



## The Best Place to Retire Is Where Everyone Knows Your Name

Sunshine and beaches can't compare to the warmth of friends

posted by [John Stark](#), April 18, 2013 [More by this author](#)



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I've been thinking a lot lately about where to retire. I'm in my 60s and need to plan for my active old age. I recently made several trips to Florida in an attempt to convince myself that it's the place to call happily ever after. It's affordable. But still, I'm not convinced.

Do a Google search of "the best places to retire" and countless lists of senior-friendly cities, towns and countries come up. Topping most lists domestically are Santa Fe, N.M.; Portland,

Ore.; and Austin, Texas. For international locales, it's Ecuador, Thailand and most of Central America.

There's no end to the sub categories, which include the most sunny, outdoorsy, urban, relaxing, educational, friendly and quirky. I recently skimmed through the latest issue of *Where to Retire* magazine at my doctor's office. It had a list of the cities with the best farmer's markets. *International Living* magazine just put out a list of spots with the best weather. The editors ranked Wisconsin No. 1. I guess nothing says it's a beautiful day more than a blizzard.

After much consideration, I have made my decision. But it's not based on any lists. I'm going where everyone knows my name.

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Several years ago I moved to Minneapolis from Boston, where I had lived for 15 years. I researched life in Minnesota before deciding to relocate for a job. It seemed like a great place to call home and eventually retire. True, winters can be long, but Minnesotans take advantage of the weather to cross-country ski and ice skate, which I like to do. Housing prices, compared to Boston, are a song. There are lots of elder services for when I might need them.

What's not to love? The Twin Cities has a world-class symphony, chamber orchestra, the Guthrie Theater, great restaurants, food co-ops, sports teams, hiking and bike trails, gorgeous lakes, the Mississippi River, enormous off-leash dog parks and an international airport. Being in the middle of the country meant I could easily travel to both coasts.

Minneapolis, I reasoned, would be a less arduous place to live than Boston, which has narrow, congested streets and a paucity of parking spaces. I was right. Minneapolis has proved way easier.

I rent a spacious house here that would cost far more if it were in Boston. There's a yard for my dog. Plows clean the streets within hours after it snows. A neighbor shovels my porch and driveway, but not for money. He's just being nice. That's how people are here.

A few weekends ago (before the attack on the marathon) I made a trip back to Boston — my first since leaving — to meet with my real estate agent and put my condo on the market. I didn't have time to do that before I left so I rented it to friends.

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I was in a social whirl from the moment I arrived in my old neighborhood of Jamaica Plain until I left. I ran into people I knew everywhere. While crossing a street miles from my condo, I heard a car horn honk. A woman leaned out her window: "John, is that *you*?" she yelled. Friends met me for breakfast and lunch. One night I had dinner with my pals Lisa and Kerry at the Dogwood Café, just down the block from where I lived. It's a combo restaurant, pizza joint and sports bar a la Cheers. Over locally brewed beers we caught up on our lives, which included Lisa's divorce and Kerry's new job.

I was walking down my old street Sunday morning when I ran into my neighbors, Ken and Tess. We fell into each other's arms. "Tell us you're coming back," Tess said to me.

As Tess and I hugged, my mind flashed back to another embrace that we shared shortly before I moved away. It took place in her house on a Sunday morning, not unlike this one. Hunter, her 12-year-old-son, tragically died that morning in the hospital from a sudden, virulent strain of the flu. A viewing was held a few nights later in a mortuary on the next block. The whole neighborhood came to pay their respects. Hundreds of people waited outside to get in, despite freezing temperatures and Arctic winds.

### **You Can Go Home Again — to Retire**

I realized as I was heading to the airport Sunday night that I will never have the same connection with my new friends in Minneapolis that I have with my old ones in Boston. There's a richness that comes only with time, a depth and layering like you find in rare gems.

A scene in the movie *Broadcast News* has Albert Brooks on the phone to his longtime pal Holly Hunter arranging a get-together. "OK," he says before hanging up, "I'll meet you at the place near the thing where we went that time." She knows just where to go.

The place I retire isn't going to be decided by the best weather, beaches, farmer's markets or even the cost of living. It'll be where my longtime friends are — ones who'll know to meet me at the Dogwood Café when I text them to have dinner. I won't have to say where or what time.

I never did call my real estate agent.

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