

here for. But I feel like I've been pegged for what I am—an outsider.

"I haven't weeded my own garden yet," I shout back, never breaking stride.

Councilwoman Mary Reynolds raves about the village's community spirit and lack of pretension, comparing the village to Fairview Park, where she grew up. "I felt the same level of community in both," she says. "There's more open space in Gates Mills, but I don't feel the people are any different. The misperception that people can be snobby in these parts," she says, "comes from the fact that many people have never been to Gates Mills or Hunting Valley. With almost no stores or restaurants in either place, there's really no reason to go. So the mystique—and misperceptions—linger."

Local real estate agent Georgia Murray of Howard Hanna Smythe Cramer and I are wearing the same dress (a knit from Ann Taylor Loft). Is this a good sign? Am I one of them? She tells me about the Halloween parties, Fourth of July parades and all kinds of festivals. Everybody brings a dish to the annual art show—a good old-fashioned potluck.

"What kind of dish?"
"Maybe cold-poached salmon with dill."

Dress or no dress, this is final proof of the divide. Poached salmon is not typical potluck. I mention this to Reynolds, as evidence that this place is not as pedestrian as everybody seems intent on proving. She quickly counters that there is an annual chili cook-off.

"I can't imagine anything more grassroots," she says.

Finally, I find a non-native to speak with. A mother of two whose children attend private schools and take riding lessons at the Hunt Club, she spends a fair amount of time here, but lives in a town down the road.

"It's one thing to be a guest, and it's another thing to live there," she says. "They're friendly to guests and welcoming to guests, but they know whether you're one of them."

How do they know? If your children don't wear Lilly Pulitzer or Lacoste, "it's an obvious yet subtle indicator of income," she says. The appropriate look for women is a mix of sporty and preppy, with \$500 Burberry jackets being

especially common. The trick—whether with cars, homes or clothes—is to make classic choices that indicate good taste, without being showy. Even more important is education. "There's a lot of subtle questions about where your children go to school and what they do during the summer," she says. She doesn't mean any of this in a bitter way, I can tell. It's just the way it is.

The West Side, of course, has a reputation for being much more open. And then, there's the cluster of 117 homes in the northwest corner of Lakewood known as Clifton Park. The residents pay a yearly fee (no one would say how much, but they all described it as modest) and have joint access to Clifton Beach. There are almost nightly gatherings there, I am told.

But when I try to check one out, I am once again met with resistance. A homeowner I'd previously spoken with could easily offer to vouch for me to get past the guard station. Instead, she e-mails: "You can explain to the guard what you are doing and ... I'm sure he will let you in. You're on your own from there." Nobody, it seems, wants to be the person who let a reporter into her enclave.

Nonetheless, I do head down to the beach on a balmy Friday night and, after a few questions, the guard let me in. The sandy beach, 50 or so feet deep, stretches about the length of two football fields. A boardwalk runs parallel to the water, lined by a row of trees. Dozens of picnic tables sit side by side in the shade.

Nearly every table is covered by a bright plaid or striped tablecloth and

has a wicker picnic basket on it. Most people brought meat to grill, but some order pizza. Everybody has wine and fresh fruit.

While the adults, quite a few holding babies, chat by the tables, the small children dart back and forth across the beach, hauling buckets of water to their sand castles and splashing in the waves.

The area used to be a bit more staid, one man says, but the recent influx of young families has livened things up. Many of the people at the beach today used to live elsewhere in Lakewood but moved, in some cases, just a few blocks, because they were drawn to the Clifton Park lifestyle. From Memorial Day on, every weekend is spent at the beach.

"This is what it's all about," one woman tells me, as her son comes up to the picnic table, thirsty from running around.

"Do you feel like there are a lot of social rules?" I ask.

She doesn't start talking about how welcoming everybody is or how down-to-earth her neighbors are. Instead, she gestures to her T-shirt, khaki shorts and bare feet and laughs. "Uh, noooo."

To me, this is the enclaves at their best. You're close to downtown, all the homes are old and beautiful, there are packs of small children. It's so social, so fun.

I think back to the woman whose couch I critiqued. She couldn't have loved her community any more.

"When I moved here," she told me, "my soul felt suddenly free and nurtured."

Yes, all of her neighbors are well off, but money won't get you in their crowd. What will get you in, she continued, is the same as it is in any community: "They have to be impressed by you as a person."

I feel like I could head down to Clifton Beach with my two little kids and a bottle of wine and have a great night. I have more trouble imagining any kind of social success over drinks at the Hunt Club. That's just me, though. As my "couch" friend said: "It all depends on who you are as a person."

	Median appraised home value	Typical cookout food	Do men wear jackets to Christmas parties?	Typical teen's first car	When residents say they're going to "the club," they mean . . .	Most popular high school sports	Corporate or entrepreneur?	Perfect lawns or are dandelions okay?	Diamonds or pearls?
Avalon Drive	\$632,750	grilled chicken, great salads	yes	Jeep, Volkswagen or Toyota	Cleveland Yachting Club	football and lacrosse	corporate	green and perfect	both, but are more likely to wear handcrafted pieces
Bratenahl	\$318,900	steak, lamb chops	yes	Jeep	Shoreby Club	baseball and tennis	entrepreneurs	lawns are perfect with English gardens	pearls
Chagrin Falls	\$252,100	chicken, ribs, scampi or salmon	sometimes	Jeep, small SUV or mom's old car	Chagrin Valley Country Club or Chagrin Valley Athletic Club	soccer, football and basketball	both, including lots of Merrill Lynch, Wachovia and Smith arney stockbrokers	nice and green	pearls for young mothers, diamonds as they age
Clifton Park	\$538,400	chicken and cold broccoli and cheese salad	no	usually a used car	The Clifton Club	baseball and swimming	both	nice and green	neither, gold
Daisy Hill	\$1.16M	steaks, hamburgers, hot dogs and ice cream	yes	Jeep or mom's old BMW	Chagrin Valley Hunt Club or The Country Club in Pepper Pike	lacrosse	both	dandelions are becoming considered environmentally sensitive lawn care	pearls
Gates Mills	\$467,400	steaks, burgers, hot dogs	yes, usually with ties	Jeep	Chagrin Valley Hunt Club	field hockey, tennis and football	corporate	dandelions are okay	definitely pearls
Norh Park and South Park Boulevards	\$741,500	catered	yes	mom's old car	Cleveland Skating Club or Shaker Heights Country Club	lacrosse, tennis and swimming	corporate	green	lots of diamonds
Top-O-Hill Drive	\$1.14M	filet mignon	no	a new Honda or Audi A4	Portage Country Club	soccer, lacrosse, football and baseball	both	no dandelions	diamonds
Waite Hill	\$555,270	chicken or hamburgers	yes	mom's old car	Kirtland Country Club	soccer and tennis	corporate	acceptable, as part of rural look	neither, most don't wear much jewelry
Large lots in Westlake	\$367,600	steak	no	small SUV or Honda	Lakewood Country Club	baseball and soccer	both	perfect and green	definitely diamonds



a mix of sporty and preppy



riding lessons at Hunt Club



not a typical potluck