

Retire in the Wiregrass? They did

Lance Griffin

lgriffin@dothaneagle.com

Sunday, July 23, 2006

People retire to Florida because it has everything their towns didn't - warm weather year-round, tropical ocean breezes and beautiful scenery.

Ray and Carol Morrison loved those things, and it appeared the couple would retire where they lived for most of their lives, in Lake County, Fla., near Orlando.

But the Morrisons said Lake County isn't the same. They used to be able to look out their front door and see beautiful citrus groves, postcard shots that took their breath away.

Now they see rooftops.

"It used to be a sleepy little town ... but the area is just getting so crowded," Mr. Morrison said.

So when the couple recently retired from the Lake County Sheriff's Department, they started looking to settle elsewhere, and decided on Dothan.

The Morrisons have no relatives living here or any other ties to Dothan. They said they decided to retire here because they "just liked the area."

"We came and visited several times and every time we came we liked it even more," Mr. Morrison said. "Every time we went to a restaurant or store, all the people were so nice. Even just standing in line at places, people would talk to you and be very nice.

"Where we were, more people just seemed to be in such a hurry all the time and some of them were just rude," he added.

The Morrisons are part of a mini-trend. While a steady stream of retirees continue to locate in Florida, some are deciding to settle elsewhere, and Dothan has been a destination.

A survey of local realtors indicates a steady interest from Florida residents in Dothan.

"We were having lunch the other day with about six other realtors and the subject happened to come up," said Phyllis Dubose, a realtor with Coldwell Banker/Alfred Saliba Realty. "Every one of them said they had dealt with several Florida residents about relocating here."

It's a trend that hasn't gone unnoticed by the Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce. According to numbers gathered by the Chamber, an average of 1,890 people migrate to Florida each day. However, 945 move away.

"It is the 945 persons leaving that is creating more opportunities to the Dothan market," said Chamber president Matt Parker.

Why Dothan? Parker said there are several reasons.

n Cost of living. Statistics indicate Dothan's overall cost of living is 13.8 percent below the national average. Health care costs are more than 20 percent below the national average. Despite recent increases in property values, housing costs in Dothan remain 18 percent below the national average. Other categories including utilities, goods and services, groceries and transportation also fall below the national average. Most of those categories rise above the national average in Florida.

n Hurricanes/property insurance. Back-to-back devastating hurricane seasons have destroyed thousands of homes, done billions of dollars in damage and sent property insurance skyrocketing. Dothan isn't immune from the effects of a hurricane, but being more than 90 miles inland reduces risk and keeps insurance rates low.

n Pace. Dothan is growing, but nowhere near the rate of Florida. Trips to the mall or grocery store don't have to be all-day affairs.

Parker said Dothan is benefitting from more than retirees. He said fire hose manufacturer KFH, which recently announced a location in Dothan that will employ 200, will eventually move its head quarters from Miami to Dothan.

"With a project like this we get the owners and key technical team relocating to our community," Parker said.

This story can be found at:

http://www.dothaneagle.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=DEA/MGArticle/DEA_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149189324436&path=!news

[Go Back](#)