

Prestonwood area in Far North Dallas rated city's best neighborhood



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Rose Baca/Staff

Darleen Robertson reads at her home in Hillcrest Forest in North Dallas.

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Vicki Borowski moved last year to Prestonwood in Far North Dallas after having lived in a lot of other neighborhoods in the region.

“I was near downtown Dallas, then I moved to McKinney and to Plano and to that part of North Dallas near Ursuline Academy and then Willow Bend,” she said. “But, really, out of all the neighborhoods I’ve lived in, this is the most neighborhood-y.”

The concept of “best neighborhoods” is, at the end of the day, a matter of taste. But Borowski’s affection for Prestonwood has some statistical backing.

The Dallas Morning News conducted a yearlong study of residential areas in Dallas, Collin, Denton, Rockwall and part of Tarrant counties.

Using numerical analysis in an attempt to measure livability as far as possible, *The News* looked at 11 issues that residents said in a survey were most important to them. Those criteria ranged from safety and walkability to pet friendliness.

This story, one in a series, focuses on areas that received the highest overall scores within the city limits of Dallas.

Even in the leafiest city precincts, the paper’s study found that residents were more concerned than their suburban counterparts about issues such as whether shops, jobs or entertainment were within walking distance. Dallas residents tended to put a higher value on whether their neighborhoods were pet friendly and were a bit less concerned about crime.

The three broad areas scoring best among Dallas neighborhoods were clustered in Far North Dallas.

The Prestonwood area ranked first, although for the purposes of the survey, that designation included nearby neighborhoods. The area scored particularly well in the categories of quiet surroundings and commuter access.

Borowski said she loves the peacefulness and compatibility of her neighborhood, and is particularly taken with its proximity to entertainment, shopping and work.

“It’s convenient to everything. You can be up in Frisco in 30 minutes, you can be in downtown Dallas in 30 minutes. We have tons of restaurants here, and most of them are the same ones you get closer to downtown,” she said.

Scott Kakacek, president of the Prestonwood Homeowners Association, said quality of life is not just something that happens.

He credits the neighborhood's many social and civic groups for providing a sense of community. Even then, he said, Prestonwood has had its challenges.

A series of break-ins a decade ago spurred residents to create a Public Improvement District that pays for 24-hour police patrols. These, in turn, are supplemented by a vigorous crime watch program.

"Since then, crime has just been quashed," he said.

The Northwood Hills area ranked second in the *News* analysis, standing out as a safe neighborhood near a variety of places to go and things to do.

The Bent Tree-Oakdale-Country Brook area stood out as another safe neighborhood, with good access to shops and restaurants.

Together, the top three areas surveyed are home to just over 12,000 people.

Although adjacent to one another on the city map, each of the top three has a distinct feel.

Prestonwood is slightly older, and is more diverse than one might expect from predominantly white North Dallas.

Northwood, whose center includes Northwood Country Club, is more likely to contain houses on large wooded tracts along twisting lanes.

Bent Tree has among the most upscale streets in the city and includes gated communities set back from the main thoroughfares.

The cluster of Far North Dallas neighborhoods at the top of *The News*' Top 10 list was followed, roughly, by sections of the Lake Highlands area, all of which scored particularly well on landscaping and access to parks.

Scott Wynne, president of the Lake Highlands Area Improvement Association, moved into his neighborhood some 13 years ago. Recently, he decided to move again — about 50 feet to another house on the same street near Lake Highlands High School.

"Everybody rallies around Lake Highlands High School around here. It's a pervasive thing. It unifies people," he said.

Besides proximity to some of the city's best parks, he said, the area's attraction includes being in close commuting distance to downtown, the North Central Expressway corridor and the northern suburbs.

The oddity in the analysis was Turtle Creek Boulevard, which placed 10th on the list.

Neither as suburban as Prestonwood nor as urban as adjacent Oak Lawn, Turtle Creek largely consists of a series of high-rises and has more in common with Chicago's Lakeshore Drive than with any Dallas neighborhood.

Still, because it is surrounded by so much green space, within walking distance of some of the city's best bars and restaurants — and because its properties have appreciated so much in value — Turtle Creek Boulevard made the list.

“This is not a place for everybody,” said Jon Beasley, president of the Turtle Creek Association. “A lot of people want separation from their neighbors, and most of the residences here live in high-rises. But these are highly sociable people.”

The very proximity of the neighbors, sometimes living on the same floor of a building, gives a sense of community, he said. Residents can belong to a variety of organizations and each building often sponsors events designed to bring everyone together.

“We have a lot of empty-nesters here,” he said. “After living in those aging neighborhoods up north, they want to be free of all that maintenance. They like that they can look up out their window and see the skyline of downtown, and then look down and see green space.”

Data analysis by staff writer Daniel Lathrop.