

Schools, Shops and Transit, in a Pretty Package

Living In

By DAVE CALDWELL MARCH 8, 2012



THE hot spot here seems to be the Mall at Short Hills, a posh center with 160 stores covering 1.3 million square feet. Off an exit ramp of State Route 24, it has a Bloomingdale's, a Macy's, a Neiman Marcus, a Nordstrom and a Saks Fifth Avenue, plus dozens of specialty shops — and, of course, valet parking.

Kathy Fitzgerald Cocca, a vice president for corporate communications of Public Service Electric and Gas, and her husband, Mike, have lived close to the mall for the last 16 years, but the abundance of shopping and restaurants is far from the only reason they have enjoyed Short Hills, a picturesque, lush suburb with lots of elbow room.

“I like being a half hour from [New York City](#), and I like being five minutes from the mall,” said Ms. Cocca, who with her husband bought a 1929 Tudor here for \$875,000 in 1996, “but when I drive up Nottingham Road to my house, I always smile. It’s so pretty.”

Stewart Hartshorn, a 19th-century tycoon who made his fortune making spring roller shades, clearly did not have a giant mall with Bulgari, Fendi and Dior in mind when he began to buy about 1,500 acres in Essex County with the idea of creating a comfortable commuter suburb. The shopping is more like the icing on the cake.

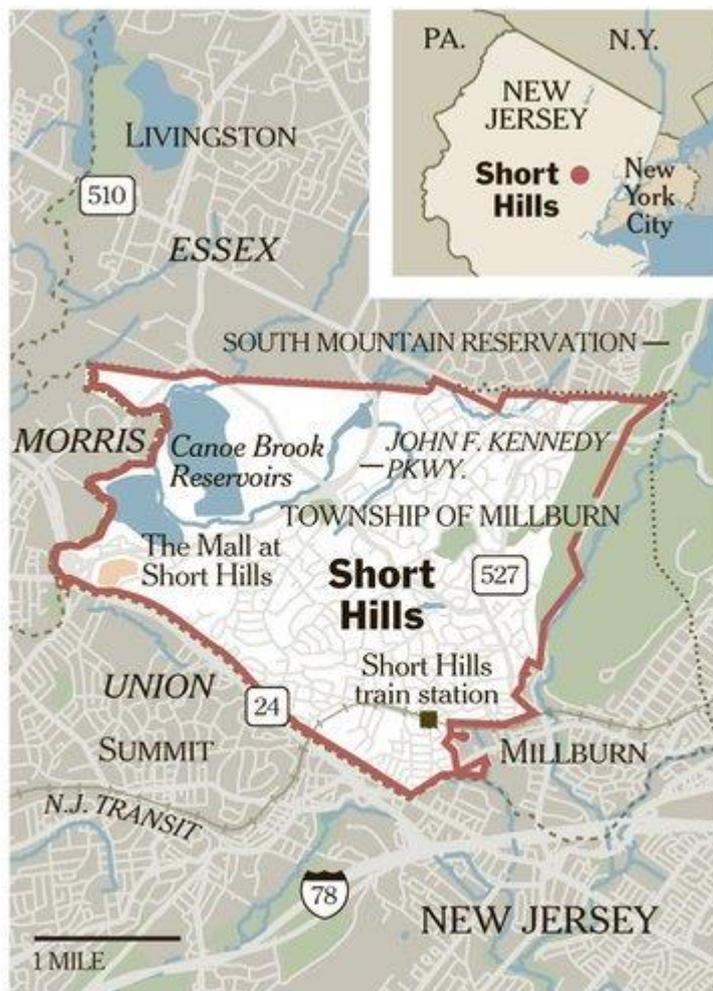
According to a history written in 1946 by his daughter, Cora Hartshorn, he named his development Short Hills after the Lenape name for the area, Little Hills. Never incorporated, it is now part of the [Township of Millburn](#), total population about 20,000. But Short Hills has its own ZIP code, 07078, and its lot sizes tend to be larger than Millburn’s.

Jason Grossman, who works for a New York real estate investment group and moved to [New Jersey](#) 10 years ago from New York City, finds the commute from Short Hills manageable.

“It’s very close to the city, and it’s a convenient place to live as a commuter,” said Mr. Grossman, who takes the New Jersey Transit Midtown Direct line into the city and also makes business trips out of Newark Airport, about 15 minutes away. “You’re really five minutes away from practically everything.”

“When your commute goes from 10 to 15 minutes to an hour and 10 minutes door to door,” he added, “it takes a little bit of an adjustment. But when you think about it, anywhere you live in the ’burbs is going to be at least a commute of 50 minutes to an hour. It’s something we all give up to get more space.”

He, too, has a 1929 Tudor. It has three bedrooms, and factoring in price and renovations, he figures he has \$800,000 invested in it. He and his wife, Alix, now have three children, 8, 6, and 3, and hope to move to a larger house, also in Short Hills. His children are involved in sports, and the family wants to stay.



The public schools are a particular source of pride. The [Millburn Township School District](#) has five elementary schools, a middle school and [Millburn High School](#), which was judged in 2008 and 2010 to be the No. 1 public high school in the state by New Jersey Monthly magazine. A high percentage of Millburn graduates are accepted to top colleges and universities, according to the state Department of Education.

“The education absolutely cannot be beat,” said Sandra Haimoff, a speech therapist who also serves as Millburn Township’s part-time mayor. “This reason alone is why so many people want to move into the area.”

And as usual, that quality comes at a price. Of the 77 residences for sale in the 07078 ZIP code recently on the [Garden State Multiple Listings Service](#), none were listed for less than \$500,000, and 36 were asking more than \$2 million. A three-bedroom 1962 ranch renovated in 2006 had an asking price of \$999,999.

WHAT YOU’LL FIND

Vera Chapman, an agent for Keller Williams Realty in neighboring Summit, said the fields most heavily represented in Short Hills were finance, pharmaceuticals, publishing, medicine and law.

“Home values in Short Hills have not seen the significant downturn that other towns have experienced,” Ms. Chapman said. “Its proximity to [Manhattan](#), the ease of commuting on the Midtown Direct and its excellent school system have helped the home market.”

Also, by suburban standards, the area has a measure of ethnic diversity. According to 2010 census figures, for instance, 15 percent of the students at Millburn High School speak a first language other than English; 3.6 percent speak Mandarin and 2 percent speak Korean. “It’s kind of a melting pot,” Mr. Grossman said. “It’s not as diverse as New York City, but it’s pretty diverse.”

Bordered by Route 24, which provides access to Interstate 78, Short Hills is tucked into a hilly, sylvan pocket in the southwestern corner of Essex, surrounded by Millburn, Summit and South Mountain Reservation. Millburn and Summit have shopping (and restaurants and theaters), but Short Hills also has its own strip shopping centers.

The topography gives it a different feel than neighboring areas. Streets meander over hills and past large lawns. Houses run the style gamut, from rangy antiques to new stone edifices to tidy (though not inexpensive) ranches.

Marcia Wilf, an educational philanthropist, recently listed her eight-bedroom eight-bath 1937 colonial, with guest house, on 3.5 acres on Hartshorn Road for sale (asking price, \$3.6 million, reduced from \$4.995 million) in order to downsize to a condominium in Verona. But she has mixed feelings about leaving, after 30 years, because, as she said, “I just liked everything.”

“The best thing was when my son was growing up, you never had to worry about anything happening in town,” she recalled. “It was a nice, comfortable feeling. You never had to worry about the kids going into town at night.”

On the Market



242 HARTSHORN DRIVE

An eight-bedroom eight-bath 1937 colonial on 3.5 acres with guest house, listed at \$3.6 million. (201) 924-1515



101 SHORT HILLS ROAD

An eight-bedroom nine-bath 2009 stone and wood shingle colonial on 2.1 acres, listed at \$4.999 million. (973) 699-4388.



83 WELLINGTON AVENUE

A four-bedroom two-and-a-half-bath 1926 Tudor, with new kitchen, listed at \$939,000. (201) 306-1357

WHAT YOU'LL PAY

Residences on the Garden State Multiple Listing Service with Short Hills mailing addresses ranged from a three-bedroom 1926 colonial, for \$599,000, to a six-bedroom colonial on 5.39 acres, built in 1938 and renovated in 1995, for \$8.995 million. In the middle, at \$1.995 million, is a five-bedroom colonial built in 1951 and renovated in 2006, with an annual tax bill of \$18,396.

Lisa Baratto, Millburn Township's tax assessor, said 257 houses sold in Millburn and Short Hills in 2010; the average sale price was \$1.178 million. She said 217 houses sold in the corresponding period this year; the average sale price was \$1.118 million. According to Trulia, the median sale price in Short Hills from November to January was \$850,000, or 11.7 percent lower than the median a year earlier.

Joanna Parker-Lentz, an agent in Westfield for Prominent Properties Sotheby's International Realty, says homes in Short Hills have tended to retain their value better than in surrounding towns. And, considering the cost of the real estate, she said, taxes are more reasonable than in other towns. That is in part because the mall and other commerce provide a strong tax base, Ms. Parker-Lentz said.

"Short Hills has definitely been more resilient," she added, alluding to the market downturn, "but there are still bargains to be had."

THE COMMUTE

The Short Hills station is on the Morris and Essex train line. On weekdays from 5 to 9 in the morning and 5 to 9 in the evening, 14 Midtown Direct trains make the 45-minute trip to and from Penn Station — 7 each way. A monthly pass is \$233. Permit parking for residents is \$300 a year, \$200 for six months. There are about 300 spaces near Short Hills station; these fill more quickly than at Millburn, the next stop, but permit-holders can park at either station. Mayor Haimoff said a parking deck was planned at Millburn station.

WHAT TO DO

Accessibility to [South Mountain Reservation](#) is considered a huge asset, but there are several smaller neighborhood parks, including the busy and well-maintained Gero Park, a 36-acre expanse off White Oak Ridge Road, which has a clubhouse, a pool, a playground, a par 3 [golf](#) course, tennis courts, basketball courts and several baseball fields.

A family membership to the pool is \$260 a year, a babysitter's membership \$120 (weekdays only). A season pass to the golf course is \$75. There are also four free summer concerts on Sundays at Taylor Park.

THE SCHOOLS

Three of the five primary schools are in Short Hills: Deerfield, Glenwood and Hartshorn. Enrollment is about 500 at Deerfield, which runs through Grade 5. Average class size is 18.5; the state average is 18.2.

Millburn Middle School, in Millburn, has about 1,100 students in Grades 6, 7 and 8. The high school has about 1,400 students in Grades 9 through 12. SAT averages last year were 627 in math, 600 in reading and 611 in writing, versus 520, 496 and 499 statewide.

The graduation rate for the classes of 2008, 2009 and 2010 was 100 percent, versus 94.7 percent statewide. Nearly half of students in Grades 11 and 12 participated in advanced placement classes, versus 19.9 percent statewide.

THE HISTORY

The Mall at Short Hills opened in November 1980, but its origin dates to 1949, when the Prudential Insurance Company bought the land where the mall now sits. B. Altman relocated from East Orange in 1958 to become the first department store. Bonwit Teller was among the stores in an open-air center in the early 1960s; Bloomingdale's followed in 1967. Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom didn't arrive until 1995.

Correction: March 18, 2012

The "Living In" article last Sunday, about Short Hills, N.J., misstated the purpose of a yearly \$120 fee at the township pool. It is the price of a weekday membership for babysitters, not the price of child care.

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