

Outlook Section, Washington Post

It Takes a Village Welcome

For the First Lady, Chappaqua Practical

By Irene Levine

Sunday, September 12, 1999; Page B05

TO: Hillary Clinton, first lady, the White House
FROM: Irene Levine, private citizen, Chappaqua, N.Y.
RE: From Pennsylvania Avenue to Greeley Avenue

Like you, when I moved with my family from the Washington area to New York state, I picked the beautiful hamlet of Chappaqua. Since we shall soon be neighbors, I am sending this memo to prepare you for your arrival and help you make your transition.

Health Care

You'll love my family physician, Dr. Finkelstein, whose office is up the hill on King Street. The ongoing debate in town revolves around whether or not decent medical care is available outside of Manhattan. I know it is. Dr. Finkelstein is caring, compassionate and competent. But please take note: Since you are not on Medicare, you will have to pay out of pocket because Dr. Finkelstein doesn't accept other third-party payers. He believes he can't practice good medicine under the constraints of managed care.

Nutrition Policy And Programs

Newcomers often find this confusing, but Dr. Produce is not an alternative to Dr. Finkelstein; it's the name of the local food purveyor on Chappaqua's main street, Greeley Avenue. Try the low-fat tuna salad with Fuji apples and dried cranberries.

While we don't do Washington-style power lunches during the school year, Chappaqua ladies often meet at local restaurants, such as Giona's Tuscan Kitchen, Peabody's Pub or Susan Lawrence. They are great places to relax, get to know your neighbors, and, for those of us with children still at home, to work out PTA assignments or carpooling arrangements.

Takeout food also is quite popular here, with so many mothers and nannies ferrying children to and from schools, sports events and play dates. When my mother-in-law visited recently from California, she said she couldn't understand why women with large kitchens and commercial ovens rarely cook: You'll probably have the same problem.

Shopping

There's no Giant or Safeway in Chappaqua. We do have a rather grungy Grand Union at the top of King Street and a marginally better A&P in nearby Millwood. These markets are old and

understocked, and the aisles are small, perhaps because the price of commercial real estate is at such a premium here, as you well know. I try to remind myself that small is beautiful.

Given those limitations, if you do cook, you will probably decide to shop where I do, at the Chappaqua Village Market. While the prices are high, choice is plentiful and the produce is of excellent quality. Be sure that you don't go shopping on the same day as our other celebrity resident, Vanessa Williams, though. Last time I ran into her there, her bandeau top, spandex pants and stiletto heels commanded the attention of every checkout clerk in the store.

If you want to go out to eat, there's Crabtree's Kittle House, a country inn known for its extensive wine cellar, just a few blocks from your new home. We've found that it also makes a perfect place to sleep overnight guests.

There are seven dry cleaners in town, and they will likely take your clothes (as they do mine) without giving you a ticket. Don't worry. Frank and Carl's Cleaners, the one I've used for several years, knows, like the others, whose suit belongs to whom. I've never known them to make a mistake.

Water

There are few towns where the taste of water rivals that of New York City. But this is one place where you will really have a leg up on Mr. Giuliani. Several years ago, the Town of New Castle (of which Chappaqua is part) built its own filtration plant. While you won't like your water bills (\$53 per 1,000 cubic feet), you'll love the taste. I'm not sure why people aren't bottling it and selling it to cities like Washington.

Wildlife

Westchester County deer have no fear of humans or their vehicles. They'll stare at you from the shoulders of the Saw Mill River Parkway and prance across your path on Route 120, in front of the Old Quaker Meeting House.

With deer, of course, come ticks. Houlihan/Lawrence Inc., one of your Realtors and mine, may have neglected to mention that, among residents, Chappaqua is thought of as the Tick Capital of the Western World--and an excellent place to study Lyme disease policies. If you like to garden or want to create a New York version of the White House Easter egg roll, though, you will need to protect yourself and your guests with tick repellent.

You can buy Duranon repellent for \$7.95 a can from the Tick Doctor, who makes house calls twice a year for about \$170 a visit. He'll tell you how many larval tick clusters you have on your lot and provide you with data to demonstrate the success of twice-yearly applications. Our numbers dropped from five to zero in five years.

Education

I should warn you that, now that Chelsea's left home, you will be something of an exception. Most people move here because they have school-age children. In Chappaqua, our schools are

our temples and education is our religion. (You already know how high your school taxes will be.)

Plan to stay home and rent a video with Mr. Clinton on the nights when there are PTA meetings. The New Castle police are out in full force, organizing parking and directing the throngs of parents. The PTA posts are some of our most sought-after local political appointments. With your interest in education, you might want to get to know the PTA president early on; perhaps some president-to-president networking will help you.

Snow and Other Road Hazards

You will need to warn the Secret Service about the winding roads and black ice. While New Castle will plow streets, you will be responsible for your own driveway and will need to find someone who can plow early enough for you to get to work. (Few of us have the time to shovel.)

Media Glare

We don't have a local newspaper, although the Patent Trader, the weekly for northern Westchester, does include Chappaqua in its brief section on New Castle. The New Castle News is also sent monthly to postal patrons. This month's front page tackles the issues of bulk trash pickups and new regulations about parking permits at the Chappaqua train station. The next issue may offer advice about parking restrictions on your block.

If you are going to issue a press release, make a speech or appear on television, and need to look particularly good, stop by and see my hairstylist, Donna. Her shop is next door to the Second Story Bookshop, the independent bookstore on Greeley Avenue (I've checked; "It Takes a Village" is on the shelves). Donna grew up here, graduated from the local high school and specializes in the care of women who don't have the time to slip into Manhattan.

I hope this background information is helpful. We all feel certain that, in a short time, Chappaqua will feel like home to you. A home is what you were looking for, wasn't it?

Irene Levine, formerly deputy director of the Center for Mental Health Services at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, moved with her family to Chappaqua five years ago.

© Copyright 1999 The Washington Post Company