

# THE HOUSING CRISIS

While we will continue to feature solutions to the housing crisis in the New York area, some of our best options may be somewhere farther away. Moving out doesn't necessarily mean pioneering, either. Sometimes you can find an established community that has everything you need, as we examine one such city this week.

DESPERATELY SEEKING A PLACE TO CALL HOME

## Begin Thinking Cleveland

FINDING A HOME IN THE FOREST CITY

Over the past 15 years or so, the Orthodox Jewish community of Cleveland, Ohio, has witnessed something of a renaissance and rejuvenation. There has been a large upsurge in the amount of young people choosing to make their homes in Cleveland. Many native Clevelanders have returned to raise their own families in their hometown (something that used to be not so common) and many others have come as well, taking advantage of the relatively low real estate prices and the many *frum* amenities, educational opportunities and *chesed* organizations. For young couples struggling to survive in the New York real estate market, buying a home in Cleveland—where prices may be a third or a quarter of Brooklyn's—would seem to be a serious option to consider, and many have been happy to “discover” Cleveland.

There are currently over 1,000 *frum* families spread out over the large Jewish communities in the Cleveland Heights, University Heights and Beachwood neighborhoods, with a smaller neighborhood in Wickliffe built around the world-famous Telshe Yeshiva. There are over 20 vibrant *shuls* serving the community, which is comprised of a diverse collection of Jews ranging from Modern Orthodox to *yeshivish* and a sprinkling of Chabad and other *chasidim*, all living in harmony and neighborliness.

Cleveland boasts several outstanding *frum* schools and *yeshivos*. The Hebrew Academy of Cleveland was founded by the legendary Jewish education luminary, Rabbi Nachum Zev Dessler, zt”l. The school became known as the model Jewish day school in America and has educated thousands of Jewish youth. Currently, there are approximately 800 children in the Academy's boys' and girls' divisions. The Mosdos Ohr HaTorah school system, founded almost a quarter of a century ago, currently has over 500 students. In Beachwood, the Fuchs Mizrachi School, a Modern Orthodox

*yeshivah*, has an enrollment of upwards of 200 students. Another Cleveland landmark is the acclaimed Yavneh Teachers Seminary, which has been led by the revered *mechaneches*, Rebbetzin Chaya Ausband, since 1963. (Although there is a *chasidische shitebel*, the *yeshivos* do not teach in Yiddish.)

All of the *frum* neighborhoods in Cleveland (with the exception of the Yeshiva Lane area surrounding Telshe Yeshiva) are within a 15-minute drive or a 1-hour walk from each other and can really almost be considered one contiguous *kehillah*. All of the neighborhoods are safe, with relatively low-crime; residents feel very safe walking around at night.

Cleveland fits into the category of a mid-sized out-of-town *frum* community—not quite as big as Chicago or Los Angeles, but bigger than smaller communities like Pittsburgh, Milwaukee or St. Louis. Of course, it cannot offer all of the *frum* amenities that Brooklyn does—such as 24-hour *minyan* factories and a wide variety of different styles of kosher restaurants to eat in—and this is often a turn-off for Brooklyn families who are used to such things. However, Cleveland does offer a very impressive established religious structure with everything a *frum* community needs, albeit on a smaller level than New York. This includes high-level boys' and girls' *yeshivos*, *kollelim*, kosher groceries and a few eateries and take-out places.

Another impressive aspect of the community is the massive amount of *chesed* that is done internally. The Bikur Cholim of Cleveland provides for the needs of scores of Jews from around the world who come to Cleveland to make use of its renowned hospitals and medical facilities. Bikur Cholim provides myriad services for these families in their times of difficulty and stress. Additionally, the recent founding of a branch of Chaverim in

PART THREE OF A CONTINUING SERIES  
ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

By Gershon Hellman

Cleveland further illustrates the *chesed* growth in the community. Additional wonderful *chesed* organizations in Cleveland are Matan B'Sayser, several *gemachs*, Tomchei Shabbos and others.

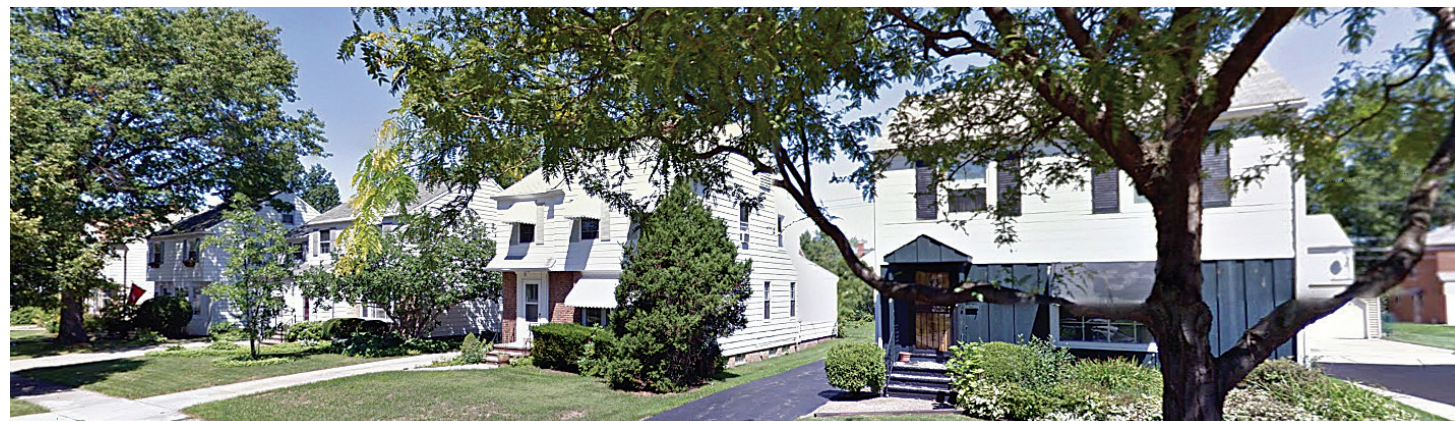
The Jewish Federation of Cleveland works very closely with the Orthodox community and is well-versed in the unique needs and issues. They have a special program called "Strengthening and Growing Jewish Cleveland," which deals with housing issues, as well as other issues that affect the community.

The revitalization of youth in the Cleveland community over the past 15 years has been based mostly around two sectors. The first would be the thriving *kollelim* in Cleveland. Cleveland has deservedly earned the name "Kollel City" because it is home to more *kollelim* and more *kollel* students than any other Midwest community, and more per capita than any other out-of-town community in the US or Canada. Until two decades ago, the only *kollel* in town was the one that was attached to the Telshe

parents.

The other sector that has steadily grown is the professional community, made up of *frum* doctors, lawyers, accountants and other such professionals. Cleveland is well known for its medical community as it is home to the world-famous Cleveland Clinic, the number one cardiac care center in the country and one of the top-ranked overall medical centers (by US News & World Report), as well as many other high-level medical facilities. Many *frum* doctors have moved to Cleveland to take advantage of the myriad opportunities in the field, as have many lawyers and accountants who have found career opportunities in their fields.

A main downside for many New Yorkers is how different the business market in Cleveland is. Many New Yorkers tend to gravitate towards employment opportunities within the *frum* community. Such opportunities are fewer in Cleveland, and New Yorkers may fear that they won't find any suitable employment



Yeshiva. Even today, a very large percentage of the community is made up of alumni of Telshe who chose to make their homes in the Cleveland area. When the Cleveland Heights *kollel* (now known as Kollel Ateres Chaim Boruch) opened, the community galvanized behind the project and showed themselves to be very eager to bring more *kollel* men and more Torah learning into the city. Over the ensuing years, five more high-level *kollelim* have opened, scattered around the various neighborhoods. Dozens of young *kollel* families flocked to Cleveland to take advantage of the opportunity to learn full-time in a city where they could actually afford to live. The local *balebatim* in every neighborhood proved more than happy to support these *kollelim* and to personally take advantage of the prominent Torah scholars that joined the *kollelim* by spending their mornings and evenings learning with them. This includes several philanthropists who have pumped millions of dollars into turning Cleveland into a true place of Torah. The influx of youth that began with the *kollelim* has attracted many young working families to settle in Cleveland as well. Additionally, tens of *kollel* men have already joined the workforce after years of full-time learning, thus strengthening the community further. A large amount of both the *kollel* men and the working men who have settled in Cleveland are native Clevelanders who were overjoyed at the chance to return home and live near their

should they move to Cleveland. However there are many opportunities. While there aren't as many Jewish businesses, there are many opportunities in the general business community. One can also open branches of an existing business or relocate a business. Downtown properties and warehouses are much more affordable than in the Tri-State area. Additionally, in today's world, businesses can be run remotely. And bear in mind that because your housing costs are so much lower, you can earn less money and still provide very sufficiently for your family.

At the end of the day, it definitely can be said that a strong argument can be made that for anyone looking for an affordable and vibrant *frum* community to live in, Cleveland should be at the top of the list. The top-notch schools, amazing *chesed* organizations and Jewish amenities available, as well as the many Torah opportunities offered to the community through the *kollelim* and distinguished *rabbanim*, are all factors working in Cleveland's favor, as is the relatively tranquil and quiet out-of-town lifestyle. Many people raised in Brooklyn who have become accustomed to the fast-paced hustle and bustle of the mega-urban life are amazed by the simple joys of always being able to find a parking spot and never having to deal with alternate-side parking regulations or double-parked cars, and by the friendliness and conviviality of the local residents. ●

## CITYSTATS

### HOUSING PRICES

Houses in the Cleveland Heights neighborhood of Cleveland can be found for as low as under \$100,000, depending on the block and condition, and range from that number to the low-\$200,000s. In the slightly more affluent University Heights area, houses usually go for prices in the mid-\$100,000s. In the Beachwood area, considered a higher-end suburb, houses still can easily be found for under \$200,000. These single-family fully-detached houses often offer much more living space and front and backyard space than a house in Brooklyn of four times the price.

### CLIMATE

Cleveland possesses a continental climate with very warm summers and cold, snowy winters. The Lake Erie shoreline, which borders Cleveland, is the principle contributor to the lake effect snow that typically affects Cleveland from mid-November until the surface of Lake Erie freezes, usually in late January or early February. Cleveland is the second snowiest major city in North America (behind Denver). Seasonal totals exceeding 100 inches (254 cm) are not uncommon.

### GETTING THERE

Driving time from Brooklyn: about 8½ hours  
 Driving time from Lakewood: about 8 hours  
 Driving time from Chicago: about 6 hours

There are often cheap flights. Someone flying to NY for Rosh Hashanah, leaving the day before Erev Rosh Hashanah and returning the following Monday, can get a ticket for \$150 on Southwest Airlines.

Flying to Lakewood (Trenton), Frontier has a Tues-Tues flight for \$94.

Flight time to/from New York: 1½ hours

There is no organized *frum* travel. There are Greyhound buses, and Amtrak connects to Port Authority and Newark's Penn Station.



## VOICES

### Mr. Shmully H. Originally from Boro Park Moved to Cleveland after marrying a Cleveland girl Director of a nationwide real estate company

Many people in Brooklyn are living in cramped small apartments or condominiums they purchased for a fortune of money. I find this pitiful when they could have moved to a nice out-of-town community for a fraction of the cost.

I grew up in Boro Park and I am a product of the Bobov *yeshivah* system and now make my home in Cleveland. I moved here after I married my wife who grew up in Cleveland.

Most people with a chasidic background like mine find it very difficult to entertain the idea of leaving the culture in which they were raised and moving several hundred miles from their familiar chasidic courts, *batei midrash*, *chadarim* and *yeshivos* and the "*heimishe gefil*" and lifestyle that they were raised in. Those willing to leave Brooklyn mostly choose to remain close by, in places like Monsey or Lakewood. They simply cannot imagine moving "way, way out" to a place like Cleveland. I once brought up the idea of moving to Cleveland to a childhood friend, and the man replied that he could never move to a place that's "even farther away than Chicago." He was genuinely surprised when I informed him that Cleveland was actually several hundred miles closer to New York than Chicago.

At the core, you're looking at an established community that has everything available and is growing and has affordable housing. All you need is a

leap of faith. Remember, you're looking to switch from living in a sardine can in Brooklyn that you're paying \$1,800 a month in rent, or paid a fortune for, to a nice spacious house in a wonderful and established community with good schools, *kollelim*, *batei midrash*, everything needed to raise your family. That's the real choice.

At the last Parnassah Expo in New Jersey, I rented a booth in order to draw businessmen to Cleveland. One young man from Brooklyn approached my table to see what I was offering. I asked him, "Are you here for *parnasah* reasons?" "Yes," the man answered. I asked him where he lived and he replied that he owned a 4-bedroom home in Boro Park. "Let me make you an offer," I suggested. "How much could you sell your house in Boro Park for today?" "About a million dollars," the man replied. "Okay," I said only partially in jest, "here's my offer. Sell your house for a million bucks. Move to a bigger home in Cleveland for \$250,000 and you'll walk away with \$750,000 in your pocket. Show me someone else who can give you such a good deal!"

The bottom line is: Why live in a 3-bedroom apartment with 5 kids when you don't have to? People are resistant to change. There's a lot of hemming and hawing. But at the end of the day, the pros greatly outweigh the cons.