

A tale of two Park Ridges from Illinois to New Jersey

By **Jennifer Johnson**

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Terry Maguire and Marty Maloney have never met, but they share something very unique in common: Both men can introduce themselves as the "mayor of Park Ridge."

For Maguire, Park Ridge is a borough in northeastern New Jersey, roughly 822 miles east of Park Ridge, Ill. It's one of three communities in the country to bear the name Park Ridge. The third is a village of some 500 people just outside Stevens Point, Wisc.

While Maguire, a 20-year resident of Park Ridge, NJ, has never visited Park Ridge, Ill., his wife and daughter dropped by the city earlier this month.

"My daughter graduated from high school and her friend is out at Northwestern," Maguire explained. "They were touring around and said, 'We have to check out Park Ridge.'"

Park Ridge, NJ is a small community of about 8,600 residents, according to the most recent U.S. Census. Like its Midwestern namesake, its close proximity to a major city — in this case, New York City — makes it attractive to commuters.

"There's a train station in town with a train into Manhattan, so a lot of people work in the city and live in Park Ridge," Maguire said.

Both communities have a population that is predominantly white, with Park Ridge, NJ boasting a median household income of \$104,543 to Park Ridge, Illinois' \$87,119, according to 2013 Census data.

Information on Park Ridge, NJ's website shows the borough was incorporated in 1894 — 21 years after Park Ridge, Ill. officially became a village — and was settled largely by Dutch and Scottish immigrants. Park Ridge, Illinois' earliest residents had relocated from New England and New York, according to the Illinois Park Ridge's website.

Historic preservation is a theme in both Park Ridges. Park Ridge, NJ has six buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, including its train station and a Dutch barn believed to have been built in 1770, according to the Bergen County, NJ website.

Park Ridge, Ill. can boast that the Pickwick Theatre building and the former Park Ridge Youth Campus have been granted national historic status.

Local government in Park Ridge, NJ consists of a mayor and six council members, each of whom are elected at large, but who identify as Democrat or Republican. In Park Ridge, Ill., local government is non-partisan and has aldermen elected from wards.

Maguire was elected mayor in 2011 and is running for another term this year, the election set for November. There haven't been any "controversial" issues on the council agenda as of late, he said.

"We've been kind of fortunate in that area," he said.

Park Ridge, NJ has a K-12 school district, consisting of two elementary schools and a junior high/high school, and its own public library. There is also the Park Ridge Chamber of Commerce which, on its website, features a photo of a clock that looks very similar to the city clock at Prospect and Summit Avenues in Park Ridge, Ill.

The borough is also home to First Friends, a volunteer group that organizes playgroups for children between ages one and five, and the Park Ridge Athletic Association, which runs sports programs.

Maguire says there is one particular aspect of his community that makes it stand apart from others in the area.

"We are one of nine towns in the state to have their own electrical company," he said. "We own all the electric lines and supply the electricity to our residents. We also have our own water company, so we're really an independent community."

Such an arrangement has reportedly led to big utility savings. Maguire says residents pay roughly 25 percent less for electricity than towns that are supplied by Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G), the regional provider. Water, which is provided through wells, costs "a little over 30 percent less" compared to what is charged by United Water, an area provider, Maguire said.

"Yeah, there's definite savings to the residents," he said.

During the immediate aftermath of Superstorm Sandy in 2012, Park Ridge was the only community in the area that hadn't lost power, Maguire noted.

"We were the only town with a diner, gas station and food store open, so it was quite the traffic jam in Park Ridge," he said.

Park Ridge, NJ has experienced some flooding in its past, but Maguire says it is not a chronic problem, something that has been an issue for the other Park Ridge over the last several years.

There's a brook that runs through the center of town and we've had it overflow a few times and cause some damage, but we're not in a low-lying area that floods routinely," he said.

Both Park Ridges have connections to the U.S. presidency. Park Ridge, NJ was once home to Richard Nixon (he and his wife, Pat, lived there between 1989 and 1993, the borough's website says), while Park Ridge, Ill. is the hometown of former first lady and current presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton.

Famous actors also lived in both communities before they became stars: In Park Ridge, Ill. it was Harrison Ford (who attended Maine East High School) and in Park Ridge, NJ it was James Gandolfini of "Sopranos" fame. Gandolfini, who died in 2013, is remembered with an honorary street name designation in the borough.

Both communities also mark summer with annual festivals: Taste of Park Ridge in Illinois and Fun Town Days in New Jersey.

To get a "feel" of the community, Maguire recommends visitors stop by the Ridge Diner which, to Park Ridge, Ill. residents, might be the closest equivalent to the now shuttered Pickwick Restaurant.

"Everybody comes to Park Ridge for the Ridge Diner," Maguire said. "It's good food and good atmosphere and has a small community feel."

Park Ridge, Ill. acting Mayor Marty Maloney says he's never visited Park Ridge, NJ, but doesn't rule out dropping by one day in the not-so-distant future. His younger brother, he said, happens to live in New York.

"In passing, I joked to my wife that if we ever go out there, we should stop in Park Ridge, NJ," Maloney said.

And if Maguire were to visit his community, Maloney added that he would certainly welcome him and encourage him to visit the Pickwick Theatre and Iannelli Studios in particular.

"He should definitely check out Park Ridge," Maloney said. "I would be happy to give him the whole tour."

jjohnson@pioneerlocal.com

Twitter: @Jen_Pioneer

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