

Real Estate eNews

Baby Boomers Seeking Smaller Gems In Retirement

Smaller homes with specialty features are looking more attractive to baby boomers that plan to retire in the next decade. Life expectancy in the United States has continued to rise, and living well into one's 80's and beyond is no longer the rarity it once was. With that fact in mind, retirees are looking for ways to stretch their assets and ways to make sure they don't outlive their savings.



As a result, those 55 and older are looking more closely than ever at value and cost when considering their next move – whether they are considering a single-family home, condo or retirement community. Boomers are reducing their home size to lessen not only their work load but their utility bills. Many are making due with fewer upscale amenities and prefer homes that are designed and constructed to be energy efficient and low-maintenance.



Many of the features that are important to older buyers fall into the category of universal design – the concept of creating products and facilities that are accessible to the widest range of users possible, taking into account a variety of abilities and disabilities. For those 55 and older, some of these features include a first floor bedroom, first floor washer and dryer, wider hallways and accessible fixtures and counters.

Other amenities that are attractive to this group of buyers include: extra storage space; easy-to-open windows; porch or patio; an attached garage. Other features of interest to boomers include bathrooms equipped with grab bars or other adaptive devices; a zero-grade or no-step entrance to the shower; wider doorways and non-slip flooring.

Options that retirement-age buyers report they can live without include: island work areas in the kitchen; separate showers or private toilet compartments; sun rooms; exercise rooms and wood-burning fireplaces.



It has long been the case that homeowners often decide to head for warmer climates as they get older. In fact, approximately 40 percent of baby boomers suggest they plan to move south or southwest at some point in their life. Their destinations have changed with fluctuating real estate prices. Recently, North and South Carolina have been the preferred destination, but as real estate prices have dipped in Florida, Arizona and Nevada, price has driven some buyers back to these states. Weather and price considerations have also led some retirees to take a closer look at Texas and Tennessee.

When checking out retirement communities, baby boomers are taking other factors into consideration, such as property tax rates. Some communities seeking to attract or retain this segment of the population have begun to offer partial tax freezes to older residents to make the communities more affordable.



Employment prospects also play a role when homeowners consider relocation, because many retirees don't really plan to retire at all. A recent Del Webb survey indicated as many as 75 percent of baby boomers expect to continue to work at least part time. For these workers, a smaller home with fewer bedrooms but a

home office is attractive. Good transportation options and reasonable employment opportunities are also important.

Where a golf-course community was once considered the ultimate in retirement living, fewer baby boomers are interested in a view of the fifth fairway. Instead, they rank living closer to quality health care facilities as a higher priority. Access to fitness and recreation centers, as well as lifelong learning opportunities are also highly rated options. For many boomers, in fact, college and university towns are high on the list because of the educational and cultural offerings that are available in these cities.