

# Secrets inside the beltline

BY BOB GEARY

**W**hat's so "best of" about New Bern Avenue, you ask? Isn't it kind of, uh, neglected? Yes, it is, which makes it a candidate for best potential, given its location close to the center of Raleigh, the fact that a downtown boulevard still has vacant lots, if you can imagine that, and its position as the connector between the downtown and the burgeoning land of the 64 Bypass/I-540 extension known as Knightdale.

But it's not just its potential we're talking about. Think of New Bern Avenue as the gateway to what's best in Raleigh. It takes you to Enloe High School, one block north, which is the best public high school in North Carolina and the flagship of Wake County's proud program of magnet schools. The smooth integration of Raleigh's and Wake's schools in the '70s, and the fact that all of the combined system's schools remain integrated today in the face of persistent residential segregation, is a best-of thing every year.

One of the best-kept secrets in Raleigh, though, is the quiet neighborhood that was among its first to be integrated, some 40 years ago, and that remains its most racially and economically diverse today.

**Longview Gardens** was developed in the 1940s and '50s on the 800-acre farm then owned by Clarence Poe, founder-editor of the *Progressive Farmer* magazine. Poe pitched it as Raleigh's "best-planned suburb" and "most beautiful subdivision," and initially it attracted such socialites as the Aycocks, the Bensons and the Eures, as in Secretary of State Thad Eure. But an enclave intended by Poe for upscale whites (or, more specifically, upscale white Christians) never really worked in East Raleigh, traditionally the "black" side of town. And when whites-only covenants were declared illegal, it opened the door to a very different Longview—a neighborhood of graceful hills and ponds, big houses and small, on generous lots of at least half an acre each and usually more, that is by far the most affordable neighborhood in town.

Longview is home to Enloe, and to the **Raleigh Country Club**, a Donald Ross-designed golf course (yes, THE Donald Ross of Pinehurst fame). It counts WakeMed and the Wake County Department of Social Services, both of which are considered good things in Raleigh, as its neighbors. There's a Longview Lake, and the gracious **Longview House**—the Poe's homeplace—which is available for your social functions.

There's even a roundabout on North King Charles Road—a "traffic-calming" method so old it's brand new in most of Raleigh.

And how do you get to this undiscovered jewel? You take New Bern Avenue, and you turn right or left, because New Bern bisects Longview. See why it's on our "best" list?

Allen Wilson, a software designer who's co-chair of the newly revived neighborhood association, didn't know a thing about Longview

coming from downtown," he says. "I remember saying to myself, 'Wow, I can't believe there's a lot like this one inside the Beltline.'"

They grabbed it, they built, and today they have a new home that's a mile inside the Beltline and backs up to Longview Lake. And Wilson's a huge Longview booster.

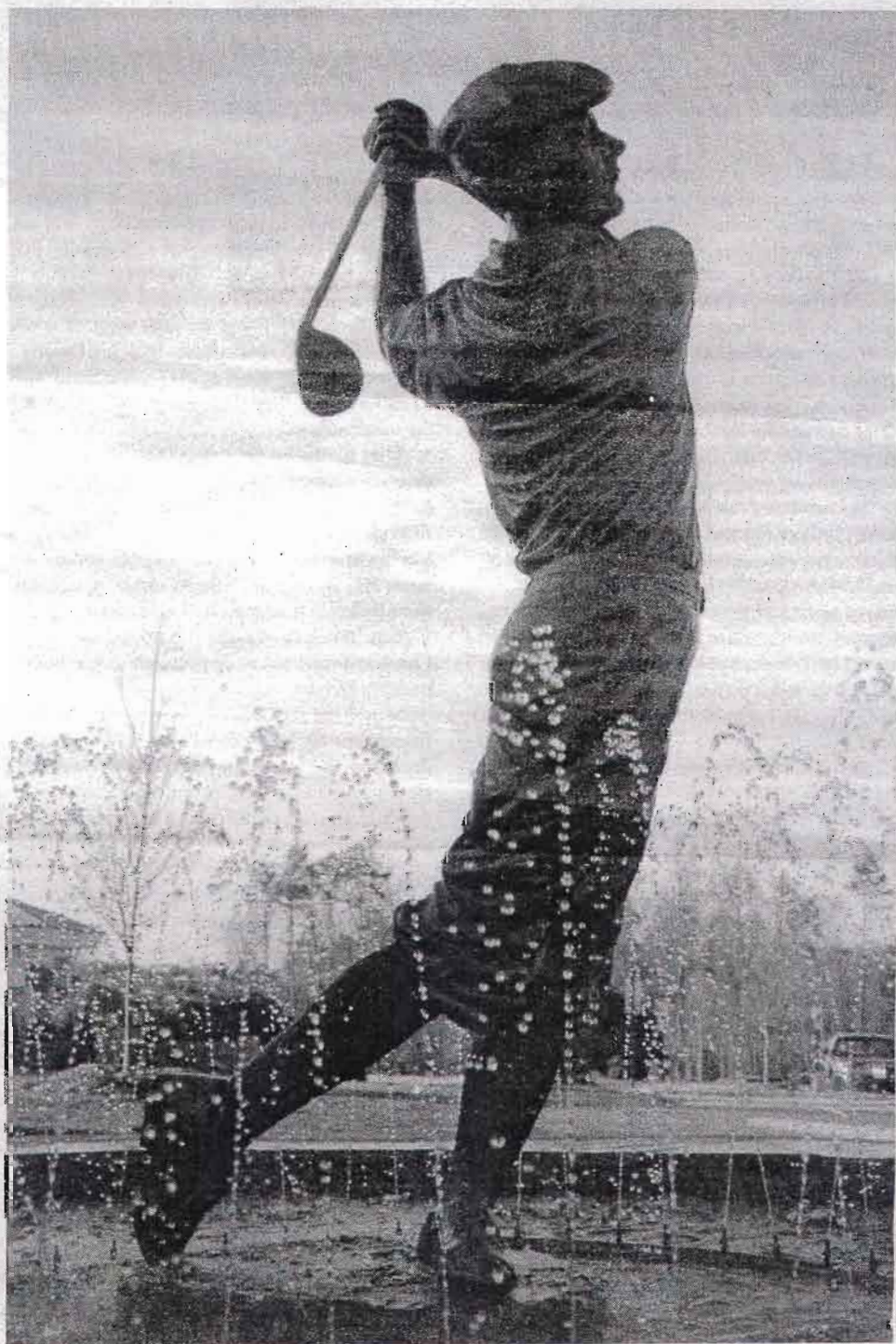
"One of the most attractive things to us is the sheer number of hardwood trees in Longview. You go out in the back yard, you feel like you're in the country. We have foxes and deer. We even saw a wild turkey the other day," he says. "Out the front door, it's urban living."

Another attraction is the diversity of the neighborhood. It's remained racially integrated—a steady 60-40 split between whites and blacks—over the years, according to Wilson. And it's increasingly a place of age diversity as well.

Indeed, one of the reasons nobody knows about Longview is that a lot of the original

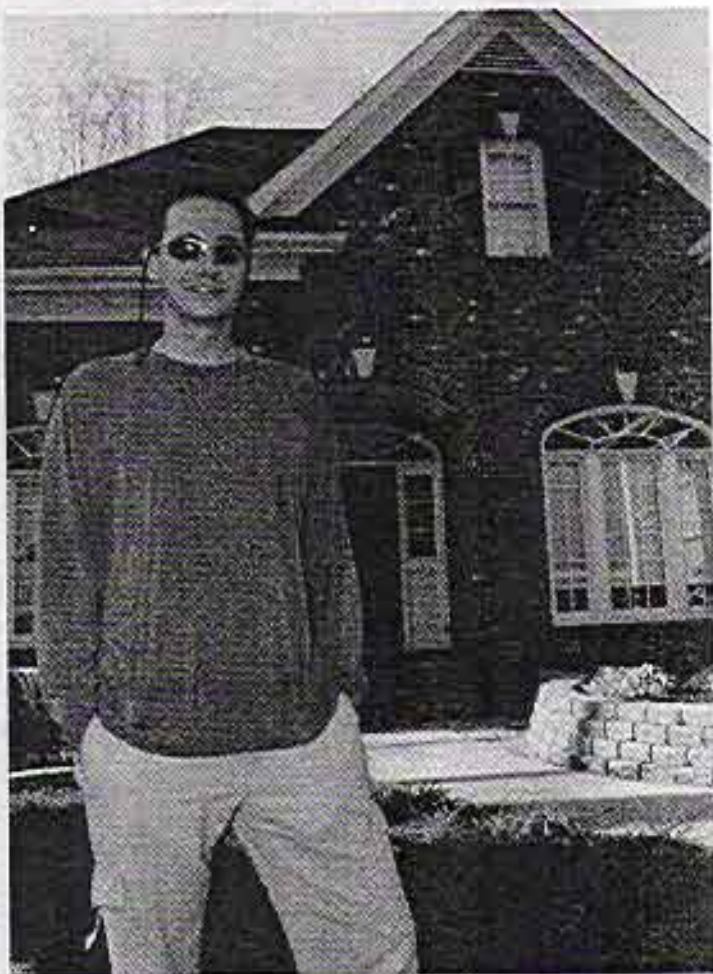
when he and his partner were moving back to Raleigh from Apex three years ago. Or, rather, he thought he knew that there was nothing in East Raleigh he wanted to look at.

So when they went looking for a lot to build on, he promptly crossed the one on New Bern Avenue off the listings and had to be talked into



**Raleigh Country Club, off New Bern Road, is aspiring to be one of the best golf courses in the state. PHOTO BY LISSA GOTWALS**





Allen Wilson, co-chair of the Longview Gardens neighborhood association, enjoys a large lot on New Bern Avenue that backs up to Longview Lake.

The Historic Longview Poe House off New Bern Avenue, below, is immaculately maintained and rented out for parties and weddings.

PHOTOS BY LISA GUYWALK

owners are still there. And, because Longview never really caught on as a neighborhood for rich people, properties haven't appreciated so much that folks were tempted to cash out and move.

But time is changing that, according to residents there, as owners age out at the same time Raleigh's downtown core picks up steam and cachet. Younger owners are moving into Longview, fixing up, adding on and gradually taking charge, says Lynette Pitt, who heads the East Raleigh CAC, the area's citizens advisory council.

A neighborhood task force wrote a small-area plan and is working on a conservation overlay district, Pitt says, and next expects to tackle a corridor plan to spruce up New Bern

Avenue. All are staples of Raleigh city planning.

"There's always been a great sense of community in the area, which is wonderful," Pitt says. "Now we're in a real transition period. A lot of people are working very hard, and some positive things are starting to happen."

One thing that's happening is that friends are telling friends. Wilson's got a friend who bought a lot on Albemarle Drive—his favorite street in Longview, by the way—and is about to break ground on a new house. "I'm a big advocate for getting people to move here," Wilson says. "We have big houses, small houses, and a lot of nice, older houses that need some TLC. There are just a lot of options here—for a lot of different people." ☒

