

THE GOOD LIFE

1950 - 1959

The 1950s hit like a bomb, releasing pent-up demands from 15 years of sacrifice, into a housing explosion that brought sidewalks and swing sets to bucolic settings across Marion County.

After a depression and a war, this decade's philosophy was: If you want it, buy it, because there is nothing stopping you from having a better life.

From the executive to the newest hire on the late shift down at the plant, owning a home became the best way to achieve the American dream. It was the good life as portrayed by Hollywood and television, populated by confident dads, perky mothers and glowing children.

It was the '50s, and TV had surpassed radio for family entertainment. Far from the futuristic gadget that was demonstrated at the Indiana State Fair in 1939, more than 137,000 sets were in Indianapolis homes by 1953.

In 1955, a housing development called Eagledale sprouted on Indianapolis' Westside near 34th Street and Georgetown Road. Depression and war had kept the home construction industry dormant for nearly two decades and now ads started appearing in the newspaper for small homes ranging in price from \$10,000 to \$15,000 with maintenance-free aluminum exteriors and connected by sidewalks and concrete streets. There were plenty of takers, and within four years, 10,000 people were living in Eagledale's 3,400 homes. By the end of the decade, the city had nearly 52,000 new homes.

To get to those houses, people needed cars. So, the '50s also was the decade of the car. And an expanding road system, including plans for interstate highways, made it easier for the outlying areas to flourish.

Although whites were the primary beneficiaries, black families also found a way out of neighborhoods where they had been confined for years as the civil rights movement progressed and increased job opportunities became available. The Grandview development in Washington Township became the first predominantly black neighborhood outside the city limits.

Indianapolis was still a segregated city and the major battles for civil rights would not be fought, and won, for another decade. But change was coming. In

Opposite page: Homemakers join to sweep an unidentified street during the city's annual Clean-Up Week in April 1952.

1955, Crispus Attucks High School took center stage when it won the all-city and state basketball championships. Led by a star player, Oscar Robertson, Attucks defeated Gary Roosevelt in the first-ever state championship between two largely black schools.

"White flight" in reaction to busing wouldn't come for another decade, but the trend had already begun as more affluent white families moved to the newer neighborhoods outside of Center Township.

In the fall of 1954, The Star's business editor, Don G. Campbell, wrote of the "frightening talk" going around that the Downtown business district was slowly dying with the advent of fringe shopping areas and the mass migration to the suburbs.

One such shopping area was a new development just east of Keystone Avenue along 38th Street. The Meadows Shopping Center opened in 1956, making it one of the city's first shopping centers — boasting 2,000 parking spaces.

The center was next to the Meadowbrook Apartments, a series of 56 modern-looking low-rise buildings with plenty of green space. They had opened three years earlier and were aimed at singles and young married couples in the middle-income range.

Eastgate Shopping Center on the Eastside was completed in 1957, Glendale on the Northside opened in 1958, and Devington Plaza on the Northeastside was done in 1959.

The opening of Shadeland Avenue after World War II made it easier for factories to locate in outlying areas, too. Western Electric opened a plant along Shadeland in 1950, and Chrysler followed suit in 1952.

In 1958, 1,000 people met at the Murat Temple the week before Thanksgiving to learn that planners and consultants had devised a \$500 million plan to guide the city during the next 25 years.

They envisioned a parklike area for boating and recreation along White River; installing a block-long reflecting pool complete with trees and grass as part of War Memorial Plaza; and replacing dingy buildings to the west of the Statehouse with a park, lagoon and apartments.