



The Examiner
REAL ESTATE
 YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO WASHINGTON-AREA HOMES

Current mortgage rates
 30-year fixed, conforming
 - bankrate.com

D.C. **5.14%**
 Md. **4.94%**
 Va. **4.94%**

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



Mount Rainier: Renaissance on Route 1

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

By Dean Bartoli Smith
 Special to The Examiner

The sign in the window of Glut, a popular co-op grocery store in Mount Rainier, reads, "After all these years — still funky, still cheap." The slogan captures the essence of the burg.

Incorporated as a trolley car suburb in 1910, the town remains eclectic, affordable and culturally diverse. The police station is green, and plans are in the works to do the same with City Hall. Some residents will stay warm this winter burning corn in their furnaces, and classes are offered in belly dancing. Located just over the District line, Mount Rainier is something completely different.

"It has a true community feel with a Takoma Park vibe running through it," said resident Alta Morton, an urban planner who is also on the Mount Rainier City Council. "I don't like suburbs. It was the most affordable place I could live."

Morton moved to Mount Rainier to be closer to Glut — one of the first food co-ops in the nation and the epicenter of the neighborhood.

"It's like taking a trip into the 1950s, across the wooden plank floors," Morton said. "You bring a basket for fresh fruit and vegetables."

The homes, on tree-lined streets, are also from another era. Built in the 1920s and '30s, Sears bun-



galows, Craftsman-style houses, Victorians and shotgun shacks all contribute to the town's listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

"It's a special little place," said Cynthia Alexandria, a resident and Weichert agent. "It's still undiscovered and convenient — only minutes from downtown. There's also a vibrant arts community."

The contemporary artists' lofts on Route 1 reveal the town's present and future as a haven for painters, musicians, sculptors and set designers.

In the late 1990s, Mount Rainier, Brentwood, North Brentwood and Hyattsville formed the Gateway

Arts District, an ambitious initiative designed to revitalize a 2-mile stretch of Route 1 with an infusion of artists and arts facilities.

"[Mount Rainier] was most well-known for its liquor stores," said Councilman Bryan Knedler, who works as a legal editor at a publishing firm. "I have seen the tide turn, and we are now known for our progressive politics, affordable homes and arts district."

Other local gems include Joe's Movement Emporium, which offers dance classes and performances, and Island Style Ice Cream — a Caribbean-style snack shop serving the best homemade ice cream around. There's also a bike co-op

At a glance

- October 2009**
 - Average sold price in the 20712 ZIP code: **\$254,000**
 - Average list price in the 20712 ZIP code: **\$258,000**
 - Average days on market for homes sold: **113**
- October 2008**
 - Average sold price in the 20712 ZIP code: **\$294,000**
 - Average list price in the 20712 ZIP code: **\$295,000**
 - Average days on market for homes sold: **159**

that refurbishes and redistributes used bicycles.

"There's a lot of pride in our neighborhood," said Brooke Kidd, who runs Joe's. "You can really initiate things and make them happen. Quality of life is defined by the community for the community."

Councilwoman Ivy Thompson said everyone knew their neighbors. "There are some residents who have lived here for 80 years, some who have left and come back, and newer folks who like a small town in an urban-area atmosphere," she said.

Though the community has made substantial progress in driving change, residents are not required to take a stand. "It's a fun place to live," Alexander said. "You can be involved as little or as much as you want to be."

Top reasons to live in Mount Rainier



Joe's Movement Emporium
 An incredible story in its own right, this dance studio began in an abandoned warehouse and now features classes and performances in Thai traditional dance, tap, hip-hop and belly dancing. It serves more than 30,000 people annually in the preservation of cultural performance traditions.



Location
 Mount Rainier is minutes from downtown, accessible to Interstate 495 and close to a Metro stop. It's also part of the burgeoning Gateway Arts District along Route 1.



ZZ's Pizza
 As diverse as the town itself, this carryout shop features pizza, Greek salad, falafel, kabobs and subs. "I had three restaurants, and they closed because of the economy," owner Jay Jahangir said. "I've taken a little from each one."



MAP BY ANGELA HAUGHNEY/FOR THE EXAMINER