



# WESTERN NC — A Place to Call Home, Again

BY GEORGIE RHEIN

## Winding up the mountain roads

into Asheville, the cool air and forest scents invigorate your spirit making you feel alive. This is just one of the many reasons that seniors are attracted to Western North Carolina. An area resident for several years, Carl Sandburg loved the expansive feeling of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He often sat outside upon a large stone ledge writing late into the evening.

The spirit of Asheville remains vibrant in the growing city that flourishes from its strategic location at the intersections of I-40 and I-26 freeways, which service the tri-state surrounding area. Asheville has achieved a multi-cultural status as new residents come from across the country for work opportunities, and retiring couples relocate as they downsize.

Retirees who prefer seasonal changes love this region – the trees are magnificent in October! Yet, winter is moderate with thirteen inches of snow, and summer is divine since the forest is ten degrees cooler than the foothills. Over a dozen golf courses draw active retirees who want to play championship courses like the one at the Biltmore Estates or Champion Hills Club in Hendersonville.

Asheville is highly rated as a ‘top city’ for people who enjoy an outdoor lifestyle. Camping, boating and cycling are popular activities since the city is surrounded by mountains and the Pisgah Forest where boomers can take their grandchildren fishing, riding historic trails and cooking over a campfire.

Downtown Asheville is always bustling with something to do. From events at the Biltmore Estates to a self-guided tour inside the historic St. Lawrence Basilica, active seniors just need to check [www.exploreasheville.com](http://www.exploreasheville.com) for a current list of activities. Retirees often head down to the Asheville Community Theater, North Carolina Stage Company, or Diana Wortham Theater for a play, a symphony or a modern dance performance. One new retirement housing trend is living in a downtown loft so couples can simply walk to cultural events and enjoy city life.

A new downtown ambience has emerged at stores like the Captain’s Bookshelf where shoppers find rare books and photographs or Laurey’s – an eclectic Asheville café and caterer famous for gourmet comfort foods. One older Floridian, gazing out the window at the passersby on Lexington Avenue called the city charming. “I wish I lived here – it’s so unique.”



Last year *Forbes* magazine designated Asheville as one of ‘America’s Smartest Cities’ because thirty-two percent of the city’s population has a college education – largely due to the influx of professional baby boomers choosing the city for retirement. Of course, advanced education is a high priority with eight colleges and universities in the surrounding area.

The University of North Carolina Asheville is a major educational force that includes the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in its academic curriculum so adults can take noncredit courses for the simple pleasure of learning. Each October the institute conducts a membership survey to calculate the needs of seniors, and offers specific area support for retirement options and long-term planning.

One of its most popular offerings is a retirement workshop where attendees learn about CCRCs (Continuing Care Retirement Centers) that provide independent and assisted living. It includes a field trip to visit and tour the range of senior living options around Asheville. The Institute has volunteers and staff that work with relocating seniors to help them design the lifestyle they wish whether it’s volunteering at the local library, doing social media for a senior center or kayaking down the Broad River.

Special Interest Groups for needlepoint, playing bridge or learning a new language meet weekly at the Reuter Center on the University campus. Over four hundred OLLI members volunteer to teach senior classes, mentor college students, serve on committees or run research projects.

After seven years of surveying members, the Center Director, Catherine Frank, is impressed by the active involvement of the membership. “Over sixty percent of our Asheville members have Masters Degrees so they >>



want to make a contribution to lifelong learning. Our center is also more active physically – seventy-five percent exercise daily compared to the national average of twenty-five percent.”

Frank explained the trends for new area businesses to serve the senior population. “We are currently speaking with a construction firm that integrates features into the home design so rails in the bathroom are not conspicuous add-ons, and smart features include energy-saving and safety responsive lighting.”

Another trend is for in-home care as families work to keep seniors in their own home environment as long as possible. A recent demand in short-term care, for six-eight weeks, focuses on recovery after hip or knee replacement surgery. Seniors Helping Seniors is one business exemplifying this short-term care. Helpers do shopping, cooking and light housekeeping as well as driving clients to doctors’ appointments. One client remarked that she felt more like she was getting a little help from a friend. “We stayed in touch after I recovered,” she explained.

One of the CCRCs available to seniors, Deerfield Episcopal Retirement Community, has served the Western North Carolina region for sixty years. The recognition of this anniversary has begun as the center initiates Deerfield Decades, a monthly program to highlight the memories and photos of residents and staff over the years. On October 11th the center plans an internal celebration to mark this milestone of service to seniors.

Housing options at Deerfield range from spacious one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments to small villas where independent living allows an active lifestyle of exercise in the morning and dance classes in the afternoon. The buildings are architecturally designed to adapt to senior mobility so detailed consideration is given to each resident’s quality of life. Features range from wide covered walkways to new keyless entries using a small bracelet disc rather than locks and keys. This ergonomic system works at every level of care insuring resident safety.

“The average age of those planning ahead and joining our Future Resident Program is seventy-four years old,” explained Kathy Foster, Marketing Director for Deerfield. “Our resident life coordinator works with resident committees to provide a calendar of events that reflects residents’ desired activities and programs.” In addition to regularly scheduled programs, there are over twenty-five resident-led clubs and groups. Deerfield is currently partnering with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNC-Asheville to bring classes onto Deerfield’s campus as well as provide transportation to the university campus.

These active retirees want to volunteer, participate in clubs and pursue their passions and interests. The

Deerfield walking/hiking trail system, which was developed by residents, connects to the Blue Ridge Parkway and the statewide Mountains-to-Sea Trail. On sunny afternoons the grounds are busy at the croquet court as players compete wearing their traditional whites.

All services are easily accessed under one roof as Deerfield captures the arts and crafts architectural style that defines Asheville. Residents can go to the Fitness Center and state-of-the-art Aquatics Center for exercise, or join friends to enjoy a relaxing spa day at the Riverwalk Spa.

Amenities such as Deerfield’s dining choices play an important role in resident socialization. The Bistro serves as the main dining venue where cuisine, which rivals fine restaurants, is shared with fellow residents. When family comes to visit, residents often use the Canterbury, a formal dining area with table services or the Galax, a private dining room where residents can enjoy an intimate meal or reserve it for a committee luncheon.

One of the popular dining spots is the Riverwalk Café offering healthy food choices in a casual environment, including an outdoor terrace dining area where residents can relax after exercising. In the mornings, folks stop by for coffee and to use the free Wi-Fi access. A favorite afternoon gathering place is Cannon’s Corner beverage lounge, located near the Canterbury room.

The MAHEC Medical Clinic is the on-site medical office where physicians and a nurse practitioner keep office hours for residents. When a higher level of care is needed, Deerfield’s Lifecare plan provides assisted living and skilled healthcare. Residents can also receive support short-term then return to independent living. A great example of Deerfield’s total care is their Person-Centered Care for dementia and Alzheimer’s care. Residents needing memory support reside within skilled nursing facilities where trained caregivers work to maintain normalcy in daily life skills.

Located one hour north of Asheville is another housing option for seniors. The Mars Hill Retirement Community was developed by Justus M. Ammons, a Mars Hill native whose family has managed retirement communities and family subdivisions across the Carolinas. The senior complex is part of the Mars Hill University so residents enjoy the educational opportunities and amenities of living on a university campus.

Mars Hill’s spacious apartment designs set a high standard in assisted living. Apartments range from studios to two bedrooms with floor plans that are as ‘residential’ as possible. The community is managed by a wellness model encouraging resident input and participation. Mars Hill is licensed as an Assisted Living Community so it provides assistance with acts of daily living such as daily meds and housekeeping.

After choosing the ideal home, seniors turn to health care as the next priority. While Asheville is a young city with the average age of forty, the highest growing age >>



group is over sixty-five and represents eighteen percent of the 75,000 total population. The major healthcare system in Western North Carolina, Mission Health, recognizes this statistic and as baby boomers face physical problems, Mission Health provides clinical services devoted to aging health issues. The Asheville Specialty Hospital allows extended stays to cope with complex health problems that require monitoring.

With a staff of five, Dr. Annette Beyea, Geriatric Clinical Services Director, coordinates Senior Services to create classes and collaborative services in order to address issues such as balance, senior nutrition and mental agility. The nurses work with families to design care plans for aging parents, and connect them to local senior resources.

A leading support agency managing the challenges of growing older is the Council on Aging of Buncombe County. Families come to COA to get referrals and

advice for their grandparents. The council maintains a complete senior services directory with listings and phone numbers of every business or non-profit service for seniors. Whether it's learning about Medicare or looking for services to help stay healthy and independent, the Council has volunteers and staff to lend a helping hand. Two of their most popular programs are Call a Ride and Minor Home Repair for seniors who live alone and need occasional assistance.

Just like other loyal Asheville natives, Wilma Dykeman, a noted writer, spoke fondly of her mountain surroundings. "This is my home, no matter where else I might be. The streams and rocks are the fifteen acres of my childhood imagination and discovery," Dykeman admitted in a 1991 *Asheville Citizen-Times* article.

Come explore Western North Carolina to create your retirement memories. The region's spirit will make you feel young again! []

## RESOURCES FOR SENIORS IN WESTERN NC

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP): 601 E St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20049, 202-434-2277

Asheville Parks & Recreation Senior Programs: Asheville City Hall, Fourth Floor, 70 Court Plaza, Asheville NC 28801, 828-259-5800

Blue Ridge Center for Lifelong Learning: 180 West Campus Drive, Flat Rock, North Carolina 28731, 828-6941740

Buncombe County Department of Social Services: 40 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801, 828-250-5500

Council On Aging For Henderson County : 304 Chadwick Ave., Hendersonville, NC 28792, 828-692-4203

Henderson County Department of Social Services: 1200 Spartanburg Highway, #300, Hendersonville, NC 28792, 828-697-5500

Land of Sky Regional Council Agency On Aging: 339 New Leicester Highway, Asheville, NC 28806, 828-251-6622

Meals On Wheels Of Asheville & Buncombe County: 146 Victoria Road, Asheville NC 28801, 828-253-5286

Opportunity House: A center for senior citizens in the Hendersonville area. 1411 Asheville Hwy., Hendersonville, NC 28791, 828-692-0575

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNC Asheville: Reuter Center, One University Heights, Asheville, NC 28804, 828-251-6140

Senior Friendships of Hendersonville: P.O. Box 2828 Hendersonville, NC 28793

Senior Fun Bunch: A Hendersonville based social club for 50+ single men and women. 828-669-8180

Willow Creek Medical Transportation: 24/7 transportation to doctors, hospitals and clinics. Serving all of Western North Carolina. 828-301-7651





## AREA MAP

