politics — some would say the "shadow" county seat.

East Chicago, founded in 1893, is also a city of distinct neighborhoods — 14 to be exact.

Ask an East Chicago resident where he's from, and he'll tell you the neighborhood: Calumet, West Calumet, East Calumet, North Harbor, East Harbor, South Harbor, West Harbor/Carey-Drummond, Marktown Historic District, New Addition, Northside, Roxana, Southside, Sunnyside or Washington Park Historic District.

Each neighborhood is architecturally, historically and ethnically distinct from the others, said Paul Myers, a Marktown resident and historic preservationist.

For several years, Myers has fought for the preservation and revitalization of this original "company town," developed by the former Mark Manufacturing in the early 20th century.

While Myers can claim many successes in preserving and enhancing Marktown's

trademark masonry construction, he's seen setbacks when others have not shared his vision of returning the community to its glory days.

Myers describes Marktown as the "Brigadoon of industry housing rising out of the mists of industry."

"This quaint little neighborhood designed just prior to World War I, utilizing the designs brought forward in the garden city concept of Ebenezer Howard, truly does live and die a little each day," Myers said. "In what could and should be a quaint neighborhood of 800- to 1,200-square-foot, well-built homes, we find deferred maintenance, illegal fences and boarded up buildings."

A 1975 petition for Marktown to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places reads, in part, "Marktown presents a living lesson in history and culture from the pioneer growth period of the Calumet Region. This region, which is America's industrial heartland, is quite young compared to other great regions of this nation."

Like Marktown, the Washington Park Historic District, developed during the first 20 years of the 20th century, remains a well-kept secret. Snuggled in the southern portion of the city's Indiana Harbor section, the neighborhood is a small, richly developed residential area encircling Washington Park.

The park is the

neighborhood's life blood, offering a greenhouse, water park, playground, picnic areas and the Block Stadium baseball park.

Thomas Frank, who recently founded the Washington Park Historic Society, said the park's beauty and summer festivals beckon visits year after year.

"The neighborhood's relationship with the past has been preserved," Frank said. "The large period revival-styled homes on tree-lined streets were originally the residences of many management-level personnel in the early days of Inland Steel."

Today, Washington Park remains a stable residential area, Frank said, calling it a testament to the strength of good design with contemporary relevance.

"Its rich past and magnificent homes have attracted many people from the surrounding working-class neighborhoods as a mark of achievement," Frank said. "Pride in the neighborhood is growing as the residents are forming an association with a mission to maintain and preserve the quality of life that is already present."

"Its rich past and magnificent homes have attracted many people from surrounding working-class neighborhoods as a mark of achievement"

Thomas Frank, Washington Park resident

Did you know?

The Marktown area is featured in Ripley's "Believe It or Not" as the only neighborhood in North America where people park their cars on the sidewalk and walk in the street.

Residents

Median resident age: 30.8 years

Median household income: \$26,538

Median house value: \$69,900

Population

2000 Census: 32,414

July 2002 estimate: 31,731 (-2.1% change)

Males: 15,509 (47.8%)

Females: 16,905 (52.2%)

Race

Hispanic: 51.6%

Black: 36.1%

Other race: 24%

White: 12.1%

Two or more races: 2.6%

American Indian: 0.8%

Ancestry

Polish: 4.8%

German: 1.5%

Irish: 1.2%

Note: This article first appeared in a special section of The Times in the fall of 2005. The section included stories about neighborhoods throughout the Calumet Region.