

Date: Oct 6, 2012; Section: Local News; Page: 3

SIDE STREETS

Neighbor feels pain of growth at UCCS

When something expands rapidly, often there are growing pains. It's true of people and institutions.

The explosive growth of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs in the past decade has produced a real pain in the neck for Marianne Horvath and her neighbors on Cragmor Village Road.

The few neighbors who remain, that is.

There's only a handful of privately owned homes left on the street, which winds east off the UCCS campus, parallel to Austin Bluffs Parkway.

For decades, it was a pocket of 15 or so rural-feel homes in the heart of the city, a barely paved road like those that still exist in places such as Woodmen Valley, Falcon Estates and Rustic Hills. It's a reminder of the neighborhoods that existed before Colorado Springs' explosive growth led it to swallow up unincorporated communities in all directions.

Today, the survivors are surrounded by university property. Eventually, the entire neighborhood will be swallowed by the school.

In the meantime, the transition is difficult.

Traffic got so bad, Horvath said, neighbors needed signs to restrict motorists to 15 mph.

And signs cautioning drivers to slow down for playing children.

And "no parking" signs to keep students and staff from choking the narrow, winding road with their cars.

But Horvath said her family, which owns two of the homes, is experiencing a more personal pain stemming from a driveway shared with the university.

Back in 1967, the house the Horvaths own was next to another home. The owner at the time granted a legal easement to allow the neighbor to use the driveway.

Today, the neighbor's home is called the Forster House and is occupied by the Office for Veterans and Military Student Affairs. Instead of a family car using the driveway a few times a day, there are cars and delivery trucks coming and going from a parking lot.

Horvath said the driveway was not designed for the traffic, and most of the drivers are oblivious to her family and the children playing in her yard and driveway.

"Careless drivers are abusing our property," she said. "And the careless drivers are a danger to our children."

She gives UCCS and Chancellor Pam Shockley-Zalabak credit for meeting with her, erecting the traffic signs and keeping an open dialogue.

But Horvath is angry and frustrated at what she perceives as harassment over the years and mistreatment on a host of issues beyond the driveway.

She said UCCS has taken down part of her fence without permission and brought grading equipment onto her property. She has battled with UCCS over the property line and was irked when one of the family cars was ticketed by university police for parking on family property. Horvath feels harassed by specific university employees including police who, she claims, have shined their lights into windows of the family's homes and been rude and aggressive toward them. She's even upset that her property shows up on Google maps as university-owned. And she said UCCS officials recently threatened to take ownership of the driveway through a legal maneuver known as "adverse possession."

UCCS spokesman Tom Hutton said there is no desire or intent by the university to harass the Horvaths.

"The university has tried to work with her and will continue to work with her," he said, noting Shockley-Zalabak has met with Horvath on a regular basis and corresponds by mail.

Hutton said UCCS wants to be a good neighbor, citing the school's erection of the traffic signs at Horvath's request, as an example.

"And drivers for vendors servicing the Veterans Center have been advised to take extra care," he said.

He said the school did not intend to take ownership of the driveway and only mentioned the "adverse possession" to Horvath in an August meeting as something it is "investigating."

I asked Horvath why her family doesn't follow the procession of neighbors and move. Clearly, the neighborhood is dying. It will be reborn as part of the campus. Why not expedite the process?

"I don't want to live next door to them," she said. "But we have no choice. We can't move. We are underwater on our home. We are victims of the economy. So we are forced to stay."

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COUrTeSy OF MArIAnne HORVATH

A truck making a delivery to the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' Office for Veterans and Military Student Affairs tries to squeeze down a driveway and across Marianne Horvath's driveway. She said this is an example of the danger of commercial vehicles using a driveway designed for private cars.

