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NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

## A Small-Town Feel in an Urban Locale

By BILLIE COHEN

AFTER spending several years in the South, Darrell Wallace and Jennifer Adkins of Greensboro, N.C., decided it was time to move. “We’re both artistic and politically active, and it was really hard to find peers into the same thing in Greensboro,” said Mr. Wallace, 30.

The couple chose to relocate to Portland, Ore., last spring because of “how beautiful it is, and how much the people respect the beauty and put forth an effort to maintain it,” he said.

Mr. Wallace and Ms. Adkins are not the only ones impressed with the city. Last year, there were twice as many people in the 25-to-39 age group moving into the city as leaving, according to Charles Rynerson, a demographer with the Population Research Center at Portland State University.

In all, 23,454 young adults moved in, while only 12,125 moved away, giving the city the fourth highest net migration in the country, after Las Vegas, Charlotte and Atlanta, Mr. Rynerson said. And in the over-55 age group around 12,000 individuals moved to the city.

Part of the draw is that Portland has maintained a small-town feel in an urban atmosphere. There is a vibrant restaurant and cultural scene, accessible public transportation — light rail, street cars and buses — and a population enthusiastic about the outdoors and the environment. Mount Hood is an hour east of the city and the Pacific Ocean is an hour and a half west.

Although the Portland region is home to high-tech companies, like Intel and [Hewlett-Packard](#), along with athletic apparel companies, like [Nike](#) and Adidas, individuals often move to Portland for reasons other than work.

“If you really wanted to get rich, you might choose a different metropolitan area,” Mr. Rynerson said. “There are other places with more job growth and higher salaries, but the quality of life is what people come here for.”

Another draw is the affordable rental market. After exploring several neighborhoods, Mr. Wallace, an information technology professional, and Ms. Adkins, 26, chose Portland’s Southeast section, a popular neighborhood for young people. “It is cozy, self-contained, functional and quiet but still has plenty of stuff to do,” Mr. Wallace said.

The couple rent a studio for \$595 a month. What they pay is typical for Portland. According to the Metro Multifamily Housing Association, which represents residential property-managers, the average rental price for a studio in the Southeast section is \$525, while a two-bedroom apartment leases for \$724. In the Northwest area, which includes the trendy Pearl District, studio rentals average \$571 and two-bedrooms cost about \$971.

“In Portland, people are either Eastside people or Westside people,” said Charles Turner, a broker with of Prudential Northwest Properties, referring to the geographical wall formed by the Willamette River. “If you want to

be on the Westside, your price range will start a little higher and you're going to have trees and bigger lots."

Buying options are comparatively affordable, as well. While the rest of the country has seen housing prices boom and now fall, Portland has remained reasonably stable.

According to the Regional Multiple Listings Service for Oregon, the average sale price for a condominium in September was \$257,200, up from \$246,800 in 2006. The median price of a single-family detached home was \$308,003, compared with \$380,200 in the Seattle-Tacoma area, \$595,200 in [San Diego](#) and \$748,100 in the San Francisco Bay area, according to Portland State University's Center for Real Estate.

Barnaby Willett, 34, who moved to Portland from [Manhattan](#), found the prices so attractive that he decided to forgo his original plan to rent when he first moved to the city in 2006. "I visited my brother in late 2005, and he lived in Belmont," said Mr. Willett, an information consultant. "I liked it off the bat. I've always enjoyed feeling connected to where I live, but it was harder to do that in New York."

He said it was easy to meet people in Portland and noted that artistic expression seemed to permeate the culture. Last March, Mr. Willett bought an 865-square-foot condo in the Southeast area for \$320,000.

Young people are not the only ones drawn to Portland. Richard Caplan, a broker with the Windermere Cronin & Caplan Realty Group, said that his agents recently have seen a lot of retirees moving to the Northwest district neighborhoods.

Though the city is "not strictly a retirement place," he said, "Portland allows them to be part of the larger community, not just the retirement segment."

Richard and Lila Suffoletto would agree. The couple, both in their mid-60s, had been living in an over-55 community in Sacramento, Calif., for three and a half years before buying a town house in the Northwest section last month. "Frankly, we were bored to tears," said Mr. Suffoletto, who retired from a career in medical and security equipment.

Jan and Juergen Striemer moved to the city after living for more than 40 years in [Los Angeles](#). The couple had become familiar with the area after visiting friends in Seattle and taking a road trip down the Oregon coast, a stretch of land that Mr. Striemer, 67, referred to as "one of the most gorgeous pieces of real estate anywhere on Earth." The Striemers paid \$550,000 for their contemporary house near the Pearl District. "In Los Angeles, it would've cost \$1.5 million to start," Mr. Striemer said.

Both he and his wife noted that Los Angeles had become too crowded, too polluted and, surprisingly, too sunny for them. "We never realized how much both of us had missed seasons and trees," said Mrs. Striemer, 57. "Who needs another beautiful day in paradise? Give me some weather."

From early-20th-century Craftsman-style houses to converted industrial buildings to environmentally conscious new developments, the diverse mix of housing appeals to both young and old. Two such examples are the Clinton Condominiums and the Belmont Street Lofts, mixed-use projects, developed by Randy Rapaport, where Mr. Willett bought. Mr. Rapaport said he wanted to create a development that embraced the Portland sensibility of low-impact living, clean design and community focus. "It's about the unwritten philosophy of Portland," he said, "that this is a do-it-yourself, local, sustainable community." His retail tenants include a yoga studio, a hair salon and a Malaysian

restaurant.

As the housing markets in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle remain high, Portland has become one of the few affordable urban options on the West Coast. Couple that with its natural beauty, its activist personality and its creative sensibility and the appeal is clear. “It’s very common that someone will visit a friend,” Mr. Rapaport said, “and then they’re moving here three months later.”

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