

# Snowbirds get to enjoy 'another life'

## Trade snow shovel for Arizona sunshine

BY DAWNA FREEMAN, POSTMEDIA NEWS OCTOBER 13, 2011

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Golfing is only one of the things to do in the Phoenix, Ariz., area.

**Photograph by:** Thinkstock, Postmedia News

Going south for the winter is like slipping through a tear in the fabric of the seasons.

One minute, you're trudging through snow and slush on a dreary grey day - the next, you're enjoying brilliant sunshine and winter warmth.

It's no wonder Canadians flock to Phoenix, a city that enjoys 320 days of sunshine annually and where, even between December and February, temperatures can reach 18 C to 21 C.

Hibernating through brutal summers, this metropolis of 4.5 million stretches to life in late fall as seasonal residents make their annual pilgrimage down from northern states and provinces to unlock their condos, gated community houses and mobile homes.

And when the retired and semiretired return each year to the Valley of the Sun's 18 cities and towns, they're not just trading parkas for sweaters, or boots for sandals, they're exchanging lifestyles.

"It's like you live half your year in another life," says Joyce Stewart, 66.

After running a busy bed and breakfast in Vernon, B.C., between April and November, she and her husband Doug, 65, drive to Apache Junction, east of downtown Phoenix, to relax at their mobile home park for four months.

"Going down there is like going home," she says, referring to the friendships and activities that resume within the community each winter.

"We live a slower, more casual life here," she adds, pinpointing the reason Canadians pay homage to this popular sun belt destination: "Even the days we don't do anything in particular, we're outside where it's warm."

Canadians who sojourn in the south each winter can't help being more active, often combining backhome interests with the desert's outdoor lifestyle.

Joyce belongs to the local library and recently signed up for courses on desert xeriscaping and water management.

Doug plays a little golf, hikes the nearby mountains and continues to sail during the winter at nearby Lake Pleasant.

Although with more than 200 courses, golf reigns in the Phoenix Valley, the mania never caught this pair of snowbirds, who find plenty else to do when not entertaining guests or getting together with other Canadians who winter there.

Living next to the state capital means a choice of big-ticket events from four professional sports teams and NASCAR racing to the visual and performing arts, plus worldclass shopping and dining in trendy Scottsdale.

Ron Eggen, 67, owned a condo in Scottsdale for 15 years before moving to a gated adult community in Chandler.

He says people shouldn't think because they've vacationed several times in Phoenix they would be bored living there.

"You're not going down as a tourist, you're going as a resident. You live like you would at home, only in a warmer climate."

Second-home owners want that connection with their community, and Michael Colby, 66, says buying a home in an adult gated community is one of the best ways to meet people.

He and his wife Eleanor, 67, from Kelowna, B.C., spend five-and-a-half months in a gated community in Mesa.

"Buying into a retirement community or a 55-plus+ active community gives you a variety of activities and social opportunities," says Colby.

"Everyone comes from somewhere else, but they share a common purpose when they live in a retirement community. We've always found people very friendly."

Diana Costain, a Vancouver real estate investor and businesswoman who bought a house near Scottsdale last year, goes down for three months at a time. She joined the Y and a hiking club to meet people.

"You get a whole second group of friends, but the same types of friends you had back home," says the 55-yearold, who counts Squamish, B.C., and Camelback Mountain in Scottsdale among her favourite places to hike.

The touristy trips- Grand Canyon, Tucson and Sedona, and old western towns like Tombstone and Prescott - are saved for guests. But when the forecast calls for damp weather, seasoned snowbirds never lack for things to do.

"On wetter or cooler days, we might head to Scottsdale for some shopping or catch a movie at the IPIC luxury theatre, where we're served wine and food in reclining chairs," says Marion Eccles, 52, who owns a home in the gated community of Corta Bella in Sun City West.

If warm weather and friendly neighbours aren't reasons enough to embrace the southwestern life, consider the other benefits of stitching two shoulder seasons together.

"Being more active outside over the winter months does work the body more," says Colby, "so I do feel better. And my joints and fingers aren't as stiff."