

Retirees embrace all four seasons in Ontario

Winter activities, as well as summer, keep people here

BY SHELLY SANDERS GREER

In the three and a half years Louisa Burke has lived at Sophie's Landing in Orillia, she's enjoyed the sun and lake in the summer, skiing in the winter, and the shows at nearby Casino Rama all year-round.

"We came from Toronto," says Ms. Burke, who bought her 3,200-square-foot waterfront home with her husband, Gerry Jones. "We looked at different places up north, but my mother and kids live in Toronto, which is only an hour from Orillia. So it's close to family and there are things to do in Orillia all the time."

In the summer, Sophie's Landing residents appreciate their 1,500 feet of private Lake Simcoe waterfront, as well as the slips at their private marina, the floating gazebo in Smith's Bay, nature trails, swim docks and canoeing from their own canoe launch (sophieslanding.ca).

"I really like the entertainment at Casino Rama," says Ms. Burke. "So far, I've seen 35 great shows with people like Donna Summer and Dolly Parton."

Though many retirees spend a good portion of the winter south, more and more are embracing the cold, snowy season, taking up snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or skating. In response to this demand, developers are organizing activities and programs for every season of the year.

The opportunity to live on the shores of Lake Ontario, coupled with the activities offered throughout the year — swimming in the indoor pool, billiards and the theatre room — enticed Lorraine and Gary Hurst to purchase a condo at the Port of Newcastle three years ago.

"The location is handy to everything in town and there are things to do all year-round," Ms. Hurst says.

She and her husband also appreciate the indoor parking at their 1,170-sq.-ft. condo, as they don't fly south in the winter. And the couple likes their two-bedroom condo so much, that when they realized they needed a new home with on-site medical services, they went with Clarington Centre, a nearby retirement

community developed by the same company that was behind Port of Newcastle — the Kaitlin Group.

When completed in the next few weeks, Clarington Centre will be a three-storey building attached with a four-season underground passageway to the retirement home. This means residents such as the Hursts will be able to use all the services of the retirement home when desired. These include an exercise room, a hairdresser, meals in the dining room and 24-hour medical care. "My husband is disabled," explains Ms. Hurst. "At Clarington, we can use the facilities à la carte, on an as-needs basis."

At Red Leaves, for example, a massive new development on 1,400 acres in Muskoka, there will be year-round nature tours on the 700-acre nature reserve, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, kayaking, birdwatching, stargazing and owl watching. Amenities include a two-storey spa, a well-equipped gym and an indoor/outdoor year-round pool.

One of the biggest draws will be the Rock Golf Course, which was redesigned last year by Nick Faldo, one of Europe's most successful golfers with 43 professional wins.

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Another new four-seasons development under construction is Touchstone Muskoka, which is clearly aimed at the high-end luxury market with its infinity pool, fine dining and spa. Yet, like Red Leaves, Touchstone is also offering winter activities such as skating, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing (touchstone-lakemuskoka.com).

"The traditional resort has been changing over the last 20 years because the current generation of retirees have worked hard all their lives and want to stay busy," says Stewart Martin, a district of Muskoka councillor who has lived in the area for most of his 74 years. "At the Muskokan, a new resort that replaced the Pinelands, there are lots of people here now, enjoying the winter. You didn't see this a few years ago."

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Gary and Lorraine Hurst in their Port of Newcastle condo.