

HYDE PARK, WOODLAWN, SOUTH SHORE

Why Are Teddy Bears Taking Over This South Side Neighborhood? 'Bear Walk' Connects Neighbors During Social Distancing

Teddy bears, Chicago bears, dogs with bears — get out for a walk in Jackson Park Highlands this week to see dozens of stuffed bears in residents' windows.

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Maxwell Evans

SOUTH SHORE — If you've been seeing teddy bears in windows while taking a much-needed walk around the neighborhood in recent days, you aren't going completely crazy.

With kids home from school and many parents either out of work or stuck at home because of coronavirus, Jackson Park Highlands residents decided to come up with a game to keep antsy children entertained — a bear walk.



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The “biggest bear in the Highlands” at 6825 S. Constance Ave.

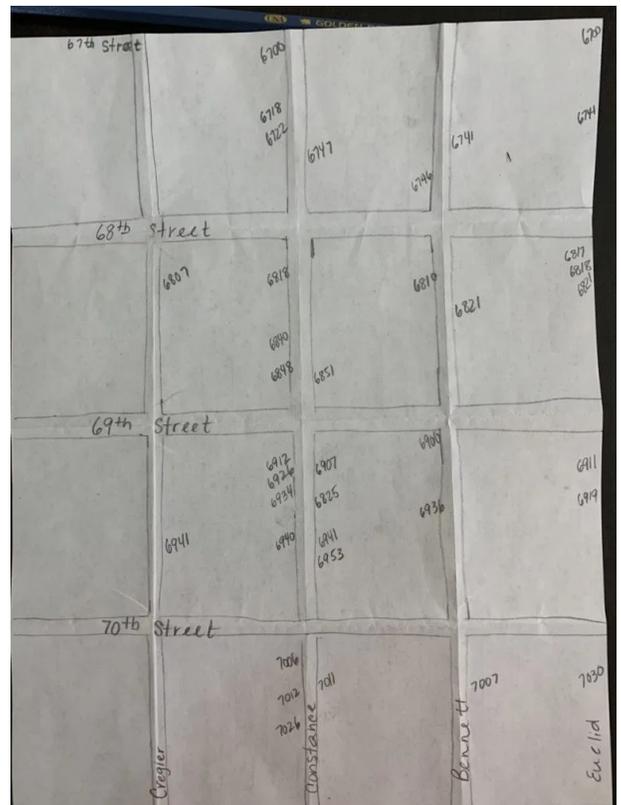
Highlands resident Anne Miles got the idea from Hyde Park’s Good Neighbors online community, which has organized nearly 200 residents to place bears, squids and Berts and Ernies in their windows in recent days.

Miles said spotting the teddy bears and other items in windows entertains kids who might otherwise find walks with their parents “boring,” but older residents have enjoyed it during their daily dog walks as well.

“I thought that was such a cute idea, so I posted a story on the Jackson Park Highlands listserv,” Miles said. “So far about 40 families have put different animals in the window.”

Miles doesn’t have a bear, so she put a toy dragon in her window instead. Some neighbors even made maps and kept logs of participating houses in the neighborhood.

The bear walk “makes you feel like you can do something positive for your



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A neighbor’s hand-drawn map of participating houses as of March 23.

neighborhood,” Miles said. “In a time of self isolation, you can still be part of a community.”

Miles, an elder law attorney, said it’s important to stay connected to one another despite social distancing — particularly for seniors, who may be unable to get out for a bear walk.

“As this [pandemic] gets longer, it’s going to be harder on people. People must reach out and not only text, but actually call,” Miles said. “Many older people need to hear the sound of someones voice.”



Kids pose with their maps during the Jackson Park Highlands’ bear walk March 23.

ANNE MILES

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