A Place to Call Home

Hood River

“Coming up Highway 35 out of town you can see the mountain pretty much to whole way. Turn onto Whiskey Creek Drive and its lined with trees that are all intertwined above you, then you run right into Thompson Orchard land,” said Lynn Moore, the family representative of Pine Crest, a sixteen-plot site her fifth-generation Hood River family is developing. “You wind up the property through oak, pine and fir trees. Right now, in the open spaces, the little belly button flowers and balsamic root out. It’s so pretty with all the wildflowers.”

How long does that scenic drive take? “Oh, the property is about six minutes from downtown Hood River,” said Moore, whose father had the foresight to re-zone the family acreage from agricultural to residential in the 1970s. As a result, this swatch of rolling hillside in eastern Hood River is one of the only developments that will ever be built amid the surrounding farms, many of which are run by other multigeneration Hood River families.

“I didn’t get very far,” said Moore with a laugh as she pulled a popsicle out of the freezer to give to her granddaughter. “I married the neighbor and moved up the road to Moore Orchard about three miles away. My sister lives where my parents lived before my dad bought a cattle ranch and moved to Wyoming.”

Each of Moore’s three grown children, all boys, have found their way back to Hood River and the family business. The Moores’ eldest “pretty much runs the orchard,” she said. “Then we have a packing house where we pack our fruit and other people’s fruit, so the middle son took that over. And our youngest, who went off to Iraq, has come back and he does all the work on the houses and is learning to run the packing line.”

The Moores are a typical Hood River family, the type of folks who are drawn to the natural beauty of the area and are moving here with frequency. While the town’s population is still under 8,000, there has been a 30 percent growth in residents since the year 2000.

“The town has really grown up, so to speak,” said broker Joe Reitzug.

“With the tech industry growth, and the built-in flexibility of that industry, people can telecommute or commute to downtown Portland in an hour if they need to,” he noted. “It’s a pretty young community as well—young professionals and families who want the smaller town feel.”

When Hertzig talks to clients and friends about Hood River, the thing he emphasizes most is the lifestyle. “You’re here for the lifestyle,” said Hertzig. “As laid back as Portland is, Hood River is even more laid back. It makes it a very appealing location for people who either want a second home, are thinking about retirement, or want a place to call home right now.”

He also believes that the town is just beginning to gain momentum.

“We used to wave at everybody on the road,” said Moore. “Now you hardly see anybody you know but it’s been a good change because the people who have moved in or are visiting, they’re real health conscious. They like to be active.”

It’s as if someone swooped up all the outdoor adventure-friendly topography in the Northwest and tossed it in Hood River County. Located at low elevation on the banks of the Columbia River, the town itself is a Mecca for wind and kite surfers because of a special current not found elsewhere in The Gorge—or much of anywhere, for that matter. From downtown Hood River, it’s only a forty-minute drive to Mt. Hood, where skiing and limitless forest recreation await. Because of the mild climate, it’s possible to ski, surf and bag another sport—think fly-fishing, hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding—in the same day.

Moore said the downtown area “really got cleaned up over the last decade and there are more fun shops and good restaurants to cater to the tourists. Ooh, and we’ve got so many wineries and breweries now.”

Hood River’s location on the eastern tipping point of the Cascades makes for an annual rainfall percentage that is much lower than that of the Willamette Valley. Still, the land is fertile. Farm stands open in June with blueberries and peaches and close when the last of the pears and apples have been picked in November. It’s tough to tell which is more fun: a day outdoors working up an appetite or sitting down to refuel.

At Pine Crest, the local ethos of veneration for the great outdoors is key to its design. Including the onsite Thompson Orchard, run by Moore’s brother, 40 percent of development’s land will remain as green space so residents can enjoy privacy from their home sites and experience the natural wonders around them on foot.

“Deer pass through daily and I have even seen a bald eagle flying with the mountain in the backdrop,” said Moore. “I don’t think there is anything that nature doesn’t provide us in Hood River.”

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