The ‘Real Life’ Takes Over in Secluded Reston

By Wolf Von Eckardt

Reston is restless.

About 6000 people now live in the budding New Town in the rolling hills of Virginia, 18 miles from Washington. The first of a proposed seven village centers, Lake Anne, was ceremoniously dedicated just over three years ago.

At that time, picture magazines around the world depicted a lovely stage set, lovely but somehow unreal. It seems a bit more plausible now. There are water puddles on the pavement of Lake Anne Plaza and there are crudely hand-lettered signs in the shops. On a few walls you even find a few discreet graffiti. Now there are actors on that stage.

Life, real life, is beginning to take over. And that life, it turns out, is not as far removed from the ferment of urban America as Reston’s almost utopian, secluded setting might lead you to assume.

At first, to be sure, as I watched the scene sipping iced tea under the umbrellas of Lake Anne Inn (they serve nothing stronger outdoors), it still seemed as though the curtain had just gone up on some bucolic opera.

Against the modern Portofino backdrop of colorful shops with apartments above, the little boat harbor and the lake with its water jet, pretty girls dart back and forth across the plaza. A policeman, leaning against the barbershop pole, smiles at them flirtatiously. Kids splash about the fountain. A young man reads unperurbed on top of a bollard—Thoreau, no doubt.

Mothers push shopping carts and pull tiny tots. Little boys, fishing in the lake, sit motionless on the bulkhead. On the church steps, absorbed in earnest discussion, sprawl a cluster of teenagers, one of them black. A little girl, called home to supper by her daddy from one of those balconies, stamps her feet in tearful protest. There is a slight commotion as a canoe, its passengers coming for groceries from one of the idyllic houses across the lake, tries ineptly to moor.

Any moment now, I could swear, everyone will join hands in some clever choreography and break out into song for the opening chorus.

But they don’t. And I start reading the Reston Times. “Reston,” it says, “must be founded on the inclusion of poor and black people as well as affluent and white people.” It says so in an eloquent front-page editorial, entitled “New Town: Black Man’s Hope.”

Poor and black people? Reston is now a subsidiary of the Gulf Oil Corporation. Some miles away from this idyll, a motel-style converted, old farmhouse, Glenn W. Saunders Jr., a vice president of Gulf-Reston, Inc., had just proudly told me that this year’s sales total of housing units is now twice that of last year. More than half of the 1969 marketing goal of 1000 units has been passed.

Karl J. Ingebretsen passes the outdoor cafe and joins me. “How goes the black man’s hope?,” I tease him. Karl should know. He is now the executive director for both of Reston’s two home owners associations, the one for the predominantly town-housed residents of Lake Anne Village, the other for the still predominantly detached-housed citizens of as-yet-underdeveloped Hunters Woods.

So Karl invites me to one of restless Reston’s spontaneous and increasingly frequent citizen gatherings. There, immersed in a pleasant, modern living room full of what seems to be Reston’s intellectual elite, I find that life around Lake Anne Plaza, thank Heaven, is not choreographed.

There is tension—the tension that goes with the growing pains of a real community of real people. There is distrust—the healthy distrust between the governed and their governors. They must have talked somewhat like this 200 years ago in Boston before they had that Tea Party.

Much as the new world colonies had attracted an unusual number of idealists, so does this New Town, with its promise of a better physical and social environment, attract a good many people who really want to make it new. A New Town, Edward G. Sharp, a research engineer of black complexion and many accomplishments, had written in that Reston Times editorial, is “fresh and innocent. Men can build a tenable, stable environment without first having to tear down pillars of old urban systems.”

Fresh and innocent.

So once was America. But Gulf-Reston, Inc.

The distrust flared up when, two years ago, the Gulf Oil Corporation, worried that its $15 million investment in Reston wasn’t paying off fast enough, summarily fired the man who had launched the town and whose ideals and ideals are forever built into it: Robert E. Simon.

In the first flush of excitement over the oil corporation’s clumsy putch, some citizens, worried about their investment, threatened to burn their Gulf credit cards. Then they thought better of it and formed the Reston Community Association. It is the unofficial watchdog of R.E.S.—town’s ideals. (The two home owners associations, dominated by the corporation, are officially incorporated to assume some municipal housekeeping chores.)

Bob Simon, of course, is now the Association’s hero.

See CITYSCAPE, L8, Col. 1
For all his bluster, everyone in the gathering agrees, Ryan had not done badly, however.

He not only举办的 sales, he also built houses and apartments that are less expensive than the first elegantly contemporary creations by Anne and John.

The story of the two-bedroom apartment for $100 a month is still considerably higher than housing in Columbia.

For Ryan, who has managed the two-bedroom apartments for people of moderate income—two to four at a time, $160 is still a concerning figure. However, Ryan is known to have managed the apartments of the happy Restonians shown in Reston's information centers.