

CHARLES McDOWELL

From little seed grows a big city

About 18 miles west of Washington, in the wooded green hills of Fairfax County, the road crosses a stream named Difficult Run, and soon a sign announces: "Reston, Va. Population 184." When we

drove out there the other day, we were received in the midst of construction crews, moving vans, planners, sociologists and salesmen by a proud guide who hastened to advise us that the sign was several days out of date.

"The population is now 219," he said, "and the first baby is on the way. The wife of one of our minister's is pregnant."

If this sounded like typical small-town news, it was, but Reston is considerably more than a typical small town. It is perhaps America's premier example of a "new town" — a precisely and imaginatively planned community that is expected to grow, in this case, to a population of 75,000 in 1980.

WHAT IS GOING on out there in the beautiful Virginia countryside is a revolution against the city as we know it. Reston means to retain the convenience of the city and enjoy at the same time the pleasures of the small town and the country.

In seven "village centers" spread across 10 square miles, the modern pioneers of Reston will live in clusters of town houses, apartments and individual homes. Great swatches of woodland, lakes, quiet streams, and recreation facilities will be all around them.

Almost everyone will be able to walk to the small shopping center in his neighborhood, the elementary school, playground, swimming pool or golf course without getting tangled up with automobiles. There will be sculpture in the village plazas, band concerts in the parks, fish in the lakes. The establishment of research firms and light industry in a carefully screened park will allow many Reston-

ians to make a living without commuting.

Conceivably, it would be possible to move to Reston and never again venture into the disorganized outside world.

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IN A WAY it is a dreamy enterprise — and the incredible detail in which everything is planned in advance may make some of us vaguely uneasy — but it is not a dream. It is not a world's fair or some kind of experiment sponsored by a foundation or the government.

Reston was undertaken for profit by the developer, Robert E. Simon Jr. (whose initials gave the community the first syllable of its name). Simon believes that Reston will succeed because it makes sense.

The first "village center" of Reston, built around a 30-acre lake in a forest of old oaks, is nearing completion. We visited the village with Peter McCandless, an amiable, low-key "community and public relations" man who might have been a young college faculty member (and once was, as it turned out).

McCandless guided us through clusters of town houses designed by three of the country's better known contemporary architects. Two of the clusters came down to the lake; windows opened on it, balconies hung over it, boat landings thrust out into it. There was something of Venice about it and something of Georgetown and of Switzerland, and something very modern and very Gothic, and taken all together it was most pleasant.

We saw a new resident come out of her house and get into a small boat and sail away across the lake, and we were impressed. One of our companions, an eight-year-old boy, saw a turtle and a water snake in the shadow of the high-rise apartment building beside the lake, and he was impressed with the joys of Reston's combination of urban and rural living.



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