

Finding a Home in

Miramichi, NB



When Deborah and Larry Kearney were looking for a place to retire, their wish list included comfortable, affordable accommodation, a fair number of amenities, and a community free of crowds and traffic that was nevertheless not too remote.

Their interest piqued by a TV ad promising these very qualities, the Kearneys, who are avid hot-rod hobbyists, arranged to visit Miramichi on a trip to the Atlantic Nationals car show in nearby Moncton.

“We fell in love with the area—and the people—very quickly,” Deborah recalls.

For starters, there’s the beauty of the place. Miramichi, a town of 18,000 that was formed by the amalgamation of five smaller municipalities, straddles the river of the same name and is surrounded by a thick forest of green that becomes a flaming patchwork of colours come fall. “It’s drop-dead gorgeous,” Deborah says.

Breathtaking scenery isn’t Miramichi’s only natural asset. “There’s lots of fishing here; there’s hunting here—lots of moose and deer,” notes Burt Dumaresq, who, with his wife,



Alice, has lived here for 10 years. And despite four distinct seasons, the climate is temperate and the winters are sunny (January, for instance, averages 120 hours of clear sunshine).

Opportunities for staying physically active, both outdoors and indoors, abound. In addition to trails for walking, cycling,

retirement destinations

Canada's Irish Festival on the Miramichi.



Burn Church powwow.



Maritime kitchen party in Miramichi.

cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing, the community boasts tennis courts, hockey rinks, and golf courses. Residents of Retirement Miramichi Inc. (RMI), a not-for-profit retirement village, can avail themselves of the gym, fitness rooms, bowling lanes, and other facilities that once served the former air force base. "My wife and I both swim four days a week—the pool is right across the street," Burt Dumaresq says.

Of course, while exercise is excellent preventative medicine, most of us periodically need medical attention, and here, too, Miramichi is well supplied, with its own community hospital and a doctor-to-patient ratio more favourable than both the national and provincial averages. And should a situation arise requiring more specialized services, Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton are at most a two-hour drive away.

"My late husband was in and out of hospital several times and he always had great care. It's as if you're part of the family," says Loraine Cairns, who moved here from Toronto in 1998.

Miramichi offers a myriad of activities for nurturing the mind and spirit, as well as the body. History buffs can learn about the river's rich past as a fishing, forestry, and shipbuilding centre via guided tours, visit some of the 124 area properties listed on Canada's register of historic places, or join outings organized by the town's recreation department to such sites as the Kings Landing historic settlement. Lovers of music and culture can explore the

region's Aboriginal, Acadian, Scots, and Irish heritage during Miramichi's non-stop summer-event schedule (a lineup that includes Canada's longest-standing folk-song festival). And lifelong learners can sign up for classes on a host of subjects at the local campus of New Brunswick Community College.

At RMI, members can take part in clubs and activities (Deborah Kearney belongs to a knitting group, for example), learn e-skills in the on-site computer lab, and host social events at the community centre.

As for shopping, Cairns says, "Everything I need is here," and it's only minutes away.

What's more, Deborah Kearney says, local retailers go out of their way to be helpful, even if it's to their detriment. For example, when the Kearneys took their fire extinguisher to a hardware store for recharging, the proprietors showed the couple how to test it themselves, at no cost.

That neighbourly attitude seems widely shared by the rest of the town.

"When we came here, people were so kind—they went the extra mile," Cairns recalls.

"The first year we were here," Alice Dumaresq says, "I felt as though we'd been here for five years."

And even though the Kearneys were initially concerned about being accepted—being unilingual English speakers and "from away," they, too, say virtually everyone in the community has made them feel at home.

Last but not least, housing prices (a median of \$149,900 in June 2016) and rents are well below the national average.

"Freeing up the equity in our previous home has allowed us to play and have fun as we never had before," Deborah Kearney says. "When you uproot yourself to move thousands of miles away, you're always a bit worried: is it going to be as good as advertised? Miramichi has exceeded our expectations by a country mile." ■

