

Wales of an area

Despite some twists, residents love Lochtyn Ridge

By KAY HOLLAN
Special to The Journal Sentinel

Wales — Those who seek nature in their backyard can certainly find it in the rolling, wooded Lochtyn Ridge subdivision in the village of Wales.

Twice, however, nature has given residents much more than they'd bargained for since the subdivision was created in the late 1970s. Tornadoes touched down in the same area of the subdivision, once in April 1984 and again in August 1987, destroying a row of homes along the ridge for which the subdivision was named.

But most of the people whose homes were hit still live in the neighborhood, said Mary Kusz, whose own home on Lochtyn Ridge was severely damaged in 1987.

According to her husband, Tom Kusz, "We built our house in 1983, and we were living here when the first tornado hit in April of 1984. That time, we only had broken windows, although a couple of homes on the same block were pretty badly damaged. One home was completely destroyed and the man who lived there was hurt badly. He was struck in the head with a rock. He moved away, but coincidentally, he was visiting the neighborhood on the day the second tornado struck. That was really hard for him."

Ironically, the demolished home was an "earth home," an energy-conserving architectural style popular in the 1970s, in which the home is built into the side of a hill, using the ground as a natural insulator. Some of the homes built along the Lochtyn Ridge used this technique.

The tornado on April 27, 1984, swept through Wales, Genesee and Delafield, killing a woman in a mobile home just east of Wales near Highways 83 and G. The twister struck 16 area homes.

"You never think a tornado would strike again in the same spot," said Mary Kusz.

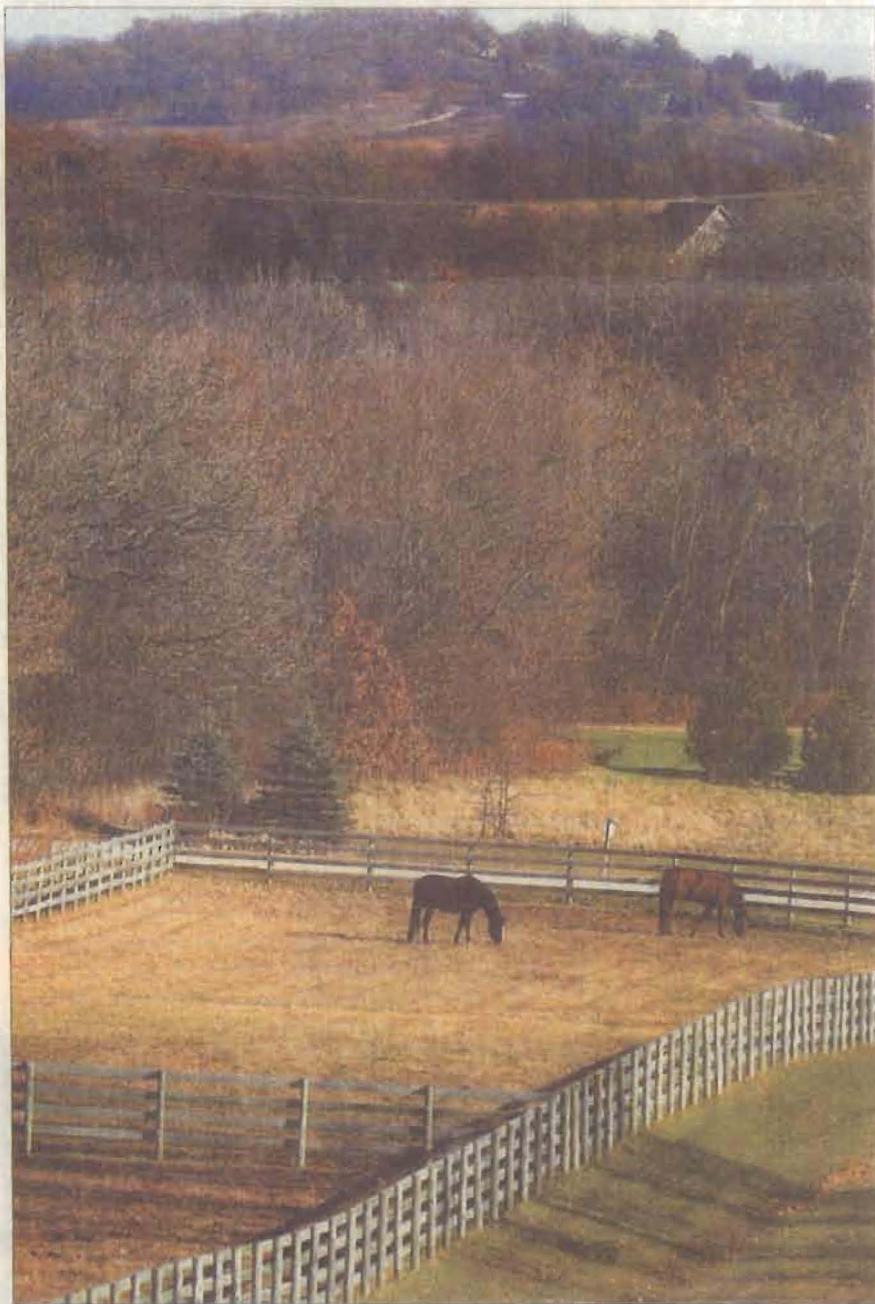
But it did.

On Aug. 16, 1987, another severe band of storms approached. Mary Kusz saw the sky turn a strange shade of green and heard a "rattling sound, like a train."

Her husband, who was working outdoors, had just entered the garage. "I noticed the big garage door shaking and then I saw the drywall coming apart in the corners," Tom Kusz

Please see **NEIGHBORHOOD, 2F**

Mary Kusz decorates her yard in the Lochtyn Ridge neighborhood. Her home was damaged in a 1987 tornado.



The Lochtyn Ridge neighborhood in Wales features much of nature's finest offerings, including horses grazing nearby and rocky hills formed by glaciers centuries ago.

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NEIGHBORHOOD LOCHTYN RIDGE



AND WOODSTOCK, ILL.

Twisters haven't damaged neighborhood's spirit

NEIGHBORHOOD, From 1F

said. "Then I was hit with a piece of glass and I was knocked down. When I looked up, I could see the sky and feel the rain coming down. The roof of the garage was gone."

The Kusz home was in ruins. Only a part of the kitchen was left standing, and Mary was treated at a hospital for inhaling insulation that blew out of the walls.

The 1987 tornado was part of a storm system that cut a wide swath throughout southeastern Wisconsin. It damaged 20 homes in Lochty Ridge, causing \$500,000 in damage, but nobody was killed or seriously injured this time.

After rebuilding, Tom and Mary Kusz decided to stay, despite the misgivings of friends and family. So did most of the area's residents, who are much more likely these days to discuss the Glacial Drumlin bike trail that runs through the subdivision or the common sightings of deer, owls, foxes, pheasants and wild turkeys than the tornadoes of the

1980s.

No tornadoes or severe storms have since disturbed the neighborhood.

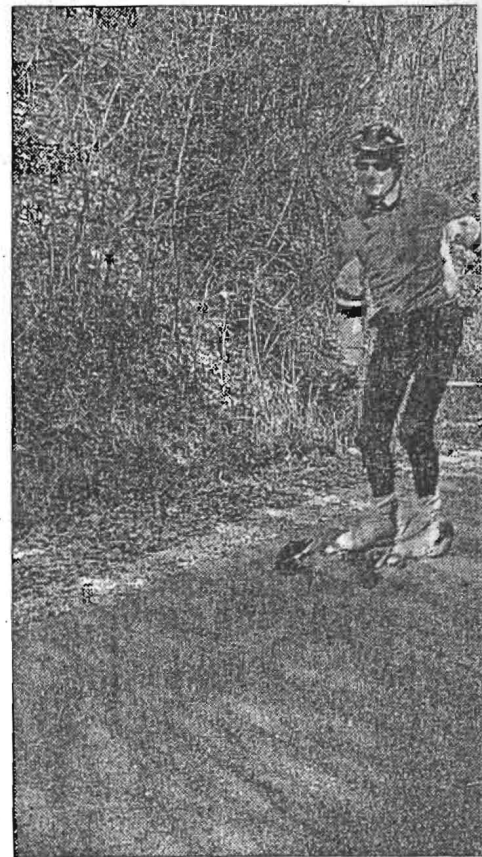
Nor have many For Sale signs.

Ann Nicholls, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Inc., confirmed that a home for sale in Lochty Ridge is a rare phenomenon.

"I work with a lot of transferees and they drive through the area and say it's so beautiful and how much they love the rolling hills and how much they'd like to move to the neighborhood, but there's hardly anything to sell," she said. "Wales is a unique little village — a lot of people you see are longtime residents. A lot of people are buying lots and building homes because Wales is a really desirable area."

According to Rose Leben, whose home was completely lifted off its foundation by the 1987 tornado, "Most of the homes here are still occupied by the original owners, even though many of the children have grown and moved away."

She and her husband, Tom, were among the first families to



buy a lot after the subdivision was created in 1977.

"We're from Milwaukee — I think most of the people who built here are from Milwaukee or Waukesha," she said. "We liked the peace and quiet, and we were told that no two houses would look exactly alike."

The large yards in Lochтын Ridge are also quite varied in appearance and shape. Many feature steep slopes and groves of trees.

"We all had to pretty much plan the style of our homes to fit the lots," said Leben.

Lochтын Ridge contains striking examples of the deep kettles and rocky hills formed by glaciers centuries ago in what is now known as the Kettle Moraine area.

"We have heard that the topography of the area creates air pockets that cause funnel clouds to form," said Leben.

But the glacial formations are also what makes the neighborhood especially beautiful, said Jock Drummond, who lives on the other side of the subdivision from the area hit by tornadoes. His lot, populated by too many oak and hickory trees for him to count, appears to have been touched by melting glaciers in the past.

"When I dig, it's all glacial till — sand and gravel that was dumped by melting glaciers," he said. "The glaciers formed the ridge here, and also the long, narrow valley where the railroad tracks were."

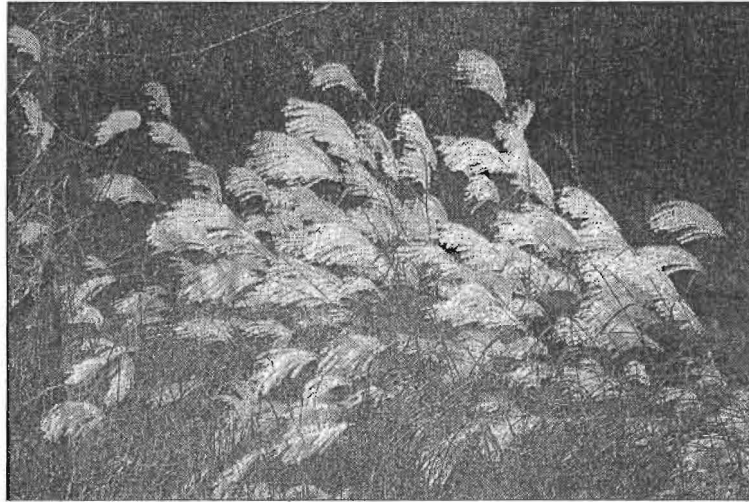
Drummond and his wife, Dorothy Crockett, aren't the least bit worried about tornadoes passing through. They are very much aware, however, of the bike trail that passes through their subdivision.

A section of the Glacial Drumlin Trail runs along the abandoned railroad track near Brandybrook Road on the northwestern edge of the subdivision. The public trail was created in 1986 by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for use by hikers, bicyclists and snowmobilers. It spans 51 miles from Waukesha to Cottage Grove. The portion in Lochтын Ridge is part of a seven-mile stretch nearest Waukesha that was paved a few years ago. The paved portion can no longer be used for snowmobiling but is ideal for in-line skaters.

"It's an extremely popular trail," said Drummond. "There



A wooden bridge that provided easy access into the subdivision was closed in September to become a footbridge. It spans the Glacial Drumlin Trail.



Plants and wildlife can be seen along the Glacial Drumlin Trail, which runs through the Lochтын Ridge subdivision.

are a lot of Rollerbladers, along with the people who walk and ride bikes."

Crockett often uses the trail to ride her bicycle to her job as a driver's license examiner at the Division of Motor Vehicles in Waukesha, about an eight-mile trek from her home.

The couple have seen gray and red foxes in their yard, as well as owls, raccoons, woodchucks, deer, opossum and coyotes.

"The neighbor over there has wild turkeys all the time," said Drummond.

Steve Graf, a middle school teacher who lives in Lochтын Ridge with his wife, Karen, and two young sons, enjoys the natural surroundings — high and low. The view of the stars from Graf's yard was so spectacular one night

that he took slides and created a presentation for his students' science class.

The Grafs haven't lived in Lochтын Ridge long enough to have experienced the tornadoes, but they have relatives in nearby Genesee who remember when the railroad valley attracted hobos — as late as the 1970s, just before the subdivision was created.

A horse farm sits prominently on one corner of the subdivision. Residents said that up until a few years ago, a zebra grazed there among the horses.

However many forms of wildlife have sought out Lochтын Ridge over the years, the area remains sought after and continuously increases in value, said Nicholis.

A computer check showed most homes in the subdivision would sell today in the low \$200,000s, she said.

"It's a very convenient location," said Graf. "It's just 10 minutes from everything. Highway 18 is a few minutes away. The taxes are pretty reasonable."

"Why would you move anywhere else? It's just gorgeous," said Mary Kusz.

