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# Curtis Bay's residents rise to its defense again

working-class area  
altimore battles  
ive its values

AURA BARNHARDT  
RIBUTING WRITER

Curtis Bay residents, South Baltimore neighborhood has always been fighting for. That was true in the 1800s, when the community banded together to have the bay dredged so that steamships could navigate along the Patapsco River. And it was true in the 1970s, when they warred against pollution from the industrial plants that line the waterfront. The community has been in a constant battle.

Like many city dwellers, Curtis Bay residents are trying to keep crime and drugs off their streets, while maintaining their older houses and roads. They also have to cope with urban sprawl by attracting new businesses and more jobs. "This is a struggling community that's basically fighting back," said 42-year-old Curtis Bay native Duane E. Tressler, who is the fourth generation of his family to live in his Pennington Avenue



CHIAKI KAWAJIRI: SUN STAFF

**Old homes:** Some of Curtis Bay's homes dating from the 1800s are on Pennington Avenue. The neighborhood originally was an extension of Brooklyn. It was annexed by the city in 1918.

home rowhouse.

"This area is teetering on the edge. We can build all the houses we want but unless we deal with the crime, drug and social problems — especially prostitution — we're going to lose the neighborhood."

As Mr. Tressler strolls about Curtis Bay's 16-square-block residential

area, he recalls growing up in a quiet, picturesque neighborhood with its bustling industrial backdrop.

Mr. Tressler remembers cobblestone curbs, brick sidewalks and streets that were named after the trees that lined them.

"It was always a close-knit community — very ethnic and very working-class," he

said.

Originally, Curtis Bay was the 1887 expansion of Brooklyn, then a northern Anne Arundel County agricultural community that had been established in 1853 by the Patapsco Company.

The two communities share much of the same history. For example, the same contractor built all 25 of their

## Curtis Bay

Population: 3,868 (1990 Census)

Commuting time to downtown Baltimore: 20 minutes

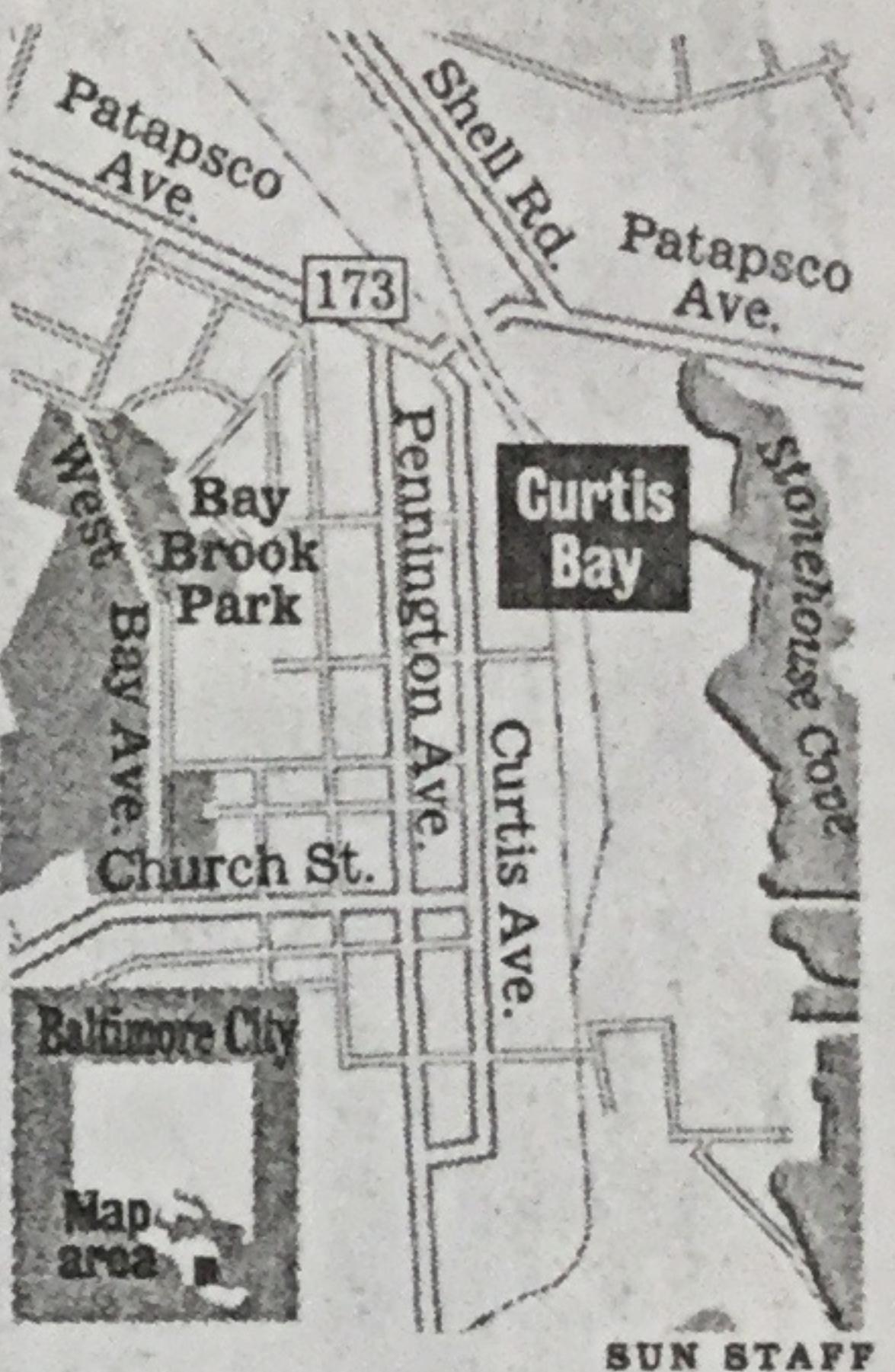
Public schools: Curtis Bay Elementary, Bay Brook Elementary, Benjamin Franklin Middle, Southern High (Students from Curtis Bay also attend city magnet high schools)

Points of interest: Fort Armistead Park, William J. Myers Soccer Pavilion, Bay Brook Park, Curtis Bay Water Tower, Ballman-Gischel House, Curtis Bay Coast Guard Yard

Nearest mall: Glen Burnie Mall

ZIP codes: 21225, 21226

Average price of a single-



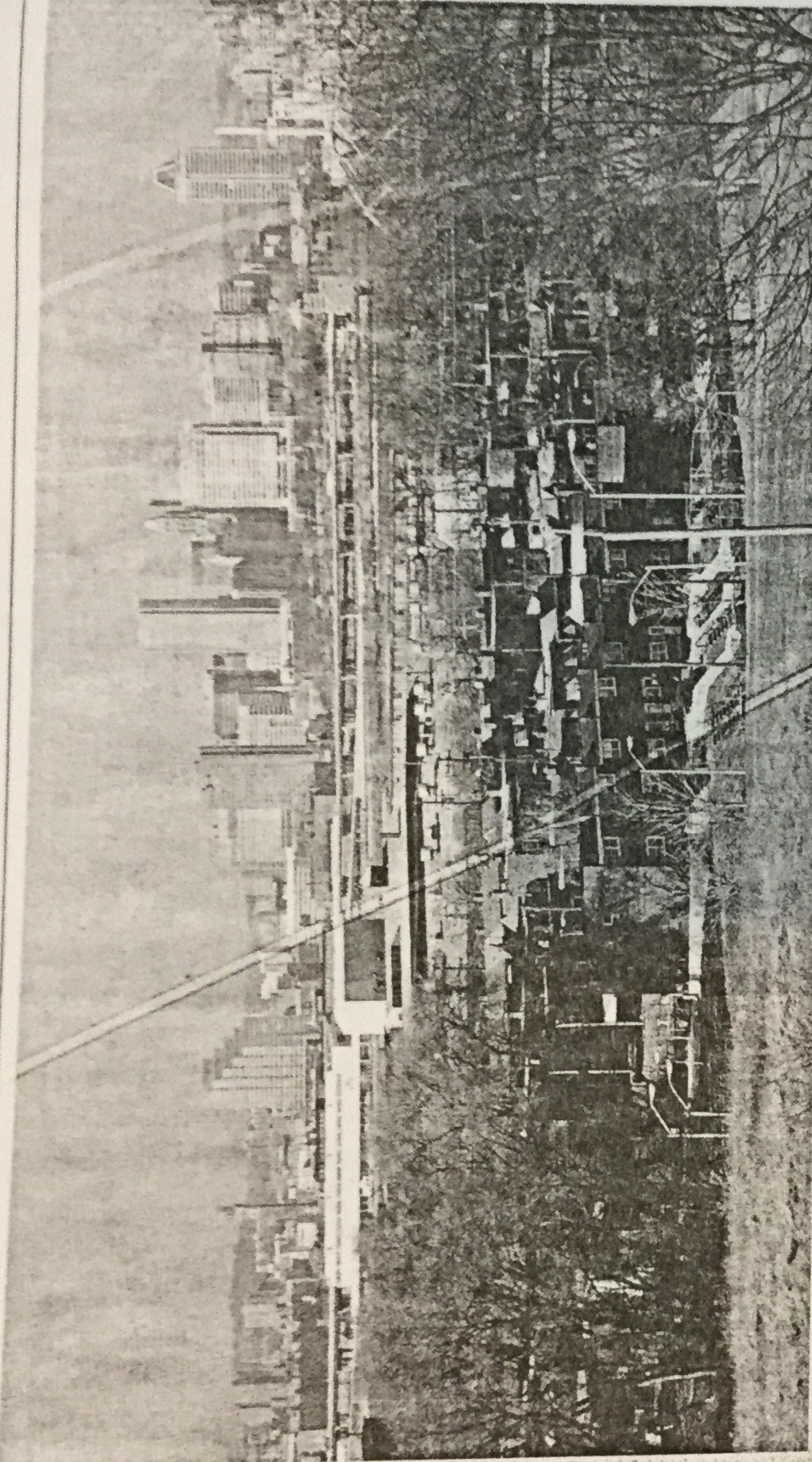
family home: \$56,344\*

\*Based on 25 sales during the past 12 months through Mid-Atlantic Real Estate Information Technologies Inc.

residents say.

One Curtis Bay native, 46-year-old Rita B. Lamke, the secretary at Curtis Bay Elementary School, observed, "It's just not the way it used to be. As a young person, Curtis Bay was beautiful. You could sit on your steps and talk to your neighbors. Now we're afraid to walk to the store. You have to chain things in your own back yard and lock all your doors. We need to take our neighborhood back."

James H. Persing Jr., 33, says Curtis Bay was a "nice neighborhood" when he moved there six years ago. Now, Mr. Persing says he hears gunfire behind his house. [See *Curtis Bay*, 2A]



*[Curtis Bay, from Page 1]*

Community with a view: The downtown Baltimore skyline as seen when looking north from Curtis Bay.

## Curtis Bay's residents are rising to its defense again

*[Curtis Bay, from Page 1]*

Although he helped start a citizens patrol, he says he's fearful about raising his 5-year-old daughter in the area and plans to move.

Others still aren't ready to give up on Curtis Bay — at least not on Wayne Rankin's watch. The 50-year-old father of two school-age children is a member of a safety patrol composed of parents of students at Benjamin Franklin Middle School. Each morning, from his window, he watches all the students go to school to make sure they all get there.

Mr. Rankin also volunteers at the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay Community Policing Center on Pontiac Avenue.

"My street was heavily infested with drugs and guns about a year or so ago. We had four shootings on my block within a 12-month period in 1994 and 1995. It's 95 percent drug-free today. I got fed up and started volunteering."

Many citizens are members of a block-watching program and report crimes to Southern District police. Officer Norita Cohen, who has worked in the neighborhood services unit covering the area for five years, says that while drug, prostitution, and juvenile crime continue in the area, "Citizens in Curtis Bay really work together when they have problems."

Many volunteer groups remain strong, whether they represent churches, civic organizations, seniors or the parents of students. A brand-new townhouse development, Farring Heights, is giving others hope. Struever Bros., Eccles and Rouse is building 72 three-level townhouses to be sold to low-to moderate-income families.

With a starting price of \$72,900, low down payments and credit counseling, the Struever project is averaging three to four sales a month.

Susan Songy, sales and market-

adjacent Anne Arundel County, said prices are lower in Curtis Bay. "There are some really nice homes in the area and you can get a really good deal. You can't beat a three-bedroom home for \$80,000 or \$65,000. Once people see what bargains they get in Curtis Bay, they should really flock there."

Gloria Sipes, 69-year-old community activist, said, "The new housing going up should improve the community. Hopefully it will bring young members into the Curtis Bay Association with new ideas and time."

For an economic boost, the community is looking to the neighboring Fairfield empowerment zone, in which an industrial park will be built with federal funds and city tax incentives.

Lt. Louis J. McClain, 34, who works at Fire Station 57 on Pennington Avenue, expressed hope that the empowerment zone will add some commercial growth. "This is a place where workers live. When jobs are gone, people are gone, and hopefully [Fairmont] will pick up [the local economy]."

In the belief that they will win the fight for their neighborhood, Curtis Bay residents continue their crusades.

After much clamoring, the city is spending \$890,000 to reconstruct Pennington Avenue, a major thoroughfare that is heavily used by commercial vehicles.

Mr. Tressler, a free-lance writer and researcher specializing in Maryland and Baltimore history, has formed the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay-North Arundel Historical Society to preserve important sites in the area. And community leaders are working to create an umbrella organization to unite everyone in their cause — saving their neighborhoods.

"This is one of those neighbor-

hoods on the borderline," Mr.

Tressler said, "where the battle for Baltimore's future is going to be won."



*[CHIAKI KAWAJIRI, SUN STAFF]*

**Fourth generation:** Duane E. Tressler, who is the fourth generation to live in his Pennington Avenue house, fears Curtis Bay will be lost unless it can overcome its drug, juvenile and other social problems.

area." Susanne Gurney, manager of Century 21-Don Gurney, a real estate company with four offices in