

WHERE to RETIRE

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America's 100 Best MasterPlanned Communities

article written by Mary Lu Abbott

Do you want to retire to a quiet haven in the woods, or a walkable neighborhood within a city? Do you prefer a small community or a large one with a collection of neighborhoods, clubhouses and amenity centers? Do you have a tight housing budget or is the sky the limit?

Within our 2007 selection of America's 100 Best MasterPlanned Communities, you will find a great diversity, in places from Florida to Washington, Massachusetts to California and Wisconsin to Texas.

For all their variety, though, these communities share a commonality: a neighborly ambience that many residents say they had found lacking where they lived and worked many years previously. Residents say they feel a "true sense of community" in their new homes.

At Shorewood Glen by Del Webb in Shorewood, IL, Cathy and Dennis Schley, both 61, feel revitalized by all their new friendships and activities in the community, Cathy says. "I've never been so happy," she says, adding that her husband feels the same.

Tom and Pat Griffin, both 64, relocated from Troy, NY, to Coquina Crossing in Elkton, FL. "It's a real neighborhood. You know the people who live on your street and there's a lot of interaction," Tom says.

Besides a joie de vivre throughout, there are some other common threads among the selection, some trends that are new and others that have grown stronger since we saw them beginning in 2005, when we last published our 100 Best selections.

Even pooches get recognition now

The latest amenity: dog parks. A number of communities now cater to owners of pooches, with enclosed parks where residents can take their dogs and let them run free. While dogs play, the residents socialize.

Spas are enhancing fitness facilities

With working baby boomers fueling a tremendous growth in day spas, communities are looking to keep those people happy as they become buyers. Though the number is small, more communities have added full spa facilities and this trend is likely to grow bigger as empty nesters relocate. Instead of a full spa, some communities have a massage room in fitness facilities so that a therapist can be scheduled as desired.

Communities are getting greener

Communities are more dedicated to preserving the natural beauty and habitat of the land, with green spaces going far beyond golf courses. Many neighborhoods are nature-oriented, setting aside preserves and wetlands and creating parks and trails to enjoy the habitat. Some developments are reserving half or more of their land as open space. And there are green homes. Leading the way, Florida has several certified green communities that are ecofriendly and have homes that meet or surpass greenbuilding standards.

These places are made for walking

Nearly every community has walking and biking trails, some with more than 20 miles to explore. Sidewalks are common, particularly in the growing number of new urbanism neighborhoods with homes that have front porches and small yards. “You sit on the porch and chat with people as they walk by,” says Dianne Schirtzinger, 59, who relocated with her husband, Jim, 61, to Baldwin Park, a city neighborhood in Orlando.

Additionally, more communities have town centers, reminiscent of yesteryear’s small towns, where people can walk from their neighborhoods to a theater, bistro, coffee bar, post office and the clubhouse and amenity facilities. Amphitheaters and plazas are the settings for outdoor entertainment.

In our 2007 selection, 31 states are represented, going far beyond the Sun Belt to include places in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, and Wyoming. While our list has many places that have repeatedly been in the 100, this time we have about 30 newcomers. We have communities built by major names in the homebuilding industry and ones developed by families who have been stewards of the land for several generations, slowly creating their dream place to live.

We do have a few caveats: Home prices are subject to constant change. We give the range of base housing prices, but these likely will rise. Also, some lots command premiums, thus increasing the base prices noted.

Quechee Lakes, Quechee, Vermont



The lure: Built around a historic village, Quechee Lakes is a rare find in New England: a large community with lots of green space. It’s in a bucolic setting, yet convenient to Boston and New York City and only a few miles from the charming town of Woodstock. A popular secondhome community, it has sports for all seasons, from flyfishing in the summer to skiing on a private mountain and crosscountry trails in winter. It offers two golf courses, and the clubhouse recently had major renovations, including expansion of the fitness area. A new section of singlefamily homes with shared common areas is planned. Nearby, Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH, offers numerous programs and events.

What residents say: “It has everything—a clubhouse, skiing, golf, tennis,” says June Gubb, who is in her 70s and now a widow. The community even has polo matches, which she says her late husband enjoyed. The couple found Quechee Lakes when they were looking for a place close to the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, about 15 miles east.

Prices: \$460,000-\$1.5 million for attached townhomes and singlefamily homes. Status: 1,350 homes sold of 2,150 planned on 5,200 acres. Age Restricted: No Information: Quechee Lakes Development Co., 176 Waterman Hill Road, PO Box 600, Quechee, VT 05059, (888)5922224 or www.quecheelakes.com .

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