

**Steeped in history and tradition,  
this community in Boca dates back more than 50 years.**

**FUNNY HOW HISTORY HAS A WAY  
OF REPEATING ITSELF**



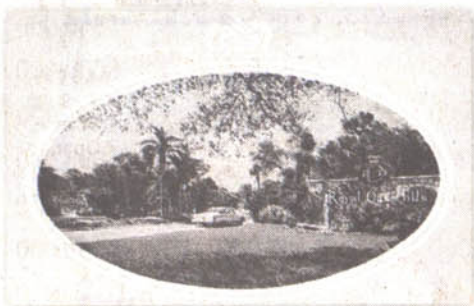
LANNIS WATERS/Staff Photographer

**'IT'S A LITTLE GEM OF A NEIGHBORHOOD':** A canal runs behind homes off Southwest Seventh Avenue in the Royal Oak Hills neighborhood in Boca Raton. Professionals and young families are drawn to the neighborhood by the waterfront homes, proximity to downtown and the beach, and the A-rated public schools.

■ Resident profiles, history of home sales, plus homes on the market: Pages 2F & 4F

NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE WEEK:

# ROYAL OAK HILLS



**THE GOOD OLE DAYS:** A flier from the early marketing days for Royal Oak Hills — circa 1960 — when the development was just getting off the ground. The sales campaign pushed homes with central air conditioning, wall-to-wall carpeting, high-end furniture and new GE appliances.

By EMILY J. MINOR  
*Special to The Palm Beach Post*

BOCA RATON — History can be elusive in South Florida, especially when so many residents have moved here from elsewhere.

We don't know what our city streets looked like in 1960, let alone 1920.

In a tidy section of eastern Boca Raton, the Royal Oak Hills neighborhood offers some prime real estate for good everyday living. Royal Oak Hills has friendly neighbors, canal-front homes, sidewalks, big trees.

And it has some history.

James McDavitt is now grown and owns a house in Royal Oak Hills where he lives with his wife and son. But McDavitt also grew up in this neighborhood. He

See ROYAL OAK HILLS, 4F ►

## THE REAL ESTATE MARKET AT ROYAL OAK HILLS

Total number of homes:

**423**

Homes listed for sale:

**5**

Median home sales price this year:

**\$330,000**

## ROYAL OAK HILLS, BOCA RATON

# Two-income couples find good values

▶ ROYAL OAK HILLS from 1F

can remember when he could stand at Camino Real and look north to Palmetto Park Road — and see nothing but land. His family moved to Royal Oak Hills right when developers Burt F. Haft and Jack W. Gaines first launched the development in the early 1960s.

A history collected by McDavitt says Haft and Gaines built a neighborhood called Imperial Point in Broward County. It was in the late 1950s, and the duo used an unusual premise for the time. They had one builder construct a model row of houses, offering different bed and bath configurations and marketing upscale homes to Northern retirees.

"These homes were known for their electrical appliances," says Don Bagley, who has lived in Royal Oak Hills for nearly 20 years and has paid attention to the stories of those early days.

The developing team began plans in 1959 to build on 450 city-sized lots in Boca Raton — bounded by Palmetto Park to the north, Camino Real to the south, Eighth Court on the west and the El Rio Canal on the east.

But first, they had to build the El Rio Canal — and that required permission from the Lake Worth Drainage District.

With the canal permits — and with a commitment from Florida Power & Light Co. to provide electrical lines — the duo that called themselves Royal Boca Developers began building nine model homes at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Fifth Street.

They named the development Royal Oak Hills, taking "Royal" from their business and "Oak" from all the oak trees. The "Hills" probably came from the nearby coastal ridge.



**PLEASANT DRIVE:**

Trees form a canopy over Southwest Eighth Terrace where the road crosses a canal in the Royal Oak Hills neighborhood in Boca Raton.

LANNIS WATERS  
Staff Photographer

In a "history lesson" he wrote for the neighborhood newsletter back in 1987, former resident John Clarke names the nine model homes. The Hartford. The Walton. The Brookfield. The Stanford. The Norwalk. The Bradford. The Fairfield. The Rockland. The Danbury. Each house was shown with new GE appliances, central air conditioning — which wasn't always offered in those days — wall-to-wall carpeting, floor-to-ceiling draperies and high-end furniture.

The homes were priced from \$17,900 to \$29,900 — high for back then — but the upgrades caught the eye of professionals wanting to move south. At the start, doctors, executives and lawyers bought in Royal Oak Hills and used the homes as seasonal getaways.

Now, some 50 years later, the neighborhood remains beautiful and those homes still appear stately. But the dynamics have slowly changed.

Today, it's more professionals and young families — drawn to these city streets by the waterfront homes, proximity to downtown and the beach and the A-rated public schools.

"The schools are phenomenal," said Realtor Terry Story, who has been selling in Royal Oak Hills for many years.

"You're in Addison Mizner (elementary school attendance zone) and that's the one everyone wants."

Besides Addison Mizner, the two other public schools for this neighborhood are Boca Raton Middle School and Boca Raton Community High School. All three of the schools are A-rated by the state of Florida.

Besides the good schools, the home prices are mid-range — especially for two-income families. Of the 423 homes in Royal Oak Hills, five are currently for sale. The asking prices range from \$279,000 to \$608,900.

"The neighborhood did go through a period of time where there were some foreclosures," Story said. "But a lot of that's been flushed out with the first wave, and it's really a healthy neighborhood that's going to hold its values."

David Ward and his partner bought here in 2000, despite their resistance to buying in Boca.

"We told (our Realtor) we'd live anywhere except Boca," he said, laughing. "We had this preconceived notion of Boca and one of the things we wanted was a neighborhood that had sidewalks. And we preferred that it wasn't gated."

"She insisted we come look at this house, and we decided that we loved it."

Ward is the neighborhood's volunteer coordinator. There are no community amenities here. No central pool or tennis courts or park. The neighborhood dues are \$100 a year, and help pay for all the activities.

There's always something going on in Royal Oak Hills.

Block parties. Wine tasting. Beer tasting. Bingo Night.

Progressive dinners. A garden tour. And, coming soon, the 2010 Holiday Tour of Homes.

"We're all so busy with work and families, sometimes it's hard to even get to know your neighbor four houses down," Ward said.

But not here.

# NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE WEEK: ROYAL OAK HILLS, BOCA RATON

## THERESA BONNIE

### HER HOME:

A 1961 bungalow with 2 bedrooms and 2 baths that she's touched up with some renovations and new design.

**WHEN SHE MOVED IN:** November 1992

**HOW MUCH SHE PAID:** \$107,000  
**CURRENT VALUE (from Zillow.com):** \$233,000

**WHY SHE LOVES IT:** How about, everything?

Since she moved into this little place 18 years ago, she's put in crown molding, redone both bathrooms and turned the back porch into her kitchen. She's added cool tile and quirky chandeliers.

"A 1961 house needs someone who has a vision," says Bonnie, 47.

And she's not the only one in her family to see the potential

of Royal Oak Hills.

Besides Bonnie, her parents live in the neighborhood. Her brother lives here. Her sister lives here. And another sister lives just a mile or so away.

"It's a little jewel of a neighborhood," she says.

This family's ongoing love affair with Royal Oak Hills began in 1981 when Joe Bonnie moved his family, and his established moving company, from New York to Florida.

"My dad was always moving people to Florida and he said, 'One day, we're going to live in Boca Raton.'" And he was true to his word.

After Bonnie's dad moved the family and the company here — Joe Bonnie & Son moving company has been here since, and Theresa Bonnie works with her family in running the business — the family spent years enjoying the neighborhood.

When Theresa Bonnie moved on and began a life of her own, she wanted a house in an eastern Boca Raton neigh-



Staff photos by LANNIS WATERS

borhood. But Royal Oak Hills just didn't come to mind.

This is where everyone's parents lived.

Still, her real estate agent wanted her to consider the neighborhood, since there were so many good buys. Bonnie was persuaded and moved back to a place of her own in 1992, just after Hurricane Andrew.

Since then, she's convinced

her siblings this is a great investment. She loves the architecture, the friendliness, the canal access to the ocean. She loves pulling out of her street at night and seeing the sculptures from the art academy across the street all lit up.

"I really do love this neighborhood," she said. "I'm not just saying that because you're doing an article."

## ON THE MARKET

A sample of homes for sale in Royal Oak Hills



**\$365,750**

(730 S.W. 5th St.)

A 2-bedroom, 2-bath home with gourmet kitchen and granite counters. Heated pool, hurricane shutters and a huge great room that looks out onto the tropical yard. Listed by Renee Luzzi, Re/Max Advantage Plus.



**\$331,000**

(127 S.W. 7th Ave.)

Charming 2-bedroom, 2-bath with a possible third bedroom. Large screened patio, updated kitchen, open concept with tile throughout. Listed by Terry Story, Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate.

## JAMES and CAMILLE McDAVITT

### THEIR HOME:

A 3-bedroom, 2-bath house that James McDavitt's parents bought back when the development was first being built.



**WHEN HIS PARENTS MOVED IN:** 1962

**HOW MUCH HIS PARENTS PAID:**

\$29,900

**CURRENT VALUE (from Zillow.com):**

\$319,000

**WHY THE McDAVITTS LOVE IT TODAY:**

There is something to be said for nostalgia, and James McDavitt can easily remember the days of his childhood, when his father fell in love with Royal Oak Hills and decided it was time to retire — even though he was only 55.

James McDavitt, then just a boy, can remember the back yards in Royal Oak Hills. They were built without fences. "You could see blocks and blocks of people in their yards, outside, sitting by their pools," he said.

In those days, they didn't lock the front door and the car keys were often found in the ignition.

It's different today, of course, but McDavitt still loves that his son can ride his bike to the beach, just as McDavitt did as a boy. Back then, the Camino Real bridge to the island was just one lane. If a car came from the other way, you had to pull over onto

the dirt berm.

McDavitt inherited this house when his mother died about 10 years ago. But before her death, McDavitt and his wife bought another house in Royal Oak Hills to be close to her because she was in failing health. Today, he and his wife love the same things his parents loved about the place back when they bought in 1962.

They're close to the beach. And the neighbors are friendly, although the mix of owners is a bit different now.

Today, there are more families who are interested in quality public schools and neighborhood commitment.

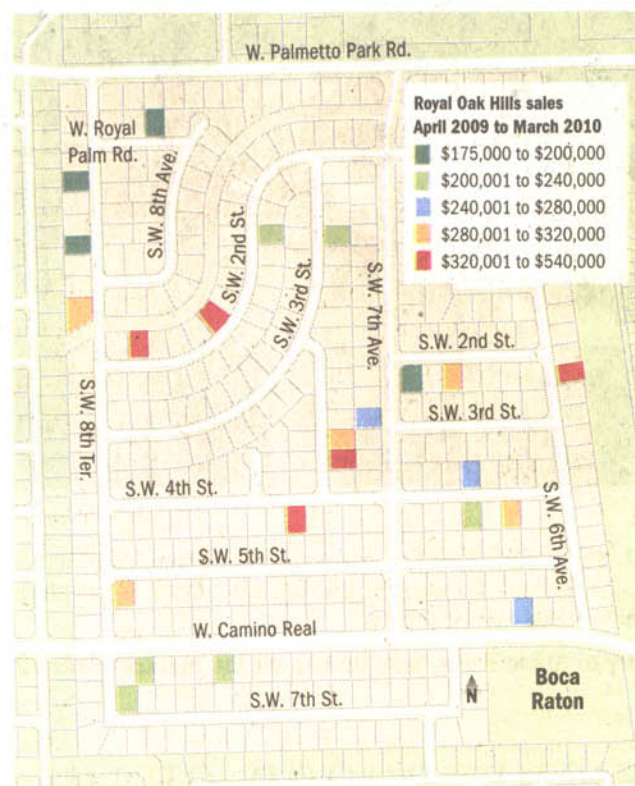
And McDavitt appreciates that the streets of his boyhood are filled with involved families.

He also appreciates the easy path to the ocean.

"Sometimes, at 10 o'clock at night, we'll just go down Palmetto Park Road, ride along the beach and come home," he said.

And that never gets old.

— Stories by Emily J. Minor



CHRISTOPHER SMITH/Staff Artist



CHRISTOPHER SMITH/Staff Artist

## History of home sales in Royal Oak Hills

YEAR	SALES	MINIMUM PRICE	MEDIAN PRICE	MAXIMUM PRICE
1995	21	\$113,500	\$138,000	\$245,000
1997	33	\$110,000	\$151,000	\$282,500
1999	48	\$118,000	\$157,500	\$338,100
2001	18	\$159,000	\$230,000	\$365,000
2003	37	\$235,000	\$285,000	\$635,000
2005	39	\$316,000	\$463,000	\$780,000
2007	22	\$308,000	\$388,750	\$695,000
2009	25	\$175,000	\$241,500	\$540,000
2010 (Jan.-March)	3	\$279,000	\$330,000	\$335,000

Mapping and data analysis by William M. Hartnett