

The Union
August 12, 2002

Living the high life

'Quality of life' draws many, but what is it?

by Grace Karpa

Editor's note: When people are asked why they live in western Nevada County, they cite the "quality of life." But what does that mean? The Union decided to ask a variety of residents to find out.

We're in heaven.

Just ask Mary Elizabeth Young.

Ask a dozen or more Nevada County residents to elaborate on the "quality of life" here, and answers range from the celestial to the down-to-earth.

"I tell people I live in heaven," said Young, a 20-year resident of the county. "It's safe here. It's a great place to raise your kids. There's so much beauty and creativity. There are so many nice people who care about where we live."

Katie Neves, an Auburn resident and daughter of Farmer Bob, whose produce truck is a Brunswick basin business, agreed.

"There are no grumpy people up here," said Neves, whose parents followed her grandparents here from San Jose 17 years ago. "They're not all focused on money here." Less crime compels many to move here from the city, we hear.

But the random sampling of folks interviewed by The Union talked about rivers, lakes, trees and people.

"My husband always wanted a boat dock in his backyard," Jan Holloway said of her family's decision to move to Lake Wildwood from the Bay Area two years ago.

Greg Tyson and his wife, Penny, fled "the evils of Silicon Valley" for rural Rough and Ready three years ago after several visits. First, they explored eastern Washington and Colorado after they decided the Bay Area was "too crowded, (with) too many people fighting for space.

"Everybody's tense and stressed out all the time, and very few people know why. I think it has to do how packed people are there," Greg Tyson said.

Tyson said "it's definitely worth it to live up here" to commute to Sacramento for four 10-hour days.

"The joy has not diminished," Tyson said. "We hate going down there."

He's trying to convince a couple of friends to move up here, but visitors have been known to get spooked by the drive half a mile down a gravel road to the Tysons' house.

Meg Hughes - as in Hughes Road - stays here "because I think this is one of the most wonderful places to live in the world."

What makes it wonderful?

"The people. Whether it's to celebrate or to help, they're there," said Hughes, whose son is the seventh generation of his family to live here. "I haven't lived other places, so ..." she said, shrugging - or is it gloating? - "I don't know how people survive without their family nearby."

Well, maybe they run into old friends who had the same idea to move to the foothills, like 12-year-old Isaac Winters.

Three years ago, Isaac, whose family moved here from Sacramento, walked into his new classroom at Yuba River Charter School, and "there was Apollo on the other side of the room," he said about recognizing former classmate Apollo McDaniel, also 12.

Apollo's family had moved to Nevada County two years before the old classmates were reunited.

"I moved up here because I'd had pneumonia and because the air in Sacramento was bad for my lungs," Apollo said. "I got a lot better."

And Isaac found the natives to be friendly.

"It was hard for me to move from Sacramento up here, but I've met a lot of friends," he said.

Plus, the pair noted, "it's possible to get to Tahoe from here."

"I like it up here because I like skiing," Apollo said. "And it's far enough out in the country but close enough to bigger cities."

The "friendliness of the town and the look of the area" drew Frank Pfaffinger to Grass Valley.

"Well, it's changing," said Pfaffinger. "It's not the same as it was 16, 17 years ago when I moved up here from San Jose.

"When I moved up here, they hadn't allowed them to scalp all the trees near Pine Creek," Pfaffinger said about the once-controversial development of Pine Creek Shopping Center

on Freeman Road. "It's a nice little community still. There are still a lot of traditional American values. There's still a belief about being under God instead of throwing him out.

"You want a place where you can raise your kids, with a community and church, and clean air," Pfaffinger said of the still-strong lure of Nevada County.

For Theo Fitanides, a 17-year-old Nevada Union High School student, the quality of life can be clearly measured by "how often you get to go to the Yuba River."

And the weather's great, said Mohammed Waggie, 22, from Cape Town, South Africa. The pair work at Camp Augusta, Fitanides as a cook and Waggie as a counselor. They look forward to mountain biking when they're not working.

"The way I see it, it's beautiful," Waggie said of Nevada County.

For one Orange County transplant, "quality of life" means "not getting up in the morning and saying, 'I have to go to work.' It means when you get home you don't say, 'Look at where I live.' It's where you don't look down the street and think about your children and say 'Oh, no,'" said Linda Tune, who moved here from Orange County nine years ago. Here, people are friendly. "I walk down Mill Street and say hi to almost every merchant on every street," she said.

But it takes a while for the big city to wear off. At work in Nevada County, Tune said, she encounters newcomers' "big city paranoia," where "people have to read every word of a contract" for fear they'll be taken.

"It took me about a year before I stopped leaving home for a doctor's appointment an hour and a half ahead," Tune said. "Here, I got to the office in 15 minutes and then had to figure out what to do for the next hour and 15 minutes."

What is 'quality of life'?

"Slow pace; low crime; great weather; four seasons; no major traffic problems; respect for history, art and culture; good schools; a short commute to work; green trees; blue skies; rivers and lakes; and a great place to raise a family."

- Cathy Whittlesey, executive manager of the Nevada City Chamber of Commerce

"Crime rate always figures into quality of life. The rare homicide here doesn't impact most people's lives. Everyone has a chance to go home. The crimes that impact people's day-to-day life here are peace disturbances, loud parties, dogs that run at will and the occasional firearm discharge."

- Nevada County Sheriff Keith Royal.

"Local control of the water that originates in the northern rural counties is a key issue for the region's quality of life. It gives us the ability to enhance recreational opportunities, to

truly work to enhance natural and business environments."

- Maria Caudill, communications director for the Regional Council of Rural Counties.

"The indicators that make 'quality of life' concrete are a healthy economy, safe environment, access to health care, good schools and services, and employment opportunities. The assessment measures air quality, family violence, health service, housing, social and recreational, substance abuse, transportation and traffic, wages and work opportunities, and vocational training and career development. We're one of the smallest counties to do one of these, so we're pro-active in finding out what makes up our quality of life."

- Lori Burkart Frank, United Way of Nevada County Community Assessment Project Coordinator about the study , which was conducted in 1999 and 2001 and is planned again for next year.