

Staking A Claim in Paradise: Retirement Living on the Northern Neck
By Larry Mazzeno
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Julia Putney-Brandt of Weems stops her Ford F-150 behind two cars at a red light in Kilmarnock. “Oh, look!” she chuckles. “A traffic jam!”

Welcome to retirement living on the Northern Neck.

Brandt and her husband Bill moved to Weems in 2005 from Richmond. For years before that, they spent weekends here on their boat, moored at Yankee Point. When it was time to stop working and start enjoying life on their own terms, deciding where to live was a no-brainer.

The Brandts are typical of thousands of seniors who are choosing to make their home on the Northern Neck. Retirees are finding the area perfect for continuing their active lifestyle. Some move into places that were once their vacation homes. Some build new houses, scaled to fit their new lifestyles. Others find spots in communities that take care of all the household maintenance.

What these seniors have in common is a desire to live in more serene surroundings after completing a hectic career. Many enjoy the change of seasons that brings gentle breezes in spring, an occasional winter snowfall, and warm summer days perfect for outdoor activities. They like to watch the sun rise over the Chesapeake Bay or set over the Rappahannock River. They appreciate the smell of freshly plowed earth in spring, and of bumper crops of corn and soybeans that cover farmers’ fields in fall.

They relish the chance to drop their crab traps in the Little Wicomico or cast a line into the waters of the Corrotoman. The love to watch ospreys soar overhead, or hear the squawk of seagulls on their way to and from the Bay. They look forward to taking their boats out on the waterways that cut through the landscape.

Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury (RWC) President Stuart Bunting believes that “location” is one of the principal reasons people looking for a full-service senior living community come to RWC. “Seniors today want to have time to explore their surroundings and try out new activities,” Bunting says. Located just outside Irvington, RWC gives people a chance to live in the heart of one of the country’s most historical areas, benefit from a rural lifestyle, and still have easy access to major metropolitan areas.

George Van Sant moved to Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury five years ago because he was impressed with the area’s natural beauty and the look of the RWC campus. The opportunity to get involved in the local community and the availability of care if ever needed were particularly strong draws, but equally important, Van Sant says, was his discovery of what the area *lacks*: “No high rises.”

Other seniors also like what the area *doesn’t* have: Traffic congestion and air pollution. And, many say, there’s no sense of the alienation one often feels in urban areas walking beneath skyscrapers or driving pell-mell among strangers too busy trying to get somewhere to stop and say hello.

Do any of these seniors have regrets about coming to the Northern Neck? As most of them will tell you, just one: “Why didn’t I move here sooner?”