

OVERVIEW OF WENDYWOOD

History

The history of Wendywood is tied to the history of Sandton. The Sandton municipality was established as an extension of the city in 1969, after Johannesburg began to expand northwards. In its initial beginnings, it was very much a residential area consisting mostly of small holdings. Wendywood was established around the same time about 40 years ago and was part of Blue Haze farm. The newer part of Wendywood was part of Barry farm and is about 20 years old. In these early days, residents had huge stands and some even kept horses. There were gravel roads, no street lighting and no schools, which were later built in the 1980s. As Sandton became the new financial centre of South Africa and Johannesburg's premier business centre, much of the financial focus of Johannesburg shifted from the Central Business District to Sandton, especially in the last 15 years. Because of its close proximity to Sandton, Wendywood has therefore always attracted middle-upper class residents.

From its establishment throughout the 1980s and up until the late 1990s, Wendywood was predominantly a white neighbourhood. Wendywood has a history of being cosmopolitan its own right because it had Jewish, British, Portuguese, Irish, Greek and Lebanese communities. The Jewish community is sizeable and they have a synagogue just outside Wendywood in Gallo Manor. An esteemed Jewish school, King David is also nearby. However, the Jewish community has been diminishing from the 1990s which can be linked to the general steady decline in the South African Jewish community that peaked at 119,000 according to the 1980 census but is now

approximately 75,000. The major reasons cited are the unprecedented rise in crime and political uncertainty. One resident mentioned that about 60% of residents in Wendywood were Jewish in the 1980s but presently Jews make up about 30% of the community's residents. The other Greek, Portuguese and foreign communities were reported to have also decreased but it must be noted that generally most people who leave Wendywood tend to emigrate to other developed countries.

The politics of the community have generally been liberal and it was definitely not a National Party stronghold under apartheid. Wendywood began to see African families moving into the neighbourhood in the late 1980's and early 1990's although their numbers were relatively small. The onset of democracy in 1994 witnessed the steady flow of non-white residents into the community, particularly Indians and Africans especially from around the late 1990s. In contrast to the 1996 and 2001 census data which shows an increase in the white population, the perception on the ground is that there was decrease in the white population although they remained the majority. The census data rightly shows an increase in the African population, but there has also been an increase in the Indian population, which residents see as almost equal to the African population in size.

Wendywood is described as one of a series of leafy suburbs that form an affluent stretch in the north of the city and as one of the older upmarket suburbs in Sandton that offers calm, luxurious living close to the hub of Sandton, with little of the traffic noise, constant buzz and rat-race-living people have come to associate with Johannesburg.

Regardless of the catchy phrases used in these descriptions, the suburb is leafy with tree lined streets and maintained green lawns. It is a boomed area of several enclosures that have been created by the residents as a response to increasing crime rates. Whilst residents argue that the enclosures have helped in their fight to curb crime, they make navigation through the community difficult. All the booms are manned 24 hours a day. The houses are generally big with high walls and well maintained. There are few double storey houses as most of the houses are single storey with the smallest or standard house being a 3 bedroom house. There has also been the development of the Esprit Estate completed in 2006. The estate has 109 free standing homes with landscaped gardens and a high tech gym, sports arena, business centre etc. It is probably the only major development in Wendywood after 1994. Despite Wendywood being one of the upmarket suburbs in Sandton, it does not resemble the plush super-rich mansions characteristic of Sandton. Even the Esprit Estate is not as plush as other residential estates like Dainfern. As indicated by many residents, Wendywood is one of the cheaper areas in Sandton and therefore it attracts mostly middle class families. In addition to its affordability, it is close to Johannesburg, Midrand and even closer to the business hub of Sandton, making it attractive to people working in these areas that can't resist the lure of having a Sandton address.

In terms of racial integration, there isn't much inter-racial interaction going on since there is not much interaction among residents in general and most community members keep to themselves behind high walls. Whilst residents indicated that there was a fair amount of inter-racial interaction in the community, there was limited visible

interracial interaction at the shopping centre or sports club which are the two major platforms of potential interracial interaction in Wendywood. There is a perception among some residents that there is an unwritten agreement that people in the suburbs mind their own business within their walls, therefore there is lack of interaction between residents regardless of race. The quality of interaction is largely poor and limited to community meetings, especially those related to crime, and when neighbours run into each other at their gates and just say hi.

Economic development

In terms of new economic developments, the area has been stagnant. There has been no major development except for the Esprit residential estate. There have always been residents operating small businesses from home such as catering services, beauty salons and so forth. There is no informal economy to talk about except for 1 or 2 vendors. The community has been homogeneous in terms of class and has largely been middle class. Most of the residents are professionals or operate small businesses and the neighbourhood has traditionally been composed of such people. There are no pockets of richer or poorer areas but rather it is largely a middle class community. Property prices, like everywhere, have been increasing over the years.

Politics

Wendywood was traditionally a Democratic Party community and after 1994 the winning ward councillor was from the Democratic Alliance (DA). After the re-demarcation of wards in 2001, Wendywood was combined with Alexandra which is a

dense African National Congress (ANC) stronghold and this easily diluted the votes in Wendywood and the ANC won the ward in 2006.

The community's interaction with government has generally been low and seems to have gotten worse when the ANC took over the ward. Apathy and disinterest is rife because there is a feeling amongst residents that even if they try engaging with government, they would get nothing out of it. In addition there have been contradictions in what the community requests and government policies. The government has gone against some of the community's initiatives, particularly the erection of security booms and creation of enclosures. Residents view disputes like these as the government holding the community back, hence the disengagement with government. In addition to creating enclosures, residents have been responsible for erecting street lights in some streets and the fencing of public land, so they feel that they are responsible for their neighbourhood's development and there no need to engage with government when it comes to local development.

The community is politically heterogeneous and the major divisions are between the ANC and DA. The divisions are not characterised by tensions but residents tend to be split along racial lines with whites supporting the DA and Africans the ANC. There are no other organisations or movements that are politically active in the community. Despite the ANC presence, the party does not campaign in the neighbourhood and probably focuses more in Alexandra where there are more voters. The current ANC councillor is not active in the community and many of the residents do not know him.

Photos of Wendywood









Wendywood Sports Club