

Lynn wasn't the first choice, but the city has plenty of allure

By Linda Werbner | December 4, 2005

Globe North recently asked readers to tell us how they picked their new hometown. Here is one reader's response. If you want to share your story, log on to www.boston.com/norhtalk or send your reply to globenorth@globe.com or Globe North, 1 Corporate Place, Suite 200, 55 Ferncroft Road, Danvers 01923.

Honestly, Lynn wasn't our first choice. When my husband and I were finally able to scrape together enough money for a down payment, we quickly discovered that our options were limited. No mansions in Lexington for us, a couple of hand-to-mouth teachers.

But that's all right because that wasn't what we were looking for anyway. We wanted a funky urban environment with genuine diversity, proximity to Boston, and lots of natural beauty. In Lynn, we hit the jackpot. Boston is only a 25-minute drive. Three beaches are in our backyard, and Lynn Woods, the second-largest municipal park in the country, is minutes away. Best of all, Lynn is also the home of the Marshmallow Fluff factory.

Yet, the reaction I got from friends and family when I mentioned that we were moving to Lynn was akin to uttering the name of Voldemort at a Hogwart's shindig. It is the City-Which-Must-Not-Be-Named. Even some native Lynners, who, after confessing where they hail from, will tack on the disclaimer, "I'm from Lynn -- but on the *Swampscott* line."

When I ask these same folks, "Have you ever *been* to Lynn?" most admit that they have never set so much as a suburban toe in the city. They have only heard that it was a sketchy place. And, bet your bottom dollar that as soon as they hear "Lynn," they dutifully recite a notorious jingle. Chances are if you grew up anywhere near the North Shore you've heard this odious couplet, which I won't bother to repeat.

Lynn has certainly seen its fortunes rise and fall -- and now rise once again -- in the 20th and 21st centuries. Once a center for leather-tanning and shoemaking, Lynn fell into decline when the industry left and it became mired in social problems, many of which the city still grapples with.

But things are looking up for this scrappy city of 90,000. The many shuttered brick factory buildings that dot the center of town are being converted into hip condos and loft spaces faster than you can say Marshmallow Fluff.

Hopefully, the city can hold on to its intoxicating array of diversity as it morphs into an attractive, revitalized community. Lynn boasts a large and thriving Latino population, as well as a sizable Russian-speaking community. There are five Russian markets in the city, and Inter Kniga, a new bookstore selling Russian-language books, films, and music, just opened this month.

A walk through Central Square confirms that Lynn is truly the United Nations of the North Shore. Over here is Nana's African Hairbraiding shop, where women dressed in colorful bubus weave artful, intricate braids. Next door is the African Food Shop, where one can find fufu flour and fresh goat meat. Stop in for some savory and authentic pho or soup at Pho Lynn. Enjoy the percolating rhythms of salsa as you feast on a burrito at Tacos Lupita, which has the best Latin American soul food this side of the Lynnway.

But wait. There's more. If you get a hankering for some Czech beer or a double espresso, get thee to the Gulu-Gulu cafe.

Owners Steve and Marie Feldmann, themselves Jamaica Plain transplants, opened the funky and friendly arts and performance space more than six months ago. Paintings by local artists hang on the walls, and there are many inviting, overstuffed chairs to sink into and sip coffee, write, and read.

If you are in the mood for more upscale fare, then head over to the elegant new Oxford Street Grill for mustard-crusted organically farmed sturgeon and a glass of Gewurztraminer.

On a muggy summer evening, there is nothing more refreshing than heading down to Lynn Shore Drive and walking the scenic mile to Swampscott for an ice cream (turn left) or to Nahant for a beer (turn right).

Another Lynn gem is Fraser Field, which hosts the North Shore Spirit baseball team. For \$7 you can get a primo box

seat, watch the Spirit wipe the field with the Brockton Rox, and still have enough left over for a hot dog and a beer. And you can usually park free on the street. How cool is that?

As newcomers to Lynn, we are proud of our city but, I'm sorry to say, have developed a chip on our shoulders about the rotten tomatoes that get lobbed at our newly adopted hometown.

On the other hand, we know what a jewel this city is and, frankly, we're not too keen about the inevitable influx once the word gets out. So I say let those doomsayers keep singing their stupid, outdated jingle and let us enjoy our city for a little while longer before Utne magazine puts it on its list of the hippest places to live in North America. ■

© [Copyright](#) 2005 The New York Times Company