

1994 Money Magazine Rates Prescott #1 For Retirement

Lesley Alderman

The mild climate and laid-back lifestyle attract more than 600 retirees a year to this mile-high mountain town.

Bordered by 1.25 million acres of national forest and the 1,400-acre Yavapai Indian Reservation, Prescott (pop. 28,211) is an ideal spot if you love outdoor activities. Its high elevation and mountain breezes keep temperatures from reaching the grueling levels of low-lying Phoenix, 90 miles to the south. In summer they rarely exceed 85 degrees, and in winter's sun-filled days they average about 50 degrees. Humidity stays a moderate 45% year round. Practically every day, you can play tennis, golf on two city courses, one created by famed designer Gary Panks, or hike the many trails on nearby Granite Mountain.

The Grand Canyon is a roughly two-hour drive away. Because Prescott is the county seat, many services are conveniently located in town. They include the regional Social Security office, motor vehicles department and 129-bed Yavapai Regional Medical Center. No wonder retirees favor this quiet mountain community. About 23% of the population is over 65, half of them relocated from California and the Rocky Mountain states.

The living in Prescott, though bountiful, is not cheap. Dickinson estimates that a retired couple need at least \$25,000 of annual income to live comfortably. Studies compiled by SCORE, a business association, reveal the annual median income of those over 55 is \$40,000 to \$45,000 -- more than three times the national median.

Founded in 1864 as the territorial capital of Arizona, Prescott still has the distinct feel of a wild West town. Historic Whiskey Row once had 20 raucous saloons; today, many of the original buildings house boutiques, hotels and gift shops. The town also had its genteel side, which can be seen in Mount Vernon Street's graceful Victorian homes, many of them on the National Register of Historic Places.

"This is a town that attracts individuals," says Dickinson, 67, who moved here in 1988. "There is nothing cookie cutter about it --not the people, not even the homes." Indeed, most of the houses are custom-built into the rough and hilly terrain, where javelinas (wildboars) sometimes wander across the yards at night. And in many residential developments, builders are required to make each house one of a kind.

Newcomers often become involved in the community through the Volunteer Center of Yavapai County, which steers people to programs with 135 different

local agencies; the Sharlot Hall Museum, for example, enlists more than 150 volunteers to greet and guide visitors through exhibits on the town's first settlers. The local college, Yavapai, offers senior citizens hundreds of courses, including challenging classes in genealogy and environmental chemistry, for about \$35 each. The college also conducts 190 week long trips a year through the Elderhostel Network; the most popular are a house boat excursion on Lake Powell, 225 miles to the northeast, and a 200-miletrip to the Hopi Reservation, also in Arizona's northeast corner.

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InvestInPrescott.com Publisher note:

While this article was printed over 10 years ago, the information and the reasons for Prescott's popularity remain the same. Enjoy. :) PS