From the Editor

The unwritten rule about subdivisions is that they are generally named for what they replaced. There are no meadows at De Paul Meadows, no oaks at Southern Oaks, and neither pine nor creek at Pine Creek. But there were, or might have been, such natural elements at one time, and it is this abstract "one time" that the names are meant to connect us to: not *nature*, but the *idea* of nature.

When developers don't think they can sell a subdivision based on nature, they often look abroad. Many subdivisions yearn to sound foreign in some way, whether by adopting French words (Chateau de Parc, Tesson Parc, Parc Place) or the superfluous *e* of "Olde English" (Villas at Summit Point*e*, Town*e*s at Hilltop, Crown Point*e* Estates). As with the "natural" place names, the point is not to make a connection to one specific place, but to an *idea* of place. Unlike the settlers who named "New" York, these names have no real-world referent.

Subdivision names make a fat target for cynics like me, who have yet to adopt the recently coined term *urban choice* as a substitute for the less friendly *urban sprawl*. However, to throw rocks at subdivisions is to ignore the glass house of place names, community identity, and history that we all live in.

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Cities, after all, have often been named, or at least nicknamed, for what they replaced. St. Louis was known as the "Mound City" into the twentieth century, a reference to the prehistoric Native American mounds that dotted the landscape before European settlement. The city was not kind to the memory of the mounds; developers systematically removed them in the nineteenth century, with many of the thousands of artifacts within being lost forever.

As the city expanded to the west, what we now call "inner ring" suburbs often named themselves after the ideal of nature that encouraged residents to leave the hectic, dirty, and unsettling city. Several adopted the word *wood*—Maplewood, Brentwood, Kirkwood, Crestwood—even though the "woods" had to yield to streets, highways, and subdivisions. St. Louis Hills, in the southwestern part of the city, is still hilly, but not hilly in the same way it had been when the property was still David R. Francis's 377-acre farm. Webster Groves, the "Queen of the Suburbs," owes its existence to noisy railroads as much as sylvan groves.

But surely there is some difference between the "hills" of St. Louis Hills, for example, and whatever might be in the "forest" of Emerald Forest. You might argue that the newer subdivisions are designed only to sell land and houses to hopeful homeowners, but that argument ignores the example of Tower Grove Heights subdivision in the city, which was developed and marketed to varying income groups by the Connecticut Real Estate Company early in this century. The four-, two-, and single-family homes in this neighborhood are now being bought and rehabilitated by both city and county natives.

All right, you argue further, but the older subdivisions have mature trees, not the spindly sticks wedged between squares of zoysia sod you see in the "new" subdivisions. While this is true, I remember Esley Hamilton of the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation Department once showing a stark photograph of forlorn-looking young trees, grassless lots, and several brand-new homes. "Where do you think this is?" he asked his audience. "St. Charles?" someone answered. "Jefferson County?" someone else cried out. "No," Hamilton said, "this is Julius Pitzman's Parkview Place subdivision, developed by the Parkview Realty Company just after the World's Fair." The passage of time has now worked its magic; Parkview Place today is a beautiful, tree-lined neighborhood at University City's southeastern edge.

The real difference between the "new" subdivisions and the "old" seems to be about something other than development strategy, the way the sites treat their natural surroundings, or whether they exhibit "choice" or "sprawl." What the new subdivisions need is, for lack of a better word, diversity. In being marketed toward specific income groups—"Homes from the $150s," "Stately homes from the $200s," "Classic homes from the $250s"—the developments extend the century-old private place mentality described in Eric Sandweiss's article, "What Is 'Diversity'? The Lessons of the Nineteenth-Century City." And in supporting the class divisions that have existed for so long in the city, such enterprises make it easier to remove old neighborhoods like Howard Place and Evans Place for another shopping center. Luckily, enough people in Grantwood Village cared about the past to save Ulysses S. Grant's White Haven before it became a condominium complex, probably called something like "White Haven Point*e*."

Place names are important because they offer clues about how we think of ourselves and the places we live. The trick is to remember that some of the trends we most deride have always been with us, and that the suburbs, old and new, have many lessons yet to teach.

—Tim Fox