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— Laura Crockarell

Coweta County: A Place to Call Home

By Alex McRae, Photos by John Beck and Bob Fraley

Each year a growing number of people are discovering that in a cookie-cutter world, Coweta County is much more than a place to park your car and collect your mail. It's truly a place to call home ... in every sense of the word.

"When newcomers first hear about Coweta County, they think we're still a little rural community close to the airport," says Laura Crockarell, president of the Newnan-Coweta Board of Realtors. "But once they get here, it doesn't take long to figure that Coweta offers lots more than a quick commute. This is a place where you can really put down roots."

From the Civil War through the Civil Rights movement, Coweta County remained largely a quaint, agricultural community. In the mid 1970s that changed forever when I-85 opened through the heart of the county, putting Coweta's agricultural past even farther in the rearview mirror of thousands of new residents who flocked here to savor the small town charm while enjoying an easy commute to Atlanta area jobs, especially those at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, less than 30 minutes north.

In the next three decades, Coweta County underwent an unprecedented growth boom. New subdivisions catering to all tastes and wallets sprang up in former cotton fields, new industry created thousands of jobs, and first-class retail, dining and entertainment offerings once available only in downtown Atlanta followed.

Some communities have choked on the kind of growth that has put Coweta consistently among the top 100 fastest-growing counties in the U.S. But postcard-pretty small towns like Newnan, Grantville, Moreland, Senoia, Sharpsburg, Haralson and Turin have managed to maintain their timeless charm while embracing a flood of newcomers.

Coweta offers something for every style and budget, with plenty of amenities to sweeten the deal.

Coweta's six golf courses offer membership or fee options for every budget and many feature a variety of housing options. Waterfront communities boast everything from small ponds to large lakes suitable for fishing, swimming and sailing. While small subdivision lots are still available and affordable, multi-acre lots and small farms are an option for those who want a large backyard garden and aren't afraid to share their produce with the local wildlife.

And while low taxes, high home values and easy commutes — even to places like Peachtree City and LaGrange — are a big part of Coweta's real estate success story, Crockarell says newcomers are just as impressed by local home offerings.

"Development always runs in phases," Crockarell says. "One day one style is hot and the next day it's something else. But our builders and developers have done a great job of keeping a mix of all styles on the market. These days it's not the easy commute that sells people so much as the selection of home styles and the local lifestyle."

It's a lifestyle that still clings to its rural roots. These days, the horse-drawn carriages only come out for special occasions, but Cowetans are never more than a 10-minute drive

from a rolling country road reminiscent of days gone by.

Not all Coweta's real estate offerings are strictly traditional. Picturesque antebellum mansions still abound, but residents who prefer the small-yard, low-maintenance lifestyle have plenty of choices and in recent years, exciting new living spaces have become available in the upper floors of some downtown Newnan buildings.

And while new subdivisions seem to spring up almost overnight, one of the county's major success stories is a new wave of urban redevelopment.

In downtown Newnan, realtor John Young and developer John Shaak formed a company called Salbide Restorations to rehab and renovate neglected properties, bringing new life to once-vibrant neighborhoods a stone's throw from Newnan's historic court square.

"We had a whole vision of changing an entire street and bringing it back to where it was 50 or 60 years ago," says Young. "By bringing a piece of one of the historic districts back to where it all began, you can really see what Newnan was actually like and how the people lived."

In Senoia, an even more ambitious project is underway as a group of local businessmen and developers have united to form the Historic Senoia project. This venture has acquired nearly all the vacant land in Senoia's historic district and plans to construct infill development designed to blend with the town's existing architecture. One of the partners in the Historic Senoia project is Riverwood Studios, home to feature films including "Fried Green Tomatoes," "Pet Sematary II" and "The War."

In case other film projects come looking, developers promise their new development will be as camera-friendly as it is livable.

"We've grown to love this place," says Riverwood President Scott Tigchelaar. "Senoia is already a great place to call home and we're dedicated to making it even better."

While the face of Coweta County continues to change, its small town spirit endures. As long as that continues, Coweta County will continue to be a place people are happy to call home.

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