

# In West Bloomfield

## Family clings to rural life in old farmhouse

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Like many early settlers in the area, Zephaniah Green was attracted by the abundance of fertile land available for farming. In the fall of 1812, he planted three acres of wheat and in later years found his land suitable for fruit tree cultivation, Wendell says.

**DURING THE PAST 150 years**, four generations of Greens have lived and farmed on that same plot of land that borders 14 Mile, west of Halsted.

The original house that Zephaniah and Zerilla built to replace the log cabin still stands adjacent to the "main house." This house, built in 1837 around the time Michigan became a state, still is occupied by Wendell's sister-in-law, Bernadine Green. Bernadine has lived in the house since the day Arthur Green, the father of Wendell and her late husband, Alden, gave it to them as a wedding present in 1938. According to Bernadine, it took her and her late husband many months to convert the house into a livable home after it was used as a storage shed for many years.

Wendell lives in the "main house," a large Victorian home. A barn is next to the house. It was built by father Arthur in 1909 when Wendell was 2 years old. "I remember them telling me about the time I climbed up on the ladder when they were building the thing," recalls Green.

"Nearly broke my foot neck until a workman got me down from there," Arthur served in local government as a

clerk in West Bloomfield Township, a justice of the peace for 20 years and as a traffic court judge.

**THE FARM** has changed its production from wheat, to fruit and dairy, to primarily fruits and vegetables over the course of a century.

Arthur Green, grandson to Zephaniah and Zerilla, used a horse and buggy to carry his produce to Detroit's Eastern Market, Wendell says. The trip, which lasted one day by buggy, was shortened by the invention of the motor car.

Zephaniah's father tried to reach Grand River, called "The Gravel" at that time because of its surface, in hopes of hiring someone to take their produce down to the market by car.

School buses were unheard of in Wendell's high school days. As a young schoolboy growing up in the 1920s, Green rode his bike three miles down 14 Mile Road to the corner of 14 Mile and Orchard Lake Road. There, he caught the Detroit United Railway, known as the inter-urban trolley, that took him to Pontiac Central High School.

Owning a car, according to Wendell, made the farming business a little more productive because farmers could take their goods frequently to the major market places without an overnight stay or several hours on a fruit wagon.

**MANY OTHER MODERN conveniences** changed the face of the Green

farm over the years. In the 1930s, the Greens installed refrigeration in their barn to keep the stored fruits fresh. It was one of the first refrigerated barns in the area.

But Wendell, a 1930 graduate of Michigan State University in horticulture, knew the farm needed the conveniences of modern equipment to operate. The Green brothers, Wendell and Alden, continued to take on more orchards and become one of the largest fruit farmers in the West Bloomfield/Farmington area. Their children became interested in the business and learned "how to make a buck" selling sweet potatoes at their own roadside stand, Wendell says.

The West Bloomfield Wendell, wife Mary, and Bernadine knew is quite a different township than its modern-day status. Near their farm, several new developments have been built in the last 30 years.

"It all began in the 1950s when the township ceased to be the farming community it once was," Wendell explains. "Farmers decided to sell their farm land to housing developers instead of struggle with farming."

It WAS DIFFICULT for the Greens to see their community change and become part of the suburban sprawl. As the years passed, the number of developers, as well as the price of the vacant land, rose considerably.

In 1948, Wendell and Alden were offered a large sum for the land their great-grandfather had purchased.

It was a dilemma for the two brothers, who had cherished the family homestead. Selling the land meant giving into the developers that were changing the face of the township, as well as giving up the old family jewel that was honored as a Michigan Centennial Farm just nine years before.

Refusing to sell meant the continuation of the struggle to cultivate the overvalued fruit trees without the proper personnel or equipment, in addition to giving up a handsome sum of money for the property.

**THE BROTHERS** compromised with

the developer. They sold all the farm except for the four acres where the original house, the barn and the main house stood. The developer paid more than \$2,500 an acre for 107 acres of farmland.

In 1972, Levitt and Sons began to build a group of condominiums to the west of the Green farmhouse, adjacent to 14 Mile, on the land they purchased. Levitt, to the Greens' surprise, retained the name "Green Farms" for the complex.

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The Greens' new neighbors have caused a mixed reaction in the family.

Mary attended a West Bloomfield Township Board meeting a few years ago to investigate Levitt's land-development proposal.

"How long have you lived here?" fired one female observer to Mary at the meeting. When Mary told of the Centennial Farm that the Greens had occupied, the woman responded: "You've lived here too long — get out!"

There's a lack of respect toward the original residents," Mary says. "People have come out here and want 'instant city' — we don't like that."

Wendell disagrees: "It's a progress that has to be, but what I don't understand is why."

**DESPITE DEVELOPMENT**, the Greens feel their roots in West Bloomfield are too strong to be replanted elsewhere.



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

## Workshop to teach parents, teachers

Creative use of children's literature, child safety and strangers, and sex education are three of the topics that will be explored in a parent education conference to be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday in Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, 3065 Six Mile, Livonia.

Arranged by the Greater Detroit Cooperative Nursery Council, the program aims to provide educational opportunities for parents and teachers of young people.

Cost of the event is \$3 for council members and \$6 for others.

Eleven workshops are offered. Leigh Beagle will take a light-hearted look at getting a child ready for kindergarten in a class called kindergarten readiness. Alice McCoy, children's librarian at the Southfield Library, will use puppets, flannel boards and finger play to demonstrate how to stimulate an interest in reading to your child. It's called "Creative Use of Children's Literature."

In "Discipline From Birth to 6," Kate Wood, a social worker, will focus on discipline at home according

to development and physical stages. Harriet Hartman Education Unlimited will address the topic, let's play and learn.

Child safety and strangers will be discussed by Bonnie Stovall of the Children's Aid Society. "High Adventure — Family Style" will be taught by Sidney Milstone, a former teacher. Dorothy Kirby will talk on "OK Parenting."

Dr. Frances Eldia, audiologist and speech and language pathologist, will look at learning disabilities. Director of communication disorders at Children's Hospital, she will explore early detection of learning disabilities. John Bernardo, school psychologist, university instructor and educational consultant, will describe stages of growth families go through in "Family Growth Cycle."

"Sex Education" will be viewed by Pat Rom, a registered nurse. She will also discuss developing a loving open relationship which benefits both child and parents.

For more information on the conference contact Cindy Moll at 531-9025.

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