Loop & Near North

If you like urban pleasures, favor walking to work, savor dining al fresco, theatre, art museums and galleries, and acclaimed architecture, there’s a neighborhood for you. Don’t be deterred by traffic, tumult and construction. Wind your way to Chicago’s Loop and near north.

For visitors and residents alike, downtown Chicago abounds in attractions. There are plazas with mosaics and sculpture; the business and financial district; Navy Pier with its rides, restaurants and theaters; Orchestra Hall, Lyric Opera and theatrical stage venues; shopping on State Street and the Magnificent Mile; and Grant Park with its annual Taste of Chicago, concerts and music festivals. And in warm seasons, tens of thousands of sunbathers flock to the Oak Street and North Avenue beaches.

Housing tends to be condos and rentals, with loft conversions the latest trend. You’ll find apartment buildings interspersed among office buildings downtown, heavy concentrations to the east near Lake Michigan and to the north in Streeterville and along Lake Shore Drive on the Gold Coast. In recent years, River North has gained in popularity. The downtown area is home to longtime residents as well as singles and empty nesters who moved to the suburbs while raising children and now have returned to enjoy center city amenities.

The downtown region is also home to the central offices of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago at 1 S. Franklin St., Ben Gurion Way. The building also houses a number of Jewish Federation agencies, including Jewish Vocational Service, Jewish Family and Community Service, Jewish Children’s Bureau, Jewish Community Centers and Chicago Board of Rabbis. It is also home to JUF’s Jewish Community Relations Council, the umbrella body for 47 major Jewish organizations in Chicago.

Two Federation agencies are located at 618 S. Michigan Avenue. The Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies offers an array of academic programs and houses the Norman and Helen Asher Library and Chicago Jewish Archives as well as the Spertus Museum featuring the largest Jewish museum in the Midwest, and the Zell Holocaust Memorial exhibit. The Community Foundation for Jewish Education, a support foundation of the Jewish Federation, provides resources and services on behalf of the Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform congregations and their movements.

There are a half dozen congregations in the downtown-near north area, including Reform, Conservative, Traditional and non-denominational.

Also serving Jewish students and the wider community Mildred and William Levine Hillel Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University Hillel.
Lincoln Park, Lakeview, Edgewater

On a clear, sunny day, driving north on Lake Shore Drive in Lincoln Park and Lakeview, the beautiful panorama of Lake Michigan and its inviting beaches is one of Chicagoland’s premiere attractions.

Add in the nearby park and zoo, the Chicago Cubs’ Wrigley Field, and numerous theatrical, cultural and culinary venues, and it’s easy to understand the popularity of the high-rise apartment buildings along the Drive and the gentrified neighborhoods westward.

While the rental, condo and coop buildings along the lakefront have long been home to many Jews, the diverse neighborhoods to the west in Lincoln Park and Lakeview have in recent years attracted large numbers of young Jewish families and singles. They’ve also attracted higher housing prices as the building boom continues. Further north in the Edgewater area, there are some signs of revitalization, typified by condominium conversion of the old Edgewater Hotel.

Jewish Federation agencies serve a variety of needs in the area. The Florence G Heller JCC offers a wide range of programs, classes and activities for children and adults. The innovative City North Kehilla, a joint program of the JCC and five area congregations, offers adults under 30 membership at all six institutions for one nominal fee. Hundreds of previously unaffiliated young adults participate in holiday services and celebrations and other activities.

Keeping kosher is now a 24-hour-a-day option thanks to the efforts of locals. Two years ago the area’s main supermarket began selling a wide selection of kosher meats and poultry, breads, cakes, salads, packaged lunch meats, frozen foods and dairy products. Many kosher food products are also available at other area markets.

While Lincoln Park and Lakeview are generally considered to be upscale communities, many people living in Uptown and Edgewater are less fortunate. Studies have shown that there are nearly 40,000 poor or near-poor Jews living in the Chicago area. EZRA, a Federation multi-service agency, provides emergency services, job placement, advocacy with landlords, and other help to this population through its Dina and Eli Field Multi-Service Center in Uptown. The Center, which recently moved to new, larger facilities on W. Wilson Avenue also houses the JUF Uptown Café, which conducts a kosher meal program for the poor with the aid of some 2,000 volunteers.
West Rogers Park

West Rogers Park is home to the largest concentration of Jews in the city, although the numbers have declined since the 1960s, when Jews comprised more than two-thirds of the total population.

Significant numbers of Jews also live in adjacent neighborhoods like Peterson Park and Hollywood Park, as well as Rogers Park, where many retirees remain, particularly along Sheridan Road.

The first settler in the area, way back in the 1830s, was Philip Rogers, who traded with the indigenous Native Americans, and later bought a 1,600 acre tract from the U.S. Government.

With large numbers of Orthodox as well as Reform and Conservative Jews, plus a mélange of other religious and ethnic groups, West Rogers Park is today one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse neighborhoods in the metropolitan area.

Nowhere in the city is there greater access to all things Jewish than in West Rogers Park. There are more than 20 congregations in the area, the majority of which are Orthodox or Traditional. There are kosher butchers, bakers, restaurants and food markets as well as supermarkets which carry a variety of certified products.

For many years, Devon Avenue was the central Jewish marketplace. In recent years, other ethnic groups have moved into the area, establishing their own shopping districts on Devon. However, along a few block area, one can still find several synagogues and a variety of kosher restaurants, meat and fish retailers and Jewish bookstores. If you crave kosher pizza, Chinese food or Mid-Eastern delicacies, you can find them in West Rogers Park.

There continues to be a strong Jewish organizational presence in the community, including many Jewish Federation agencies and beneficiaries. For example, along a few block stretch of Touhy Avenue, there is the Bernard Horwich Jewish Community Center; the Jewish Family and Community Service Virginia Frank Child Development Center; the headquarters offices of the Council for Jewish Elderly and the CJE Swartzberg House; Keshet day camp; the Hebrew Theological College’s Anne Blitstein Teachers Institute for Women; the Mount Sinai Touhy Health Center and the West Rogers Park Jewish Community Council. The Horwich JCC, as the focal point for many community activities, serves the diverse needs of all ages of long-time residents as well as newly arrived immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Among the other organizations located in West Rogers Park are Federation beneficiaries The Ark; Associated Talmud Torahs headquarters, its Ida Crown Jewish Academy and day schools; Yeshivas Brisk and CJE low-moderate income housing. Other area groups serving the Chicago community include the Chicago Rabbinical Council, the Chicago Community Kollel and the ORT school, located in the former Beth El site. Information on these and other organizations appears in listings throughout this guide.

West Rogers Park has many other attributes contributing to quality of life. Enthusiastic residents point to its location with easy access to the Loop and city amenities (20 minutes by car or Metra) and to the suburbs. Proximity to Lake Michigan is another plus. They also give high marks to housing, with single family homes and town houses more moderately priced than in other neighborhoods in the city and suburbs.
In the aftermath of devastating Chicago fires in 1871 and 1874, the Jewish community began gradual moves south from the Loop.

In the early 1880s, leading Jewish businessmen helped avert a financial crisis that threatened the future of the University of Chicago. Their support continued over the following years.

The intellectual aura of a major university is now a factor attracting new residents to Hyde Park.

After years of soul searching and needs assessment, Rodfei Zedek congregants decided to take the unusual step of tearing down its existing building and rebuilding at the same location. This also involved a unique partnership with the Hyde Park Jewish Community Center, which now shares the new Jewish community campus, dedicated in September, 2000.

Established more than 50 years ago, the Hyde Park JCC offers programs and classes for all ages, ranging from enrichment classes for infants, toddlers and preschool children to an active Children’s Department, to a popular summer camping program and its Adult Department activities, which includes many classes and programs for seniors.

The University of Chicago has always attracted a high percentage of Jewish students and faculty. Among its Nobel Prize winners are author Saul Bellow and economist Milton Friedman. The Johanna and Herman Newberger Hillel Center at the University of Chicago involves large numbers of Jewish students, faculty and staff in the course of a school year, in a variety of activities. One event that has enjoyed great success for more than half-a-century is the annual Latke-Hamentash Symposium, a tongue-in-cheek debate featuring noted scholars arguing the merits of the holiday goodies.

Residents extol the virtues of the area, citing Hyde Park as a pretty neighborhood with nice beaches and parks, and ready proximity to the Loop. They see the diverse neighborhood as a good place to raise children, with plusses like access to music teachers, art centers, the Museum of Science and Industry, the well known Lab School, and the University of Chicago with its cultural offerings.
Near North Suburbs

Evanston, Wilmette, Winnetka, Glenview, Northfield

Drive along the near north suburban lakefront communities and you’ll be mightily impressed as you are transported into a beautiful region of stately homes and scenic vistas. Erasmus Patterson was.

In 1836, long before covered wagons meant SUVs, Mr. Patterson, wife Zeruah and their five children were heading west from Vermont in a covered wagon. They stopped for a night in a hilly part of what is today Winnetka. They were so entranced with the setting that they never left. Folks have been enchanted by the North Shore ever since.

In addition to the lure of the lakefront and its beautiful, sandy beaches, people have also moved into attractive neighborhoods in the western areas of Winnetka and Wilmette as well as into adjoining communities like Glenview and Northfield, enjoying the many amenities the region offers. The communities range from 15 to 20 miles distance from Chicago’s Loop.

Evanston is a culturally-oriented community boasting distinctive architecture, historical charm, several theater groups, a symphony orchestra and numerous museums and art galleries. Northwestern University —with the new Louis and Saerree Fiedler Hillel Center — enhances the community’s cultural scene. The city’s recreation department runs several parks, public beaches and community centers. The community is served by Metra and CTA transportation with easy access to Chicago.

Winnetka’s school district includes the renowned New Trier High School—rival to Evanston Township High School—which also serves Wilmette and Northfield. Most Glenview high schoolers attend Glenbrook South High School, while some attend New Trier or Maine East High.

Each of the communities has extensive park systems and activities. The Winnetka Community House is a hub for local activities and organizations.

Winnetka has three beaches and an ice arena. Wilmette has four golf courses and two indoor ice rinks. Glenview has a number of parks and playgrounds and a large nature preserve.

Shoppers can choose between hundreds of in-town businesses or outdoor malls like Eden’s Plaza and Plaza Del Lago, one of the oldest shopping centers in the U.S. Evanston has a downtown second in size only to Chicago’s Loop. All five communities are close to Old Orchard and Northbrook Court malls.

The area’s Jewish community is served by nearly a dozen congregations representing every stream, many with early childhood centers, after-school, and adult education programs. The Council for Jewish Elderly’s Klafter Assisted Living Residence is in Wilmette and there are retirement and senior care facilities in the region. Wilmette is also home to the popular Kohl Children’s Museum. Area residents of all ages can participate in activities at Jewish Community Centers located in nearby communities.
Highland Park, at the southern end of Lake County and Glencoe, at the northern border of Cook County, have continued to attract Jewish families in growing numbers. Some Jewish families are also moving to Lake Forest to the immediate north of Highland Park.

Drive through the tree-lined ravine areas, pass by stately, upscale homes, or pause to visit the beautiful beaches and recreational sites and you’ll understand the attraction. Glencoe is home to the Chicago Botanic Garden with 385 spectacular acres. It also has the third largest collection of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed homes in the country. At the southern end of Highland Park is the internationally-acclaimed venue of the performing arts, Ravinia Festival. Highland Park has twice won the All American City Award as well as a Presidential award for excellence in education and high honors for its park district.

Other area amenities include attractive downtown business districts, good Metra train and Pace bus service and access to major highways. There are a number of high caliber theatre, music and arts groups and recreational facilities. In terms of health care, the area is served by Highland Park Hospital, a 300-bed medical center, and Lake Forest Hospital.

The first synagogue in the area was established in 1920; today, the Jewish community has access to eight congregations in Glencoe and Highland Park, with abundant spiritual and educational opportunities for children and adults. Over and above the regular religious school classes, there are early childhood programs plus adult education sessions. In addition, area residents may participate in the various educational, cultural and recreational activities of the nearby Bernard Weinger JCC in Northbrook. The Jewish Federation and its agencies provides a full range of services and programs.

Highland Park offers a kosher restaurant and a variety of kosher food shops.

Northern Lakefront Suburbs

Glencoe, Highland Park, Lake Forest

In the early 1900s, the northern lakefront became a popular place for affluent Chicagoans to establish summer residences. By 1920, a number of Jews had become year-round residents of Highland Park and Glencoe, finding those communities more welcoming than other North Shore towns.
North Suburbs

Northbrook, Deerfield

Northbrook and Deerfield have, for several years, attracted many young Jewish families with quality schools, housing, recreational and cultural amenities as well as access to diverse congregations and a growing Jewish communal infrastructure.

Located four miles west of Lake Michigan, Northbrook abuts forests and lagoons on three sides at the northern edge of Cook County. Neighboring Deerfield is at the southern end of Lake County. Both communities are near the Tri-State Tollway and Edens Expressway and are served by Metra trains. They have viable business climates and a variety of shopping options including Northbrook Court, Deerbrook Shopping Center and other malls and individual shops.

While Deerfield and Northbrook offer many features conducive to a pleasing lifestyle, residents will also find ample opportunities for a meaningful Jewish experience. Start with synagogue affiliation. The two communities are home to numerous congregations representing every stream. Jewish affiliation and education can begin at a young age with early childhood learning or pre-school centers at the Jewish Federation’s Bernard Weinger JCC in Northbrook and at area congregations. A Jewish day school education is available at every level through the Solomon Schechter system. The Anela Joy Frankel Keshet Day School for children with disabilities has one of its three locations at the Schechter site. In addition, there are afternoon and Sunday classes offered by congregational schools, as well as adult education sessions. The Dawn Schuman Institute for Jewish Learning, which offers a broad range of adult classes throughout the region, is headquartered in Northbrook.

The Weinger JCC programs for young children attract almost 1,000 participants in a variety of activities and programs at sites throughout the area. The popular JCC ‘Z’ Frank Apachi Day Camp is also located in Northbrook. The Center also offers an array of educational and recreational programs for adults.

Northbrook also is home to the gamut of Jewish Federation agencies. Jewish Children’s Bureau Elaine Kersten Children’s Center and its North Suburban Child and Family Counseling Center, The Child and Adolescent Institute, Eva Cooper Disabilities Program and The Center for Young Children With Autism. Jewish Family and Community Service has its North Suburban District office in Northbrook and Jewish Vocational Service has a Jewish Employment Network branch at the Weinger JCC.

In recent years, the Council for Jewish Elderly established a strong presence in the area with the opening of the Weinberg Community for Senior Living, which houses the Gidwitz Place for Assisted Living and the Friend Center for Early Alzheimer’s Care, with its innovative interdisciplinary therapeutic programming in a home-like Jewish setting.
Some communities are relatively new while others boast colorful histories. Vernon Hills, incorporated in 1958, began as an outgrowth of a housing division and is now home to nearly 20,000 people. The Village of Mundelein, 35 miles northwest of downtown Chicago, was first inhabited by the Potowatami Indians who were trading with French fur traders as early as 1650. Their first permanent settlers arrived in the 1830s. Through the years, Mundelein has had five names, including, briefly, “Rockefeller,” adopting its present name in 1924. Further north, in what is now Gurnee, early settlers came to the area in the late 1830s by foot, horseback and oxen-drawn “Prairie Schooners.” Libertyville was founded in the early 1830s and incorporated in 1882.

The far north communities offer good schools and recreational facilities as well as highly heralded shopping opportunities. Gurnee is home to the popular Six Flags Great America and the vast Gurnee Mills outlet mall. Hawthorne Center in Vernon Hills houses 170 retailers.

Libertyville has a number of shopping areas and a colorful Heritage District with a variety of specialty shops.

At least three synagogues, along with early childhood centers as well as a religious schools and adult education activities, serve the far north area. Area residents have access to a full range of Jewish Federation agency services offered nearby and in other northwest and north shore communities.
Near Northwest Suburbs

Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, Des Plaines, Lincolnwood

The near northwest suburbs are family-oriented communities, with fine schools and park districts, as well as excellent shopping and health care facilities. Depending on the neighborhood, they offer a variety of housing options and commuter-friendly access to other suburban areas and to downtown Chicago.

Skokie, some 15 miles from the Loop, has much to offer religiously, culturally and aesthetically. Described by one resident as a “wonderful mix,” the community celebrates its diversity in many ways. Public schools, where an incredible number of languages are heard, have diversity fairs celebrating countries of origin. The population mix is very much in evidence at the annual 4th of July parade, and in other monuments and flags representing the residents’ countries of origin.

Skokie also draws high marks for its park district facilities, its city services and its school system. The sizeable Jewish community, which includes many Russian immigrants, young families, and the area’s most significant population of Holocaust survivors and Holocaust-related memorials. The area enjoys access to an excellent network of Jewish schools (at least four day schools), organizations and services, synagogues, and supplemental education programs and facilities. There are also a number of kosher restaurants, bakeries and food markets, particularly along Oakton and Dempster Streets.

There is a high concentration of Jewish Federation services; the Goldie Bachmann Luftig building housing offices of the Jewish Family and Community Service, Jewish Children’s Bureau and Jewish Vocational Service; the Council for Jewish Elderly Lieberman Geriatric Health Centre and Robineau Assisted Living Residence; and the Mayer Kaplan JCC. The JCC serves a diverse, multi-generational population with a wide variety of recreational, educational, social and cultural needs, and draws many participants from neighboring communities.

Old Orchard, a large outdoor mall in Skokie, has undergone extensive renovation and includes as anchors major department stores. Other major area malls are Golf Mill Shopping Center in Niles and Lincolnwood Town Center.

Among the area’s health care facilities are Evanston Northwestern Healthcare Center, St. Francis Hospital in Evanston and Rush-North Shore Medical Center in Skokie.
Northwest Suburbs

Hoffman Estates, Wheeling, Schaumburg, Elk Grove Village, Buffalo Grove, Arlington Heights and Long Grove

Young Jewish families, lured by housing opportunities, excellent school systems, good park districts and access to major highways, have moved in significant numbers over the past two decades to northwest suburban communities. As the numbers increase, so does the Jewish environment.

Communities like Hoffman Estates, Wheeling, Schaumburg, Elk Grove Village, Arlington Heights and Long Grove all enjoyed significant growth, but probably the greatest influx was in Buffalo Grove.

Located 35 miles from downtown Chicago (a Metra train station enhances commuting to downtown) in both Cook and Lake Counties, Buffalo Grove is described as a great place to raise children both in terms of quality of education and Jewish community activities through local congregations and the Northwest Suburban Jewish Community Center.

Buffalo Grove has more than 380 acres of parks, three public golf courses and a variety of park district programs for children and adults. It also is home to a variety of kosher food stores.

Arlington Heights, 27 miles from the Loop, boasts an award winning park district, relatively affordable housing, good schools and business climate. There are two Metra stops for commuters to Chicago. Elk Grove Village, 22 miles from downtown Chicago, has a business park reputed to be the largest of its type in the country, helping to keep property taxes low. More than one-third of Hoffman Estates is forest preserve and nearly 600 acres are used as parks and recreational areas. There are a variety of single family homes and townhouses. Wheeling is another of the region’s fast-growing communities, fueled by industrial expansion and affordable housing. It is a 20-minute drive to O’Hare Airport and buses connect with the Loop and nearby suburbs.

Long Grove is an upscale community with a quaint business district that attracts shoppers from near and far to its more than 100 distinctive shops. Schaumburg, 29 miles from the Loop, is home to the massive Woodfield mall and nearby Woodfield Village Green shopping complex. The eastern border of Schaumburg abuts a forest preserve with miles of walking and biking paths. Express Metra trains reach the Loop in 40 minutes.

As the region’s Jewish population grew, new congregations were formed and today the Jewish community is served by synagogues in Buffalo Grove, Long Grove and Hoffman Estates.

Residents from several communities participate in the broad range of activities offered at the Northwest Suburban JCC in the Jacob Duman Community Building in Buffalo Grove. In September, 1999, the Center opened its first satellite facility in the Woodland Commons in northern Buffalo Grove to accommodate increasing needs for early childhood and children’s programs. The Duman Building also houses offices of Jewish Federation agencies.
Western Suburbs

Oak Park, River Forest, Westchester, Lombard, Naperville, Elgin and Aurora

The burgeoning Jewish community began moving westward by the tens of thousands from the Maxwell Street area to Lawndale and Garfield Park early in the last century. Now, at a time of explosive growth in the western suburbs, the Jewish community is once again on the move.

Today, there are relatively small but growing Jewish communities in such widely dispersed western suburbs as Oak Park, River Forest, Westchester, Lombard, Naperville, Elgin and Aurora. Residents can point with pride to what their communities offer, in terms of ambience and quality of life.

Naperville, 30 miles west of Chicago has experienced tremendous growth, with a population now exceeding 130,000. Residents cite as pluses the career opportunities for professionals, relatively affordable housing, good hospitals and outstanding schools with students consistently winning science fair awards. Naperville has been ranked as a top community in the United States to raise children and retire.

Lombard, like Naperville, is in DuPage County. Its rich farmland attracted settlers as early as the mid 1830s.

One may tour the historic downtown area that is within walking distance of the commuter rail station. The city’s “Lilac Parade” is an annual favorite drawing more than 50,000 spectators. Closer in, some eight miles west of the Loop, is River Forest, which has received a number of Tree City USA Community and Tree City USA Growth Awards. And nearby historic Oak Park is home to the largest collection of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed structures in the world.

With a growing number of Jewish organizations in the area, synagogues continue their important role as the hub of Jewish life in the western suburbs. There are congregations reflecting all Jewish streams within reach.

In recent years, the Jewish Federation has been reaching out to the western suburban Jewish community. In 1999 the Federation launched the West Suburban Service Project, which coordinates services and programs provided through the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, Council for Jewish Elderly, Jewish Children’s Bureau, Jewish Vocational Service, Jewish Family and Community Service and Jewish Community Centers.

Jewish Waldheim Cemetery in Forest Park, with some 175,000 graves, is one of Chicago’s most historic cemeteries, and the largest of its kind in the Jewish world.
South Suburbs

Homewood, Flossmoor, Olympia Fields, Hazel Crest and Glenwood

A small number of Jews settled in the south suburbs a century ago, but the initial significant influx was sparked by the building of Park Forest. One of the first and most acclaimed post-World War II planned communities in the country, it targeted returning veterans as potential buyers.

A later migration to the region took place in the mid-1970s as numbers of Jews moved from Chicago’s south side and other areas to south suburban communities like Homewood, Flossmoor, Olympia Fields, Hazel Crest and Glenwood.

Today, the region is home to a relatively small but active Jewish community, attracted by affordable housing, award-winning schools and outstanding park districts. Residents describe the areas close and warm. Major highways provide accessibility to other suburban areas and Chicago, and the Metra rail system serves commuter needs.

For nearly three decades, the Anita M. Stone Jewish Community Center in Flossmoor has been serving residents of 12 south suburban communities with a full-range of programs accommodating social, educational and recreational needs for children and adults of all ages. Three Jewish Federation agencies – Jewish Children’s Bureau, Jewish Vocational Service and Jewish Family and Community Service – provide service through a south suburban office in Hazelcrest.

Six years ago, in response to a community-wide Priority Study, the Federation opened a south suburban office to provide referral services and work with Federation and area service organizations to assess needs and coordinate service delivery. The Federation and Stone JCC are also part of the Cooperative Jewish Council, which enables participating organizations to provide services more efficiently and to strengthen the south suburban Jewish community.

Much of the area’s Jewish life centers around its active, vital congregations, which offer religious schools and adult education programs.