



AWANDA BROWN

The Legend of Netherwood

SCENE | Ride NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line north past the leafy towns of Cranford, Westfield and Fanwood and you'll eventually reach Netherwood, a station stop that bears all the beauty of its well-known neighbors but not nearly the brand recognition. In fact, in the grand scheme of Garden State geography, most residents would be hard-pressed to identify what Netherwood even is — a town, a train station, a mythical place?

Netherwood, a historic neighborhood tucked within the city of Plainfield in Union County, originally extended east to west, from Woodland Avenue to Terrill Road, and north to south, from the North Plainfield town line to Watchung Avenue, according to Sarah Hull, head archivist at the Plainfield Public Library. Records show that in the mid-1800s, John Taylor Johnston, president of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, named the area Netherwood ("other wood") after his Scottish roots, a designation later borne by the famous Netherwood Hotel, which operated from 1879 to 1918.

It was one of four original train station stops in Plainfield's then-bustling turn-of-the-century business and shopping district. Two of the stops closed in the 1950s and '60s and the 1892-era Netherwood stop also was set to close. But those plans were scrapped because of "the efforts of the Friends of Sleepy Hollow to preserve the station based on its vintage presence and high ridership," says Jacques Howard, assistant director of economic development for Plainfield.

The Netherwood station was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984 and underwent a \$1.6 million renovation in 1998. According to NJ Transit spokeswoman Nancy Snyder, Netherwood is just one of eight stations within NJT's system-wide pool of 164 rail stops that is located in a district (or an attraction, as in the case of Monmouth Park).

The Netherwood district encompasses 99 homes and has its own neighborhood association, newsletter (Netherwood Heights Neighbors) and a website (netherwoodheights.com) on which you can buy an official "Netherwood Heights" T-shirt, a must-have bit of iconic Jersey memorabilia.

— Susan Bloom

