

NEWS

Touch of England in Stockton: Sherwood Manor neighborhood hearkens back to days of Robin Hood

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Published 11 p.m. PT January 7, 2005. Updated 5:28 a.m. PT January 9, 2011

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The Record Saturday, January 8, 2005 Metro Tracy B5

'Hoods 'n' Hamlets

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Sherwood Manor neighborhood hearkens back to days of Robin Hood

STOCKTON -- A hunt on Stockton's streets today for a glimpse of the medieval folk hero Robin Hood might lead yonder to one north neighborhood.

Sherwood Manor, named for the fabled English forest where the famous outlaw was said to have caroused, lies tucked away on tree-lined streets behind Sherwood Mall.

Head east on Robinhood Drive and -- with a little imagination -- the street names put you hot on the trail of the man celebrated for robbing the rich and giving to the poor. Nottingham, Yorkshire and Canterbury are some drives that crisscross the 50-year-old neighborhood. Tall trees stand in adjacent Sherwood Park, where Robin Hood and his marauding merry men would

likely have set up camp near the swimming pool.

Those who live in Sherwood Manor today share stories about people raising families and of close-knit neighbors. Some have lived there only a few years, while others bought new homes when the neighborhood was built a half-century ago. "For a neighborhood that's 50 years old, it's held up pretty well," said Ruth Ghilotti, 71. Ghilotti and her husband, Bob, 77, a retired Stockton firefighter, bought their Claremont Avenue home before it was finished.

Theirs isn't the biggest house in Sherwood Manor. They moved into the 1,500-square-foot house in 1955 with two children. When their third child came along, the couple turned the den into another bedroom. The couple's refrigerator is covered with pictures of grandchildren. Bob Ghilotti, sitting at his kitchen table next to Ruth, said the neighborhood wasn't always the center of town as it is now, surrounded by homes, two malls, shopping centers and restaurants. "Then, you could shoot pheasants out here," he said, pointing across the street to what was once vast open space.

Brothers Merrill and Max Stone built Sherwood Manor and about 16,000 homes in Stockton, Lodi, Sacramento, Modesto and Hawaii, according to old newspaper clippings. The brothers were part of Stockton's post-World War II building boom. The Stone brothers moved to Stockton from Idaho and bought a vacant half-block at Oak and Yosemite streets, where they built the first of

their Stockton homes in 1946 under the name Stone Bros. and Associates. They lured Macy's and other national retail stores in 1968 to the 132-store Sherwood Corners shopping complex at Pacific Avenue and Robinhood Drive and are credited with sparking development in north Stockton.

The Stone brothers traced their family back to England, hence the Robin Hood-themed street names for the neighborhood, said Robert Romero, now general manager of Stone Bros. and Associates. Sherwood Manor was one of the last residential projects the company built before turning to commercial buildings, said Romero, who also lives there. Merrill Stone died at 69 in 1992, and Max Stone died at 81 in 1999. Their company is still in business with an office on Robinhood Drive.

Dorothy Thomas, 77, and her husband, Norman, 81, moved into their home on Robinhood Drive some 33 years ago and lived next to Merrill Stone for some time. Dorothy Thomas said her daughter married one of the Stone's sons. On the wall near the front door of her home is a large family portrait of the Thomases surrounded by their three children and seven grandchildren. Out back, a grand window in the family room frames a lush yard. The couple read the newspaper and drink coffee together each morning in the family room, she said. "You feel like you're in the country, other than the traffic out on the street," Dorothy Thomas said.

Many streets in Sherwood Manor, such as one named Sherwood Forest, are lined with mature trees that are part of the area's charm. Ross Lockhart, 71, claims to be the guardian of one of the grandest trees. A towering Shamel Ash stands in one corner of his back yard. The tree is 5 feet in diameter at its base and soars skyward. "We like trees," said Lockhart, who moved into their Nottingham Street home 31 years ago with his wife, Shirley.

According to folklore, Robin Hood's most-renowned crime was hunting a deer in the king's forest. Crimes in Sherwood Manor usual involved prey of a different sort. Kay Hardaway has lived with her husband on Robinhood Drive since 1984. She points to graffiti sprayed on the pool house in Sherwood Park across the street from her house. A Halloween shootout in 2000 in the same park shocked neighbors of the otherwise-quiet area. Police at the time said the violence that caused several injuries was gang-related.

In a separate incident some years before that, a man hanged himself from a tree in the park, Hardaway said. Normally, she said, the park is a great neighbor to Sherwood Manor. "It's nice," she said. "We can watch the kids play soccer and baseball."

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PHOTO:

OLD-TIME CHARM: A postal carrier walks his rounds down Banbury Drive near Sherwood Way in the Sherwood Manor area. (Record photo by CLIFFORD OTO