Sweet Sunset Park

This Santa Monica neighborhood charms with down-home style

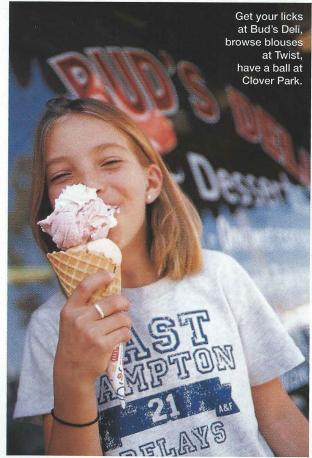
By Wendy O'Dea Photographs by David Zaitz

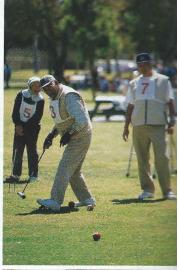
ne long, tree-lined boulevard loaded with reasonably priced restaurants and simple boutiques. A park packed with families picnicking, friends playing ball, and children swinging on playground equipment. A market, a pizza joint, and a nursery overflowing with colorful blooms and greenery.

It sounds like a cozy Midwestern village. But it's actually Sunset Park, a neighborhood along Ocean Park Boulevard in Santa Monica, known more for its pier and busy Third Street Promenade than for small-town charm. Stretching west from Centinela Avenue, this neighborhood holds an array of mid-20th-century homes and a retrolooking community grocer, Bob's Market (1650 Ocean Park Blvd.; 310/452-2493), that make it look like a time capsule from the Eisenhower era. But Sunset Park is more interestingly eclectic than it first appears, infused with an assortment of independent galleries, coffee shops, and a health food market offering diverse foods like dandelion greens and fenugreek sprouts.

"It's not like the rest of Santa Monica," says resident Rosanna Zonni while grabbing lunch at the well-loved Sunset Grill (closed Sun and holidays; 1701 Ocean Park; 310/450-7546). "Sunset Park is sophisticated, but in an unpretentious way." As if to prove her point, owner John Lorda breaks into a friendly exchange with the postman ... in French.

Clothing stores, Mexican bakeries,







Seeing Sunset Park

WHERE: From the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10), exit at Bundy Dr. south and turn right onto Ocean Park Blvd.

CONTACT: Santa Monica Convention and Visitors Bureau, www. santamonica.com or 800/544-5319.



and ice cream shops are waiting to be discovered among the storefronts. For clothing, Twist (2601 17th St.; 310/314-9161) and its sister store, Shout (2607 17th; 310/399-6959), merit a visit for their Beatlesesque names alone. For food, Cafe Bolívar (closed Sun; 1741 Ocean Park; 310/581-2344) is a sandwich and coffee shop that exhibits original art. Farther east is Gary's Grill (7:30-3:30 Mon-Fri; 2819¹/₂ Ocean Park; 310/450-9949), a '50s-style burger joint serving Angus beef burgers for only \$4.25. Bud's Deli (closed Sun; 2727 Ocean Park; 310/450-6860) sells 16 kinds of ice cream plus salads and sandwiches. And Ocean Park Cafe (8-3 daily; 3117 Ocean Park; 310/452-5728) is a grass greencolored diner so evocative of the open road, you'd expect to see Thelma and Louise chowing down on breakfast burritos.

Weekday afternoons find the courtyard at 2901 Ocean Park teeming with folks sipping coffee or enjoying lunch at II Forno (310/450-1241), a family-owned Italian restaurant. Next door, Mrs. Winston's Green Grocery (Ste. 107; 310/452-7770), a natural-food store, offers more than 140 hand-cut items at its salad bar. If you're looking for a good place for a picnic, try out Clover Park (at 25th St. and Ocean Park). Here you can relax and watch the surprising slice of Americana called Sunset Park go about its business, just as it did a half century ago. •