

## Tuxedo, N.Y., Is Getting Dressed Up

Orange County town has parkland, a Gilded Age gated community, and now an entrepreneur plans to make it a destination for foodies



Cyclists take a break by Lake Kanawauke in Harriman State Park. Tuxedo is sandwiched between Harriman and Sterling Forest State Park. *PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By **BILL CARY**

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Dot-com entrepreneur Michael Bruno is on a mission to transform the town of Tuxedo into a prime Hudson Valley destination.

Mr. Bruno, who created 1stdibs.com, an online marketplace for antiques, furniture, jewelry and art, has already spent about \$7 million buying up 22 old buildings along the rundown Route 17 corridor through Tuxedo and adjoining Sloatsburg. He plans to spend another \$7 million to turn them into a roadside inn, a high-end restaurant, antiques emporium, upscale food purveyor and offices for his Tuxedo Hudson Co., which includes a new real-estate agency.

He sees Tuxedo as the gateway to the bountiful Hudson Valley farm belt, the next destination for foodies.

“Our vision is to bring the best of the Hudson Valley in the way of food to one place,” Mr. Bruno said.



Businesses on Route 17 in Tuxedo PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The sleepy town of Tuxedo is in the southeastern corner of Orange County, about 35 miles northwest of New York City. It is sandwiched between two

large state parks, Sterling Forest and Harriman, and more than 70% of the town is protected parkland.



The ticket booth at New York Renaissance Faire on Route 17A in Tuxedo. PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The crown jewel of the town is the wealthy Gilded Age village of Tuxedo Park, a gated community of about 330 houses. Many of them are grand mansions dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries set among pristine lakes and woods.

“The natural beauty in Tuxedo Park is really something you can’t replicate,” said Barbara du Pont, a 20-year resident who is also an agent with Ellis Sotheby’s International Realty. “People tell me you feel like you’re at Lake Como in Italy or some other European place away from the crowds. It really is quite special.”

And yes, the modern evening wear known as the tuxedo was named in the late 19th century for Tuxedo Park, when several of its gentlemen residents began wearing the tailless formalwear first seen on London’s Savile Row.

Since falling in love with and moving to the town four years ago, Mr. Bruno has bought five properties in Tuxedo Park to amass a 120-acre estate around a 1900 lakefront mansion.

The Tuxedo real-estate market has been doing well.

“I’m actually quite optimistic about the market,” Ms. du Pont said. “It’s been slowly coming back for the last few years and it’s continuing that trend.”

Through the end of August this year, 12 single-family homes in Tuxedo Park have been sold, with a median price of \$920,250, according to the Hudson Gateway Multiple Listing Service and Orange County records. For the same period last year, seven homes were sold, with a median price of \$700,000.

So far this year, through Aug. 31, 22 single-family homes in the town of Tuxedo, outside of Tuxedo Park, have been sold, with a median price of \$437,500, according to the Hudson Gateway listing service. For the same period last year, eight homes were sold, with a median price of \$315,000.

“Buyers are recognizing there’s great value in Tuxedo Park, particularly for second-home buyers,” Ms. du Pont said.

But with a population of only about 3,600 and all that preserved, nontaxable parkland, the town in recent years has struggled to fill its schools and its coffers with adequate tax dollars.

This year, Town Hall offices are closed on Fridays, and the town has been on a state comptroller’s office list of municipalities in financial distress.





Four Corners Pond. More than 70% of Tuxedo is protected parkland. *PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



Chuck Stead, center, has lunch with Jim Elling, left, Holden Texel and Casey Gerald, far right, at Dottie Audrey's Bakery/Kitchen. *PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



The Tuxedo rail station has recently been refurbished. *PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Last year, the nearby Greenwood Lake school district ended a 30-year contract to send its high-school students to Tuxedo, cutting enrollment at Tuxedo's George F. Baker High School by more than half.

Along with Mr. Bruno, the other major player in Tuxedo right now is Related Cos., which has won town approvals to build a 1,200-home development called Tuxedo Farms.

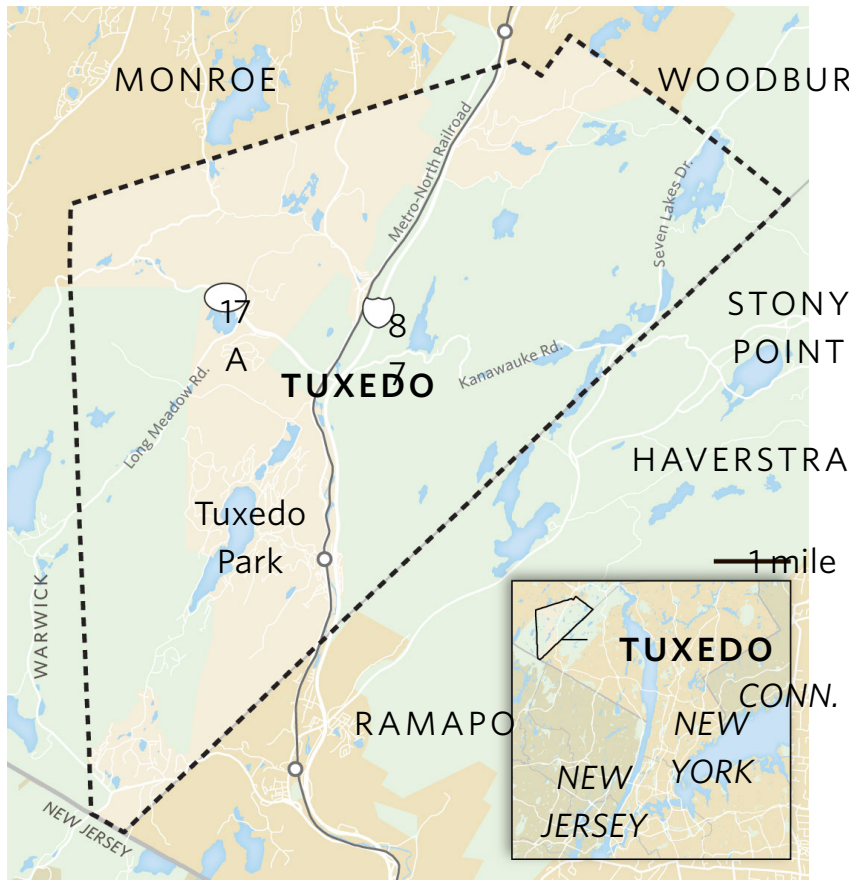
"They are in the process of clearing land and building infrastructure," said Tuxedo Town Board member Michele Lindsay.

Mr. Bruno, meanwhile, has begun to deliver on his vision. Last month, his company opened a weekend farm stand, Blue Barn Organic, in Sloatsburg, just down the road from the gates of Tuxedo Park. "We had 600 people come in one weekend and sold out twice," he said.

**Parks:** Along with the two large bicycle- and hiker-friendly state parks, Murphy Field in the town has ballfields and a pavilion. Eagle Valley Mini Park has basketball and a playground. The home of Tuxedo Little League, Tichy Field also has tennis courts and a large playground. PowerHouse Park has an outdoor stage and a lighted basketball court. There is also a skate park equipped with ramps and jumps.

**Transportation:** The quaint Tuxedo rail station has recently been refurbished. It is about a one-hour ride to Manhattan's Penn Station and a 35-mile drive into the city. The New York State Thruway (Interstate 87) runs through the town.

**Dining:** Most fine-dining options are about a 20-minute drive out of town. In Tuxedo, on Route 17, Dottie Audrey's Bakery/Kitchen opened last year. It serves breakfast and lunch along with gourmet coffees and homemade pastries and desserts. "It's been a fabulous addition to the town," Ms. Lindsay said. "If you want to see somebody, you go there."



**Entertainment:** The New York Renaissance Faire on Route 17A offers costumed actors, 16th-century games, rides, arts, crafts, food, music and dance. This year, it opened in August and runs on weekends through Oct. 2. A few minutes north of town in Central Valley, Woodbury Common Premium Outlets has 220 stores and a variety of dining options. Storm King Art Center, a 500-acre sculpture park, is also nearby.

## If You're Browsing for a Home...



**\$2.85 million**

### 122 Circuit Rd.

This seven-bedroom stone and cedar-shingle home is within the gated village of Tuxedo Park. It has a new kitchen and bathrooms (eight full and two half), refinished floors and updated plumbing, heating and electrical systems. The oak-paneled, 24-by-34-foot living room has a 11.5-foot-high ceiling and 17th-century English fireplace. It has a grand formal dining room, graceful lawns and a private patio.

**Year Built:** 1890

**Square Footage:** 8,500

**Lot Size:** 2.2 acres

**Property Plus:** All five second-floor bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms.

**Property Minus:** The backyard is private, but the front is on a neighborhood street.

**Listing Date:** May 9

**Listing Agent:** : Barbara du Pont of Ellis Sotheby's International Realty

**Open House:** By appointment

*PHOTO: ROBERT SOCHA*



**\$1.1 million**

### 177 E. Lake Rd.

This six-bedroom Dutch Colonial in the gated village of Tuxedo Park was once the gardener's cottage for the estate of George F. Baker, a financier and philanthropist. It has five full bathrooms and one half bathroom. There are bucolic four-season views from most rooms. It has two porches, a detached three-car garage, sprawling lawns, stone walls and a seasonal brook.

**Year Built:** 1904

**Square Footage:** 3,460

**Lot Size:** 8 acres

**Property Plus:** It has modern amenities including central air conditioning and an updated kitchen and bathrooms.

**Property Minus:** Shared driveway

**Listing Date:** April 7

**Listing Agent:** Karen Hart of Tuxedo Hudson Realty

**Open House:** : By appointment

*PHOTO: JILL SWIRBUL*



**\$300,000**

### 261 Benjamin Meadow Rd.

This three-bedroom, two-bathroom contemporary home has cedar siding and multiple outdoor decks and patios. It is light and bright, with lots of windows. It has a master suite, new wood floors, an attached garage and a large fenced garden.

**Year Built:** 1940

**Square Footage:** 2,200

**Lot Size:** 2 acres

**Property Plus:** The home is surrounded on three sides by state parkland.

**Property Minus:** The kitchen and bathrooms could use an update.

**Listing Date:** July 12

**Listing Agent:** Bob Thompson of Tuxedo Park Preferred Properties

**Open House:** By appointment

*PHOTO: ROAMY FILS-AIME OF EDBERG SOLUTIONS*