

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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DOWJONES

VOL. C NO. 109

CE/HL ★★★

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1997

INTERNET ADDRESS: <http://wsj.com>

*** 75 CENTS

That Nice Facade May Hide a Surprise

By NEAL TEMPLIN

Staff Reporters of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ARLINGTON, VA.— The addition to this leafy Washington, D.C. suburb that sprang up last year looked like an attractive, block-long row of brick townhouses. But nobody lives in them.

That's because what appears to be a collection of classic 19th century walk-ups is actually the facade of a 68,000-square-foot self-storage facility, Storage USA, a Memphis, Tenn. real estate investment trust, built in a way to appease people who were mortified to discover such a facility was being built in their community.

Neighbors were "scared to death," says Joseph Rahner, past president of a local homeowners group. "Everybody had the same impression of what a self-storage facility would look like."

Indeed, hung with bleak metal doors and surrounded by chain-link fences and barbed wire, traditional self-storage facilities often don't make inviting

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Self-storage facilities in Charlotte, N.C., (top) and Arlington, Va.



In addition to heading off neighborhood opposition, such architectural niceties help facilities stand out in an increasingly competitive business. During the past five years, as Americans have become increasingly mobile and affluent, the number of self-storage facilities has increased.

Residents of the surrounding neighborhood where brick row houses sell for \$100,000 kept a close eye on the project. "I've never ended up with a self-storage facility."

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"Chicago-based Lock Up Development Corp., for instance, recently constructed a Lake Forest, Ill. facility that looks like a glass-and-stucco office building and offers carpeted floors and air conditioning in all its units."

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it had been a typical self-storage facility. "It would have been horrible, especially there," says resident Jody Mayer.

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