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## Arverne Advances by the Sea

**BLOCK PARTY:** By BRITTANY HUTSON



A plan to create a new beachfront community in New York City is starting to take hold at Arverne by the Sea, a development on the Rockaway peninsula in Queens that eventually will house 2,300 families.

Since the development broke ground in 2003, nearly 850 units have been completed and occupied, an attractive collection of three-story town houses built using coastal architectural styles. Many homes have sweeping views of the Atlantic Ocean and the boardwalk, and are equipped with rooftop decks. House prices start at \$559,000 and extend up to \$1 million; condos start at \$185,000.

Hills-based Muss Development LLC resulted in the Oceana, an 860-unit condominium in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Construction started in 2001 and was completed in 2008.

**“Developers have really turned around something that has been an eyesore,” one official said.**

“Arverne is a testament to the rise and robustness of the city’s economy,” said Roland Lewis, chief executive of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance. “For a long, long time that was vacant land that no one would touch because it was a dangerous place and was too far away.”

Before the project was launched, middle-class families wouldn’t flock to Rockaway Beach, which was better known for its many low-income, high-rise buildings than for being the largest urban beach in the U.S.

But you won’t find movie stars or celebrities on this beach. “We’re creating a thriving oceanfront community for middle-income New Yorkers of all ethnic backgrounds,” said Gerard Romski, counsel and project executive for Benjamin Beechwood LLC, a joint venture between the Beechwood Organization and Benjamin Cos. “If anyone said six years ago that this area would be in the current state it is now...they would have said you’re crazy.”

Arverne residents are an ethnic composition of approximately 40% Caucasian, 30% African-American, 17% Hispanic and 13% Asian-American, according to Mr. Romski. The community has been attracting first-time home buyers, young families, couples ready to settle down and a few retirees.

Vincent Castellano has been a resident of Arverne since 2009. He says he was lured by the oceanfront view and feels he came across a unique opportunity to live at the beach. “I like the fresh air, the smell of salt in the air and the sound of the surf,” he said.

The development doesn’t just include housing. Also coming is 200,000 square feet of retail space, including a Stop & Shop supermarket scheduled to open Oct. 1. A retail transit plaza with a 21,000-square-foot retail center is being built at the base of the Beach 67th Street Station subway stop. It is scheduled to open by August 2011. The station is currently being remodeled by the New York City Transit Authority.



Also on the drawing board is a YMCA, a marina and a charter school, intended to serve grades kindergarten through eighth.

“The developers have really turned around something that has been an eyesore for close to 50 years,” said Jonathan Gaska, district manager of Queens Community Board 14. “They are building a wonderful project that the community is happy with.”

But there are challenges to living 14 miles away from Manhattan, which is a commute that ranges from 45 minutes to an hour on the A train. Driving to Manhattan can take 35-45 minutes, depending on traffic. An express bus to midtown Manhattan can take up to 50 minutes in rush hour.

Residents are hoping to improve transportation options. “Fixing the transportation system is critical to the future of Rockaway,” said Mr. Castellano, who is in favor of a ferry or faster bus service. “It will make Rockaway a far more appealing place to live.”

