

Roland Parkers are homebodies during the downturned economy

Hudson's Corner

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If the number of Roland Parkers at the Fourth of July parade is any indication of those staying at home this summer, it showed that more people are in town.

Perhaps because Mayor Sheila Dixon spoke at the parade, the turnout was greater, or the events of the past year rallied this community to come out.

Any way you look at it, Roland Parkers seem to be clocking in more time in the 'hood this July.

I took an informal poll on the July Fourth weekend. A few families planned to go away for two weeks or more or travel abroad, but most planned long weekends nearby, visits with friends and family, or a week at a beach.

It's the economy, hon.

College-age children have patched together summer jobs babysitting, lifeguarding, or working as camp counselors or at stores and restaurants, with an occasional non-paying internship, summer school course and a rare paid internship.

Most who have just graduated are still looking for jobs. Some have signed up for graduate, medical or law school or have signed on with an array of nonprofit opportunities. I know only two 2009 college graduates who have landed paying jobs. I'm sure there are more, but I only know two.

Painting contractors seem to be the predominant trucks on Roland Park streets this summer, with only an occasional general contractor working on the few houses that have recently sold.

A friend, who thinks differently than most, is trying to dream up home improvement ideas to keep her favorite plumber, electrician and painter from further hardship this year.

Another neighbor has decided to use summer as her opportunity, when her children are in day camp, to do volunteer work in an area of the city where food on the table is a daily issue. Another asked if my husband and I would be references for a new volunteer position she hopes to land at a health care facility.

Yet another sat down and wrote a check from his foundation for \$250,000 to a city outreach center.

While marshalling the resources for paying high city property taxes, maintenance bills on aging homes and tuitions, many neighborhood households are simultaneously looking outward, offering volunteer or financial support to individuals and nonprofit organizations throughout the city. As a community, Roland Park is working to improve the area. The library has been renovated and replanted and is booming with business. The community has helped secure about \$240,000 to renovate the Roland Park firehouse.

Efforts are under way with surrounding communities to begin fundraising to maintain and restore the water tower on Roland Avenue. A chain link fence has recently gone up around it to keep pedestrians and drivers safe from falling roof tiles.

That removable fence might be seen as emblematic of the times. While a severely down-turned economy is a hardship to many, with combined efforts and persistence, improvement eventually will come.

Until then, spending time with neighbors working to make things a little better in the city creates strong bonds.

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