

# Creative Living at Lorton's Laurel Hill

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The prison Teddy Roosevelt envisioned building in Lorton, Va., in the early 1900s was quite innovative for its day. Appropriately enough, about 100 years later, the site again is home to creativity -- but this time the grounds will embrace the arts as their path into the future.



Lorton, originally named for a village in England, had a population of about 27,700 people in 2008. At the time of construction, the prison embraced a concept of punishment and reform that held that hard work, learning skills and fresh air would help create better citizens. Among its most famous prisoners were about 170 women suffragists who were arrested during voting rights marches in front of the White House.

The prison was closed in 1994, and the county acquired the property in July 2002. One of the requirements for the county to be able to take over the land was the development of housing and recreational plans for the site. As part of that process, the county stressed the need for affordable housing for families.

Affordability is what drew Suzanne Oakley's family to Lorton's Laurel Hill subdivision, which is located where part of the prison dairy once stood. Houses closer to the District "cost so much more, and you get so much less," she said.

"We bought a new house, and that was attractive, and we really like how the builder planned out the neighborhood and set up the community with the pool and the community center," Oakley added.

The pace of life is also quiet and family-focused, said Daisy Newberry, another resident. In addition to the community center and pool, "there are tot lots everywhere," she said. "We don't have to leave the community to take the kids to go down slides, to play on a swing."

Sales at Laurel Hill have increased since the early part of spring 2010, said Austin Morrill, a real estate agent with Northern Virginia Homes. He cited the federal tax credit as having helped sales but noted that many homebuyers were not first-timer buyers.

Now planning for another development at Lorton has started, and work is already under way on the Workhouse Arts Center, a 55-acre facility overseen by the Lorton Arts Foundation and designed to promote lifelong education and opportunities in the arts.

The first phase of the arts center project is complete. Twelve historic buildings were rejuvenated to provide space, tools, expertise and an interactive venue for artists working in the fields of light and

## Top reasons to live in Lorton

**Commute** Laurel Hill is close to Interstate 95, making for an easy commute to Washington. It also is near one of two stations that serve Amtrak's Auto Train.

**Leisure** The 18-hole regulation course at the Laurel Hill Golf Club, which was designed by William R. Love, opened in 2005. It was ranked No. 15 on Golfweek's 2009 listing of the United States' 50 best municipal courses. The land the golf course is on was once part of the reformatory. The Laurel Hill Mountain Bike Trail offers offroad run fun as well.

**Location** It's a quick trip south on Ox Road to historic Occoquan or north to the city of Fairfax and all of the shops, entertainment and restaurants both have to offer.

heavy visual art, theater, music, dance, film, and digital and print media, according to the foundation. The second phase of construction is focused on rehabbing the remaining buildings and creating a theater, events center and dedicated space for children.

"The arts center is an active concept in terms of an arts venue for exhibiting, but also for performance," said Tim Sargeant, chairman of the Laurel Hill Project Advisory Committee. "Right now, artists can lease working space. There are plans for about 40 units where artists and employees of the site can live."