

Special Advertising Feature
WESTCHESTER AND FAIRFIELD COUNTIES

Year-Round Recreation Appeals to Homebuyers

THE PROPERTY MARKET REMAINS STRONG BECAUSE OF THE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE

By Joseph Dobrian

Many people looking for a home in Westchester County, N.Y., or Fairfield County, Conn.—whether they're coming from New York or other parts of the world—wonder whether the area will have enough amenities and recreational activities to keep them occupied. Also, does the area have a personality of its own? Does it offer a lifestyle that can't be found elsewhere? Residents and real estate professionals agree that these two counties have year-round appeal, with plenty to do in all four seasons. New York is right nearby if you want it—but the local lifestyles are what give these suburban communities their allure.

LIFESTYLE TOOLS

"Not only do we market our properties; we market the particular towns' lifestyles," explains James Gricar, general sales manager at Houlihan Lawrence.

"People coming in from other parts of the world want to know what there is to do here—not just where to find the best dry cleaner, but the best place to pick apples in the fall—so we have a lifestyle Web site, northof.nyc, and Journeys, the printed version. These tools help our customers learn about our markets before they visit. The Web site is divided by lifestyle: the Villager, the Equestrian, the Trailblazer, the Waterfronter, the Locavore, the Cosmopolitan."

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Westchester County offers more of an urban experience, including cities like White Plains and Yonkers, but the northern parts of the county are somewhat more countrified. Fairfield County has larger towns like Greenwich and Westport, but plenty of little villages and countryside as well. Favorite activities in both areas—and in the counties to the north—include various fall festivals and food events, pond-skating in the winter, and plenty of golf.

"And horses, horses, horses," Mr. Gricar adds. "You'll find equestrian properties especially in northern Westchester, and many of our customers want a property where they can keep at



Sailing and horseriding are two of the most popular activities for residents in these counties.

least one horse. Most people don't associate our market with the beach, but most towns have great beach amenities.

The biggest activities in the eastern part of our market are water-based—and we have many more bodies of water here than most people think. Hiking around the watersheds is a big deal. This is a small region, but—topographically and culturally—the towns are so different from one another."

LIVELY ARTS SCENE

Mr. Gricar adds that the area has a lively arts scene, with the focus on contemporary art. Overall, he says, the lifestyle is "a combination of East Coast cosmopolitan and New England earthy.

"Our customers want to know, 'Are the basics here?' and of course, they are, but they want to also know, 'Am I moving

somewhere special?' They want to know that there's character up here, a point of view, a lifestyle that's different from what they're used to but familiar as well. Northof.nyc lets them see this area in contexts other than the house they're buying or the schools they'll send their kids to."

Joan Wright, realtor at William Pitt Sotheby's, says Westport, Conn., is an artistic community, with many waterfront amenities, "more sophisticated and diverse than many other towns.

"Westport sells itself," she says. "It's a 70-minute commute by train to Manhattan. We have great beaches, boating, an 18-hole golf course for Westport residents, and plenty of private [golf] courses in nearby towns.

"Weston is directly north of Westport: about as big geographically but with

about one-third of the population. Weston is a little more affordable; you might prefer Weston if you want more privacy and land. Weston also has award-winning schools.

"The town of Fairfield includes Southport, which is known for its historic village on Southport Harbor."

New construction is always in demand, Ms. Wright adds, but that comes at a premium. House prices usually drop the farther the property is from a downtown area.

"Colonials are still the most popular architectural style," she says, "but some buyers want a 'transitional' interior, with more modern finishes. Fewer people are looking for a formal living room; they want a family room or open space that connects to the kitchen.

"Home offices are important too, and everyone wants an island in the kitchen that becomes a hub for the family. Kitchen finishes have moved on from granite. Today's customer wants quartz materials."

STEADY PRICES

Kathleen Collins, broker at William Pitt Sotheby's Realty, notes that prices seem to be holding pretty steady in Westchester, although she has seen a pause in the market and some price declines because of the recent questions about tax reform, and the prolonged winter. But, she says, she's confident that business will stay strong, largely because of the amenities available in Westchester.

"The county has 18,000 acres of park land," she notes, "with golf courses, pools, and other amenities. We have lots of small villages with great restaurants; you're convenient to the beaches on Long Island Sound and walking trails. Within 45 minutes you could be on an ocean beach on Long Island, or skiing upstate.

"Each of our villages has its own special characteristics. I'm located in Bronxville, a small, very urban/suburban community of one square mile where you can walk everywhere, so you're not spending as much time in the car as you might [living] in other parts of Westchester.

"Like Bronxville, Rye has a vibrant downtown; Irvington has a great waterfront park. Larchmont is another of my favorites. I especially love our river towns. Westchester has some of the best public schools in the nation, which is a great attraction to younger families."

Joseph Dobrian is a freelance writer specializing in real estate matters.