

# Front porches becoming place to meet

**BY MICHELLE CAMPBELL**  
CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

**TINLEY PARK, Ill. (AP)** — Old-fashioned front porches are popping up faster than tulip bulbs this spring as homeowners struggle to reclaim a way of life passed by.

The look and feel of some neighborhoods and subdivisions are being transformed as property owners, one by one, build nostalgic front porches on their homes.

And it doesn't seem to matter what style of home they have. In Tinley Park, for example, a cookie-cutter subdivision of Cape Cods, split-levels and ranch-style homes is now lined with Victorian-style front porches.

"Before people started building porches, everyone used to be in their back yards and no one really knew their neighbors," said Kevin O'Connor, 41, who was one of the first on his block to put a porch on his ranch-style home.

"Now, we can sit out here, have a beer and play cards in the evening. Our neighbors stop by and talk to us," he said. "Porches help get back a way of life that has passed us by."

Ken Zomparelli, who owns a Tinley Park deck-building business, said over the past two summers he has noticed a dramatic increase in the number of porches being built.

"They give the house a better look," said Zomparelli, who has even seen some trailer home owners try to make their barbecue decks look like old-time porches. "So many people are tired of having their house look just like everybody's else's on the block. A front porch can add some personality."

While the thought of putting a Victorian-era porch on anything but a Victorian house makes architecture purists cringe, it didn't stop Pamela and Bill Palm from building one on their Homewood bungalow.

"I love being able to sit on my porch swing and watch everyone go by," said Pamela Palm, 30, who persuaded her husband to decorate their porch with pink, gingerbread-style accents. "I'd always wanted to live in an old farmhouse, but we decided to stay here and make this house look more old-fashioned."

Since the Palms built their porch a year and a half ago, several more have popped up in their neighborhood.

"It's starting to look more like the kind of neighborhood you would see in the movies," she said. "People are trying to grasp onto that old, warm, homey feeling."

Many real estate developers are designing new home models with traditional front porches.

"We've definitely noticed a dramatic resurgence of the old-fashioned front porch," said developer Jim Hughes Jr., a partner in the Wheaton-based Wiseman-Hughes Enterprises, Inc.

"A lot of people want to be in a subdivision that is like an old neighborhood. The kind of place where everyone would go on their front porch and mingle with their neighbors after dinner."

The sprouting porches are actually part of a national trend that has been tracked by sociologists and architects over the past several years.

The main theory explaining the rebirth of the front porch is that "because people are living such private and internalized existences because of the car and the television, porches represent a community of people who communicate face to face," said Elizabeth Cromley, chair of the architecture department at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Up to about 40 years ago, the porch was an integral part of any neighborhood, Cromley said.

It was where neighbors got together and talked, and the point from where they watched each other's children and kept track of who came in and went out of the neighborhood.

nostalgia for that sense of community," Cromley said front porches in the '90s may be more symbolic than anything else.

"The porch is a gesture toward that kind of life, but people are still inside where it's air-conditioned and they're talking to people by email," she said.

But Ball State University architecture professor Tony Costello believes the rebirth of the front porch will bring isolated neighbors together, as well as bring down crime rates.

"I think we're beginning to realize that suburbia has become too isolated," he said. "I believe front porches can play a vital role in rebuilding our neighborhoods."

**'Before people started building porches, everyone used to be in their back yards and no one really knew their neighbors.'**

*Kevin O'Connor  
porch sitter*

But even though there's "a lot of

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