Headline: The case for Schaefer 7-8-Lodge

Subheadline: ‘You’ll definitely want to raise a family here’

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It’s a powerful message: An older man seated on a park bench next to a little girl on a park bench reading. Both black, enjoying the outdoors against a landscape of homes.

The scene is a painting from Mary Gagnon, who lives in the Schaefer 7-8-Lodge Community, and her art will be displayed on new signs in the neighborhood, replacing older ones that simply stated the name of the area.

The signs, in the works since last year, go up in May.

Most neighborhood signs might have just the name of the neighborhood or drawings of homes. But it was important for Schaefer 7-8-Lodge residents to have something that reflected the tight-knit community they live in.

“This is one beautiful neighborhood. Here in Schaefer 7-8 and other communities throughout (District 2), we’re definitely community-focused,” Marcus Cummings, vice president of the Schaefer 7-8-Lodge Community association, says.

Residents in the westside neighborhood, bordered by Schaefer Highway, Seven Mile Road, the Lodge Freeway and Eight Mile Road, proudly (and quickly) tout the neighborhood’s amenities. Vernor Elementary School and Comstock Park are all within walking distance, hence the significance of a little girl reading. The Lodge is, well, right there for freeway access. And most residents have lived in the area for at least a decade.

Beyond that, however, is that residents say they’re off-the-radar for Detroit home shoppers despite offering many of the same qualities as the nearby Bagley or University District neighborhoods. While Bagley is lauded for its affordability, and University District for its charm, Schaefer 7-8-Lodge is passed up, despite a housing stock similar to both neighborhoods.

And there’s the occupancy rate: 80%, by many residents’ guesses. Neighbors look out for vacant (but not necessarily abandoned) homes, and regularly remain in contact with Kim Tandy, District 2’s city-appointed manager, for opportunities to fill those empty spaces.

“This is definitely a community you would want to raise a family in,” Cummings says. “It’s like a family atmosphere.

“My next-door neighbor, Mrs. Brazier, she’s like a second grandmother. It’s an amazing feeling where you can live somewhere, and the person next door to you isn’t just a neighbor, but is more like family,” he adds.

When Mrs. Brazier’s – or Mrs. B, as Cummings sometimes calls her – husband died, all of her neighbors stepped up to help her, and continue to do so. Keeping the grass trimmed, helping with household chores, whatever she might need at the moment.

“You don’t get that too many places. A lot of places, you don’t even know who your neighbors really are,” Cummings says.