



Photos by Bill Graham

# 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 operetta.

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 unperturbed 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, sprawls 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, in a motel-style converted, old farmhouse, Glenn W. Saunders Jr., a vice president of Gulf-Reston, Inc., had just proudly

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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. Ingebritsen 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 idealism and initials are forever built into it, Robert E. Simon.

In the first flush of excitement over the oil corporation's clumsy putsch, 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.

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And he deserves to be, not because he would, in the end, relinquish the real estate investor's prerogatives of prudence more readily than Gulf-Reston, Inc., but because he is so disarmingly technostucture weasles. Be-frank while the corporate sides, he is a man of wit, charm flesh and blood and not an organization man.

The corporation, in fact, still doesn't quite see what all the fuss was about. When Gulf, in a momentous conglomerate move, acquired none less than General Atomics, the event rated four lines in the "Wall Street Journal." When they kicked out Simon for the unpardonable sin of running out of cash, it made big headlines all over.

And now Bob Simon's chief executioner, a man named Robert H. Ryan, who waves a cigar and is reputed to know how to make a developer's cash register ring, has left the helm of Gulf-Reston, Inc. William H. Magness, last known to have managed the Iranian Oil Exploration and Producing Company, has taken over.

What does that mean for their community, many Restonians wonder? Was the Ryan at hand perhaps more auspicious for its future than the pigeon on the corporate roof? Few have ever met this Magness, let alone seen him. "The corporation people stay very aloof," said one of the citizen — leaders in that crowded living room.

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For all his bluster, everyone in the gathering agrees, Ryan had not done badly, however.

He not only boosted sales, he also built houses and apartments that are less expensive than Bob Simon's first elegantly contemporary creations around Lake Anne. And that is just as important to the New Town ideal.

You can now buy a townhouse in this community for \$25,000 on up or rent a one-bedroom garden apartment for \$150 a month. This is still considerably higher than housing in Columbia, Maryland, the only other bona fide New Town in this country. But Cedar Ridge, Reston's first cluster of 198 subsidized garden apartments for people of moderate income—with two to four bedrooms at monthly rents of \$121 to \$161—is nearing completion.

Nor has Ryan omitted any of Reston's amenities, such as separate walkways, playgrounds or thoughtful landscaping. And his support of the town's abundant community facilities and programs—from kindergartens and swimming pools to the Nature Center and university extension courses—has been unstinting.

Now it is Magness who is suspected of wanting to sell houses rather than a new community.

"The challenge which faces us is building a viable town—not just building houses, apartments, stores, streets, schools and swimming pools," editorialized Ed Sharp.

Saunders, who has served Reston under Bob Simon as well, is reassuring about the physical plant. Construction will soon start in Reston on a new headquarters building for the U.S. Geological Survey, which employs some 2800 people, about half of them blue-collar workers. Since there is now no Federal money for peace-time public works, Gulf will build the headquarters according to Government specifications and lease it to the General Services Administration.

This, says Saunders, will give a new boost to low-cost housing in Reston.

"Both GSA and Gulf want to be sure that everyone who works for the Survey can also afford to live nearby. GSA doesn't want to be accused again of depriving Washington Negroes of another employment opportunity. We are sending out questionnaires to all employees to find out what housing they need to have waiting for them. Much of it will obviously have to be subsidized under one government program or another," he says.

In the offing, in addition

to an accelerating housing construction, is a new conference center and inn close to the Dulles Airport Highway. And plans are firming up, Saunders says enthusiastically, for Reston's second Village center at Hunters Woods. Gulf, obviously nettled by Bob Simon's success with Lake Anne, wants it to be an equally outstanding work of urban design. There is even some talk of an architectural competition.

But all this doesn't quite reassure people like Ed Sharp or Joseph R. Stowers, the president of the Community Association, or Eli Blake, a psychologist, or any of the other roughly 20 community leaders who munched pastrami sandwiches and talked that evening.

Some of them had recently met with Saunders to press for another image of the New Town's viability. How about showing a black face or two among the happy Restonians shown in Reston's information center exhibit and sales brochures? How about some black salesmen, for that matter? After all, 3 per cent of the town's population is Negro, the group pointed out. It wants to encourage more than tacit open occupancy on a plantation country club. It wants the open community's freshness and innocence openly touted.

Saunders shrank from such boldness. Impractical. There are too many salesmen already.

And Simon, too, when I asked him by phone if he, were he still in command,

would even in these subtle ways make racial integration part of Reston's sales pitch, was frank to say he wouldn't.

"I'd first want to have my major marketing problems behind me," he said.

Yet, he had much admired Ed Sharp's editorial and has long agreed that it is a vital part of the New Town idea to help people out of the ghetto.

But the question is not, it would seem, Glenn Saunders' or Bob Simon's personal views or integrity. It is whether free enterprise alone can be relied upon to set America straight. Ed Sharp's hope, after all, is not



Ed Sharp: "Poor and black people as well as affluent and white people."

what the stockholders put their money on.

Gulf's golf course plans raise the same question without race. Reston has a beautiful championship golf course with its architecturally most handsome townhouses clustered around it. The course is now open to anyone and thus often badly crowded.

Now, when a second golf course is completed next spring, the corporation wants to convert the first one into a private club with stiff fees and an indoor swimming pool and other added goodies.

The citizens that night were irate. They look upon the golf course as a part of

club?" he asks. "After all, many Americans are willing to pay more to get more. Reston is not built on a socialist concept."

In Saunders' view it is only a small minority who favor black salesmen or oppose the private club.

Simon, too, sees nothing wrong with the private golf club. But he said: "Aren't the shakers and movers always a small minority?"

The living room gathering was divided on the question of how much support it had in the community. Some said as many as two-thirds of the residents would vote for its ideas. Others thought they could just barely swing a majority.

financially. Ingebritsen thinks Gulf ought to quit lobbying for unlimited automobile access to Dulles Highway, which runs right through Reston but is fenced in so local traffic won't interfere with airport traffic.

"I would rather see them lobby for bus access only," he says. "Then we could speed people to work without pouring more cars onto the highway."

But it is still very much an open question whether this kind of creative civic responsibility will prevail, whether Reston's citizens can move their corporate landlords to make their