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Donna Terek / The Detroit News

Dr. Stephanie Posey lives in Detroit but sends her daughter Lisa, 9, to a private school in Novi.

## Staying in Detroit requires sacrifice

Many turn to suburbs for schools, shopping

By Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News

**DETROIT**--Every morning Dr. Stephanie Posey rises before the sun to get her 9-year-old daughter ready for a long journey to a private school in Novi.

It is one of the many costs she pays to stay in Detroit.

Posey, an anesthesiologist at St. John Detroit Riverview Hospital, could live anywhere in the metro area, but she has chosen to make Detroit her home.

She owns a four-bedroom brown-brick Tudor valued at \$125,000, but it could easily sell for double that amount in many Detroit suburbs. It's nestled in Russell Woods, a bastion of middle-income black families.

### Costs of staying in Detroit

Middle- and upper-class blacks who choose to remain in Detroit pay sizably to remain in the city.

\* They have typically lower home values, a primary source of any family's wealth.

\* A lack of quality education as a result of eroding tax bases often prompts them to seek private, suburban or magnet schools.

\* Less access to higher quality shops, foods, restaurants and fresh produce frequently prompts them to spend time and money in the suburbs.

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suburbs.

She is one of many blacks who can afford to live elsewhere, but make the sacrifices to stay in a largely black city.

A 43-year-old single adoptive mom, Posey has come to terms with the costs.

"If I want fresher produce and better-quality service at stores, I have to go to the suburbs," said Posey, who usually travels at least 20 minutes to an Oakland County shopping mall to buy clothes for her daughter, Lisa.

A graduate of Detroit's Cass Tech High School, Posey went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then to Tufts Medical School in Boston.

She said it was those years of being in a predominantly white world that drew her back to Detroit when she returned to Michigan.

Although she has contemplated a move to the suburbs several times, she said she's staying in her west-side neighborhood that borders Dexter, Livernois and Davison avenues.

"I stayed in Detroit primarily to stay in my black community," Posey said. "I wanted to stay in my community and not be on the periphery."

Posey's home is filled with hundreds of dolls she proudly shows off as a veteran doll collector. A long-winding oak staircase greets visitors at her home, in which she has invested thousands of dollars to upgrade to her tastes.

"My brother and sister in Rochester Hills and West Bloomfield give me a hard time about staying in the city," Posey said. "They call my home the ghetto oasis and the ghetto Shangri-La."

The price she pays to stay in Detroit are significant, but ones she chooses.

"Those are the drawbacks I live with," Posey said. "There definitely is a disparity. But I guess it's worth it."

Researchers like Thomas Shapiro, a sociologist for Northeastern University in Boston and the co-author of the book *White Wealth, Black Wealth*, knows all too well the travails middle-income blacks like Posey endure when they opt to stay in their communities rather than "moving up and out" to mostly white suburbs.

"It's a repetitive tale among black middle-income homeowners and families and for those who have resolved the issue of staying in a community that they want to identify with," Shapiro said.

Many middle-income blacks, Shapiro said, often find their urban communities have inadequate public schools and are faced with additional costs of private schooling.

"They have to put their children in a private school or hope they can get them in a magnet school," he said. "That's the dilemma that faces middle-income blacks, especially."

Another cost comes in home equity because of the unwillingness of most whites to buy into black neighborhoods.

"The mean equity for white homeowners is \$75,000 compared to \$46,000 for blacks," Shapiro said. "The social dynamics at play here is that homes in most communities appreciate in value but there is very

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clearly a color coded appreciation of home values."

"The whiter the community the steeper the home value is going to go up," Shapiro said.

That can make it increasingly difficult for a black homeowner in Detroit to make the jump to a better life in the suburbs.

Lisa Wilmore enjoys the cultural enrichment and a network of black urban middle-class professionals like herself in Detroit, but wonders whether it's worth it.

"I'm thinking of moving," laments the 28-year-old Detroit native who works for Compuware as a computer analyst.

Wilmore said she is frustrated to see the stark differences in housing, goods and services and employment opportunities between Detroit and its largely white suburbs.

"There is so much segregation," Wilmore said. "It affects the quality of life for Detroiters. That needs to be changed."

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