

Healthy choices not always easy

► For some, it's an ordeal; for others, it's a walk in the park.

By **GINNIE GRAHAM**
World Staff Writer

Northgate neighborhood resident Alfred Higgins has worked for decades to rid his streets of crime and improve safety.

He also has had three heart attacks and walks six blocks to catch a bus for his doctor's appointments and grocery store trips.

Higgins lives in one of the county's worst ZIP codes for premature deaths.

"Every time I get to the bus stop, I get winded," said the 63-year-old. "I'm trying to get on a senior bus program so I don't have to walk all that way."

The 74126 ZIP code contains several neighborhoods including Northgate, which has been a focus of rehabilitation by the Tulsa Housing Authority, the city and several other nonprofit agencies and churches.

Higgins serves as president of the Alert Neighborhood Community Association to prevent crime.

"It's hard to say what is causing that death rate," Higgins said. "It could be people dying young from drugs or people not eating the right kinds of food or getting exercise."

Higgins has high blood pressure and has an implanted heart monitor. His last heart episode occurred while on a city bus coming from a doctor's appointment.

For exercise, Higgins walks around his backyard or works in his home.

"I'd like to get a bicycle trail here or walking trails to help everyone get healthy," Higgins said. "I'm eating the right food and staying away from junk food."

Northgate resident Dorothy Gatewood said health status is tied closely to other demographics such as poverty, access to health care and grocery stores, crime and the condition of the homes in the neighborhood.

"Everything we've tried to get here has taken us years," Gatewood said. "We need grocery stores nearby to get fresh fruit and vegetables and better transportation. For people not in good health, they have a hard time



Alfred Higgins, president of the Alert Neighborhood Community Association, lives in the 74126 ZIP code.

ROBERT S. CROSS / Tulsa World

getting to stores to get the right kinds of food."

For some residents, public transit requires two to four transfers to get to grocery stores, and the amount of food is limited to what can be carried, she said.

Gatewood said she welcomes the recent announcements by the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa and Oklahoma State University-Tulsa to build healthplexes to serve the area.

"I know it will make a difference," she said. "I have family members with diabetes who won't go to clinics because the wait is so long. They will run out of medicine because they can't afford it or can't wait because they are working. So, they end up sick and go to the emergency room. It ends up being more expensive."

Gatewood is the president of the Northgate Task Force, which has been making headway on its long-range plan. It calls for improving Vining Park, attracting quality convenience and grocery stores and getting rid of slum-lords.

The city has stepped up neighborhood inspections and fixed street lights. The housing authority has helped secure grants for purchasing a splash pad at Vining Park and starting on walking trails and benches. Several substandard homes have been demolished, and the housing authority has renovated

homes for sale.

"I'm hoping this can be done before I die, because we've been asking for it for years," Gatewood said.

'People walk a lot'

On the flip side, the 74114 ZIP code sits as one of the areas in the county where residents are healthiest.

Its midtown location near the Broken Arrow Expressway gives its residents access to several major grocery stores, 24-hour drugstores, health clinics, doctors' offices and hospitals.

Mayo Meadow Neighborhood Association President Jeanie Newell said all of her doctors and health care needs are within a few miles.

"People don't have to go far to find what they need," she said. "It's a safe neighborhood that's pretty established. Our neighborhood compares good on crime."

Most telling of good health is the sight of regular walkers and joggers through the neighborhood streets.

"Whether it's with a stroller or dog, people are just out walking," Newell said. "People walk a lot. That was the first thing I thought of when thinking about our health here."

Patric Johnstone, founder of the Bryn-Mawr Neighborhood Association, said neighborhood walkers create more secure streets.

"Our streets are no brighter or darker than most neighborhoods, but nothing seems to stop people determined to walk and jog," he said.

"The more people utilize the streets, the safer our streets will be. When you see more of your neighbors, that will be more effective than street lights."

Johnstone said he was surprised at his ZIP code's healthy status and is unsure why.

"I don't know if it's our proximity to St. John (Medical Center)," he said. "But people here do get out and exercise. Seeing people walking up and down the streets shows they are getting away from their couch."

Sarin Hale, member and past president of the Florence Park South Neighborhood Association, said geography may give the health edge to the area.

She regularly visits a gym and walks her dogs in the neighborhood.

"(Oklahoma) Highway 51 is very close to health places, and it's easy to get around in the city," Hale said. "We have tons of people walking, even after dark. People seem aware of their health and want to be active."

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HEALTH:

Improved health-care plans are being made for underserved areas of Tulsa.

FROM A-1

tion was sorted by ZIP code and by cause of death.

Death rates were converted to age-adjusted rates to allow for a comparison of premature deaths among different categories.

Overall, Tulsa County and the national age-adjusted rates have grown dramatically separate since 1992. The Tulsa County rate began to increase, while the national rate continued a decrease.

In dissecting the deaths by geography and cause, general patterns emerge, but no one area shows perfect health, LaPolla said.

"It is not all good or all bad," LaPolla said. "We have general areas of good and bad. There are hot spots in Tulsa and the region that deserve greater attention."

"When you look at concentrations of areas that could use immediate improvements in health status, those are located in north, east and west parts of the city. But the areas of the highest death rates are marbled throughout our region."

The areas showing greater premature deaths are located north of Admiral Place and extending east with pockets in west and south Tulsa.

In general, the findings show a correlation between death rates and incomes.

Within ZIP codes showing more healthful environments, there are specific areas leading to premature death.

The 74114 ZIP code, which is among the healthiest in the region, shows lower rankings in suicides and accident-related deaths. A midpoint of the area is near 31st Street and Harvard Avenue.

Among the five most healthful ZIP codes in a seven-county region, four are located in Tulsa. Three of those are in midtown Tulsa neigh-

borhoods adjacent to the 74114 ZIP code.

In the 74126 ZIP code, suicide deaths are not as problematic as cancer, diabetes and respiratory disease. It is located near Turley with a center of about 56th Street North and Cincinnati Avenue.

The adjacent 74130 ZIP code shows the fourth-lowest rate of suicide but tops the list in premature deaths for heart disease, cancer, stroke and respiratory disease.

"We want to use this as a guide and resist overinterpreting the red areas," LaPolla said. "We want to look at the community as a whole."

LaPolla points out that the data compare ZIP codes. But if the comparison were to a state with a better health status, all the ZIP codes would show greater premature deaths.

"When you compare to each other, half are going to be below average," LaPolla said. "We are trying to look at the bigger picture and look at swaths across the area."

A significant outgrowth of the data and subsequent Lewin report is placing more advanced outpatient and ambulatory services in underserved areas of Tulsa.

The University of Oklahoma-Tulsa and the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences are planning to start construction on two free-standing health complexes this year. The OU-Tulsa clinic is expected to be near Apache Street and Harvard Avenue. The OSU clinic will be built near its Medical Center at 744 W. Ninth St.

OU-Tulsa has led the effort to institute the recommendations of the Lewin report, which focuses on creating a safety net of health-care services that Tulsa lacks.

LaPolla said people generally view the reasons for premature death rates as half influenced by health services and half by human behavior.

"What we're saying is, let's influence both in different ways," LaPolla said. "Let's get services to those areas and influence behavior at the same time."

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CLUB:

One patron recalls the panic that followed the shooting.

FROM A-1

Both were transported to a hospital in serious condition, and the shooter has not been captured.

On Friday, security was increased at the club, with staff turning away anybody who did not have identification, screening people with metal detectors, not allowing jackets or coats in the building and prohibiting possible gang-related colors and clothing.

Police patrol cars seemed to circle the building, located at the intersection of Second Street and Greenwood Avenue, every five minutes and two officers entered the club at one point to check on things.

Though the Ministry does not have a license to sell liquor, it does have a license to sell low-point, or 3.2 percent, beer. That makes it legal for people under 18 to enter the establishment.

However, some patrons said it wasn't too hard to get a drink at the club, even for those younger than 21, until new security measures were instituted.

"I think the majority of the people who come in here are under 21," said Ehrin Gartner, 19, who was at the club Friday night. "That's why you don't have many people in here now. It was fairly easy to get your

drink bracelet (a band worn around the wrist that shows the person is 21 or older). My buddy got his and all he had to do was to show his ID. They didn't really check it."

Gartner said he was at the club last weekend when the shooting started. He said he was sitting near one of the large-screen televisions when he heard gunshots, then screams, bouncers restraining people and a stampede of people toward the door.

"It was panic," he said, recalling how once people got outside, they scattered into the streets.

Gartner said he was a little apprehensive about coming back, but that he does like the club.

"I was worried it could happen," he said. "I know a lot of gangs come in here. It's terrible one person can ruin this for everybody else. It's a good club, good music, the girls are good. You could pretty much get away with whatever. Now, no one wants to come because you can't get away with anything."

Club-goer Jamie Holland, 19, said though the shooting was a bad thing, it has happened at other clubs in the past and is not isolated to the Ministry.

However, Holland said, people under 18 should have restrictions if they are allowed into a club.

"If they do let them in, they should make them leave at a certain time," she said. "If I were a mom, I wouldn't let my 15-year-old go to a club."

The Ministry's operator, Steve Kitchell, owned several former nightclubs in Tulsa, and has been both credited for revitaliz-

'I think the majority of the people who come in here are under 21. That's why you don't have many people in here now. It was fairly easy to get your drink bracelet (a band worn around the wrist that shows the person is 21 or older).'

Ehrin Gartner
Ministry of Sound patron

ing Tulsa's downtown night scene and criticized for alleged heavy-handed practices by security workers at his clubs.

In 2004, two former bouncers from Studio 312, owned by Kitchell, were accused of accosting a man in a parking garage after the man left one of Kitchell's clubs.

One of the former bouncers, a professional boxer, allegedly struck the man in the face, causing him to fall and hit his head on the concrete. He died five days later.

After that man's death, several people, including some law enforcement officers, stepped forward and alleged a pattern of abuse by bouncers at the clubs.

Though a manslaughter charge against one of the bounc-

ers was dismissed, the bouncer accused of throwing the fatal punch, Jason Nicholson, still faces a manslaughter charge. His trial begins Monday.

Kitchell has been sued 18 times by people claiming to have been beaten by bouncers at his clubs, the Tulsa World reported in 2004.

Besides problems with the bouncers, a property owner claimed Kitchell owed him \$100,000 in back rent, forcing the closure of two clubs, and in 2004, Kitchell was arrested on a complaint of selling alcohol without a license, selling beer to underage buyers and other misdemeanor offenses.

Kitchell was not available for comment Friday night.

Police are continuing to crack down on crime downtown, and selective enforcement units are targeting crime hotspots, but the recent shooting at the club in the Blue Dome District hasn't resulted in extra patrols, police said.

Sgt. Virgil Litterell said the recent program that put more officers downtown didn't result from the Ministry of Sound shooting.

"We have extra patrols, but they're being used to increase the emphasis on suppressing crime, not as a direct result of last week's incident," he said.

Police asked that anyone with information about the shooting contact Crime Stoppers at 596-COPS.

World staff writer Jeff Billington contributed to this story.

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POST:

Schmidly previously served as president of Texas Tech.

FROM A-1

ture is brighter than ever," Schmidly said in a statement released by the university.

"My wife, Janet, and I have truly loved our time in Oklahoma and will cherish the many wonderful friends and memories

we have from our more than four years here," Schmidly said. "The OSU family will continue to have a special place in our hearts."

Schmidly became president of OSU in November 2002 after working as president of Texas Tech University for a little more than two years. He previously served in other positions at Texas Tech, and he spent 25 years at Texas A&M University.

Schmidly announced to OSU last month that he was a finalist for the New Mexico post, but he said he was pleased with his job with OSU. The New Mexico job appealed to him because the uni-

versity is the state's flagship and because he and his wife have a second home and a son and daughter-in-law in the state.

Schmidly has said he always evaluates his job after five years and considers whether he is the best person for it.

He met with UNM faculty, staff and students on Tuesday. According to UNM's tentative presidential search schedule, the new president could start the job July 1.

New Mexico Regents President Jamie Koch said 91 percent of the staff, faculty, students and community members involved in forums favored Schmidly.

"We had five wonderful candidates, but one stands head and shoulders above the rest," New Mexico Regent Don Chalmers said in news release. "Dr. Schmidly came to us with a vision about how to take this university to the next level."

He earned \$407,870 in total compensation at OSU, including \$75,000 in deferred compensation, \$31,753 in retirement pay and \$25,000 for a car, according to a recent report in The Chronicle of Higher Education.

A spokeswoman for the University of New Mexico said Schmidly's salary and start date are still being negotiated.

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