



Brunswick County's 47 miles of seashore offer the chance to feed gulls, find shells, surf fish, build sand-castles or bask in the warm sun.

Photo by
NC Travel and Tourism Division

RETIREES LIKE WHAT THEY FIND

Home, Sweet Home By The Tee Or By The Sea

BY SUSAN USHER

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Almost 10 years have passed but David Harper hasn't forgotten the winter day in Syracuse, N.Y., when he slipped and fell in the ice and snow of his driveway, luckily avoiding serious injury.

"That's why we're getting out of here," he recalls thinking at the time. Today he and his wife, Marjorie, are happily settled into a home and a new way of life at Brierwood Estates in Shallotte...

The lakefront lot was theirs, the house plans drawn. But when the reality of retirement struck home, Flo and David Gibson of Charlotte knew the location wasn't right, their thoughts were turning instead to their beloved Holden Beach. They followed their hearts and today Flo says, "We plan to stay..."

North Carolinians like the Gibsons make up a large chunk (30 percent according to one 1990 study) of the retirees flocking to Brunswick County, as far south as you can go and remain in the Tar Heel state.

Joining them in ever-increasing numbers are couples like the Harpers, urban and suburban snowbirds fleeing harsh, northern

winters for the year-round comforts and charms of coastal Carolina.

Seniors age 65 and older represent the fastest-growing segment of the United State's population—one in every nine of us. Many are finding the Tar Heel state to their liking, making North Carolina and Florida, by 1980, the two most popular destinations in the eastern Sunbelt.

Brunswick County is the second-fastest growing of North Carolina's 100 counties. The dramatic numbers show that the elderly—because of the area's growing popularity with retirees, increased life expectancies and such—account for a major part of that change. From 1980 to 1990, the "silver" ages 65 and older increased by 94 percent to 7,457—or one in almost every 15 residents. Only the 25-34 age group is larger, the last of the "Baby Boomers." The median age of Brunswick County's 1990 population of 50,985 people is 37.1 years, compared to 33.1 for the state as a whole.

They come—from across North Carolina, the Northeast, Virginia, Maryland, the Great Lakes region, the Northeast. But why Brunswick County and why the South Brunswick Islands?

"A lot of our retirees are from Ohio and the Midwest," says Evelyn Madison, a Realtor at Ocean Isle Beach. "We're halfway between Florida and home; they can still get back to their families."

Most of the retirees the Ocean Isle Beach Realtor works with are in their early to middle 60s, still in good health, energetic, and looking for a retirement spot that offers plenty of recreational opportunities, a comfortable climate. A good number of are couples who first vacationed at a local beach with their families and came to know and love the area. More often than not they want to live, not on the island where the typical purchase these days is a rental property for investment purposes, but on the mainland near the beach and perhaps at or near a golf course.

"This location is so attractive," said Madison. "It's still unspoiled and natural and to them the pace seems slow compared to what they're accustomed to. They prefer this area to the more developed Myrtle Beach community. "They love the golf courses and the quiet life here," she said, "but appreciate the closeness."

Pati Lewellyn hears similar comments

from clients at her family's construction and realty businesses in Calabash.

Regardless of the homes they're seeking, she says, "after you talk to people for a while we find that many of the retirees we see were born in small towns that have changed over the years. They see Calabash and they are reminded of that. They like the quaintness, and the water's a big draw, as are the golf courses. But it's the small-town atmosphere they like."

For those who miss certain aspects of city life, proximity to Myrtle Beach, Wilmington and Charleston is close enough "they can get those big-city things in a hurry without living in the middle of it," said Lewellyn.

Along with a choice of residential communities that feature condos, patio homes, modular homes and larger single-family homes, Madison and Lewellyn agree that a mild "four seasons" climate, a more pristine natural environment, the quieter lifestyle, availability of medical care, proximity to shopping areas, lower property tax rates and lower overall cost of living all contribute to the area's growing attractiveness to retirees.

A warm reception helps, too.

"They like us because we are so friendly and nice," said Lewellyn.