

GERALD W. SWEITZER AND  
KATHY M. FIELDS

2nd Edition

Great places to live and work in Alabama, Florida,  
Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina,  
South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia



# The 50 Best Small Southern Towns

Charming, Livable  
Places Offering a  
Gentler Way of Life

**GERALD W. SWEITZER AND KATHY M. FIELDS**

# **The 50 Best Small Southern Towns**



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## P R E F A C E

Our paths first crossed in 1997 when Jerry signed up for a simple living group Kathy was starting in the Atlanta area. As we moved into our midlife years, we had each raised similar questions, but we brought different perspectives to these inquiries. Jerry had recently lived in a small town and commuted to work in a small city. When he moved back into the Atlanta area, he had concerns about increasing traffic problems, suburban sprawl, rising housing costs, and a significant decline in air quality. He began to research and write about small-town living as an alternative lifestyle. While pursuing an advanced degree, Kathy created and taught lifestyle courses at a local college, including one on simple living. She was wondering if all the working, driving, and hectic lifestyle were what she really wanted to do with the next ten or twenty years of her life. In the group we shared in 1997, we realized that our interests—“simple living” and “living in small towns”—were leading us in the same direction.

We continued to write, conduct internet forums, and teach classes. Jerry started teaching a class on small-town living and Kathy taught her simple living classes. We encountered positive and interested responses from many people we talked to, including clients, co-workers, class participants, friends, and family members. Many were eager to learn ways to find a more relaxed pace of living and a simpler lifestyle; some were looking to make a change in their lives in the near future and they were ready for specific answers to their questions.

From our previous individual research, we already knew there was no one guidebook that provided all the information we were seeking. We decided to gather in one book a body of information for people who, for whatever reasons, were thinking about simplifying their lives by moving to a small town. Over the next several months, we developed an outline and some preliminary criteria for evaluating a small town. We haunted libraries and the internet, combing through census figures and economic data. We pored over maps and travel guides. We read brochures and books on the Southern region. Using the information we had collected, we developed a questionnaire as a tool for searching out towns that would meet our criteria.

With maps and questionnaire responses in hand, we began to tour the South, visiting towns we had seen in the past and exploring lots of new ones. We talked with

residents on the streets, in shops, and in restaurants; we interviewed professionals in the chambers of commerce and in real estate offices. As we looked and listened and learned, we drew up the following list of criteria.

- The population of the town should be no less than one thousand nor more than twenty-five thousand. (The population of Summerville, South Carolina, went over this number as of the 2000 census, but we decided to leave the town in the book. Because Virginia Tech's student body is included in the population of Blacksburg, Virginia, it also exceeds the criteria.)
- The town should be located within seventy-five miles of a small city.
- The town should have a stable or growing population, or the potential for growth.
- The town should be economically viable and show potential for stability or growth.
- Each town should demonstrate an enthusiasm for planned growth and community involvement.
- The town should provide a variety of cultural, educational, and recreational facilities and have access to good healthcare facilities.
- Local internet access should be available as well as other informational sources, such as local newspapers, radio, and television.
- The town should have easy access to highways, interstates, and airports.

We visited more than 150 towns—all the towns in the book as well as many more that were not included—in nine Southern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. We chose the five or six towns in each state that best met our criteria. (Several additional towns of interest are listed in the appendix).

We organized the information on each town into the categories described below.

### **STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS**

A list of statistics appears on the first page of each town description.

**Population:** Population figures are based on the 2000 census results, updated to estimates for 2006 by ESRI, the world's leading geographic information system tools provider.

**Nearest Cities:** Each town selected for this guidebook is located within seventy-five miles of one or more small cities with a population over 25,000.

**Cost of Living:** Cost-of-living figures are difficult to obtain for small cities and are not usually available for small towns. However, ACCRA (formerly the American Chamber of Commerce Research Association) does collect and report data from various cities with populations over 45,000 that are part of Metropolitan Statistical

Areas. The ACCRA cost-of-living figure is the city's percentage of the national average (100). For each town in the book, we have listed the average of the quarterly cost of living figure for the geographically closest city that reported to ACCRA for the third quarter of 2005 (see appendix). For example, for Apalachicola, Florida, we used 97.7 percent, the figure for Panama City, Florida, the nearest reporting city. The true cost of living for a town, however, is usually lower than the figure for the larger city. To give a more complete picture of the cost of living in each town, we list average costs for both renting an apartment and for purchasing a house. These figures were supplied to us by local real estate agents, local real estate and rental guides, and chambers of commerce. We listed house and rented apartment prices for at least one town in Florida based on whether the location was on the mainland or the beach.

**Median Household Income:** The data is the estimated figure for 2006, the latest available. This figure was obtained from ESRI.

**Taxes:** Sales tax is the combined state and local option sales tax, but excludes any special taxes such as hotel/motel or restaurant. Sales tax figures were obtained from local chambers of commerce. Property tax figures were obtained from chambers of commerce, local tax offices, local real estate firms, or town real estate and rental guides.



**RECREATION** We provide basic information on the town's local recreational and sports opportunities as well as area park and wilderness sites, and coastal and inland waterways.



**CULTURAL SCENE** We list a sampling of the wide variety of cultural experiences available in each town, including the visual and performance arts, historic sites and museums, unique attractions, and annual festivals.



**MAIN STREET** Many of the towns included in this book are participants in the National Main Street Program, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The program, designed to improve all aspects of the downtown, has become a powerful local economic development force. (See [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org) for a description of this program). We have listed only a few of the many gathering places and happenings in each town.



**HOUSING** Housing costs, land costs, and apartment rental rates were obtained from chambers of commerce, local real estate firms, or town real estate and rental guides. Since the publication of the first edition, there has been a dramatic

increase in real estate prices in towns along the Atlantic and the Gulf coasts. This is particularly true in Florida. As we approach publication of this revised edition, there are signs that these prices are leveling out. Readers should check out local prices to get an accurate picture of current values.



**ECONOMICS** Information on employers and other data were obtained from local chambers of commerce, economic development offices, and visitors/tourism bureaus.



**EDUCATION** We provide information on higher education opportunities as well as elementary and secondary facilities.



**HEALTHCARE** We list the closest hospitals and major medical service providers in the area.



**SPIRITUAL LIFE** We provide basic information on various forms of worship available to the community.



**STAYING CONNECTED** We indicate the availability of local newspapers, cable television service, radio stations, and internet service providers. Local high-speed internet service is now available in virtually all of the towns.



**GETTING THERE** This section provides information about the travel infrastructure: the location of the town, the nearest state highways and interstates, and the local airports and nearest commercial airport.



**RESOURCES** All towns listed have a chamber of commerce—sometimes part of a larger county organization. We have included information on visitors bureaus and other area websites where available. We have drawn on these and other websites for information about the towns we included in this book.

## **VITAL STATISTICS**

A chart showing detailed statistical data appears at the end of each town's description. While we do not suggest you make a decision to move based on statistics, we have added information that might aid you in your search.

**Climate:** Elevation figures were obtained from chambers of commerce. All other climate data, including rainfall and snowfall averages, and temperature data was provided by [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com).

**Occupations, Adult Education, and Population Data:** Population estimates for 2006 and 2011 were obtained from ESRI. Other 2000 census figures are also provided by ESRI.

## THE LURE OF SMALL SOUTHERN TOWNS

Over the past half-century, the South has become a destination for many Americans seeking a good climate, a more relaxed lifestyle, and new vocational and recreational opportunities. The region's relatively low cost of living, diverse geography, and reputation for the finest of southern traditions—warm hospitality, old-fashioned manners, a friendly style, and a slower pace—have attracted people of all ages and income groups. The influx of newcomers is changing the look of the South, spurring not only industrial growth and economic expansion, but also opening up new cultural horizons.

This major trend is continuing into the twenty-first century. Not only are large metropolitan areas in the South still expanding at record rates, but population in small cities and towns is also increasing. The April 2006 U.S. Census Bureau report "Domestic Net Migration in the United States: 2000 to 2004" shows that the South remained the primary destination for migrants within the United States. The South Atlantic division, the most populous of the region's three divisions, saw its net migration increase from an average of 254,000 per year in the 1990s to 313,000 per year in 2000-2004. This is the region where most of our small towns are located. More people live in the South (100 million) than in any other region, according to a report on the 2000 Census published by the Bureau of the Census. As of July 2005, the Southeast (which includes the nine states in this book plus Arkansas and Louisiana) makes up 72.2 million of the 100 million. In an April 2005 report, the Census Bureau estimated that by 2030 nearly four of every ten Americans will live in the South (defined by them as the area from Maryland to Texas), bringing the population of the region to about 143.3 million. An article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "Americans are Moving South," reported that large numbers of people ages thirty to sixty-five are migrating to the South, and the median income levels of people moving to the South exceed those of people moving away. The South is not only attracting more people, it is attracting a wide range of better educated, more affluent residents who add to the potential for continued economic expansion. The southward migration of sixty-something retirees and fiftyish baby

## **X** The 50 Best Small Southern Towns

boomers with their bulging 401Ks and flexible work schedules does not seem to be slowing. Today the South accounts for the highest percentage of senior (over age sixty-five) population growth in the United States. Moreover, according to *America's Demography in the New Century*, published by the Milken Institute in California, the fastest-growing senior population can be found in smaller and medium-size metropolitan areas in the West and South.

In the 1990s, another new trend emerged, and it continues in the 2000s: a significant number of city dwellers moved from large cities to small cities and towns. We reported this trend in our first edition, referring to reports from the Census Bureau such as a press release dated June 30, 1999, which reported, "Smaller cities with populations between 10,000 and 50,000 grew at a faster rate than their larger counterparts... Cities with populations between 10,000 and 50,000 grew faster (8.6 percent) than any other category." On June 21, 2006, *USA Today* referred to the new 2005 city population estimates released by the Census Bureau on the same date and stated "growth is shifting from large central cities to smaller outlying communities in California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida." "Smaller places are grabbing more than half the growth this decade," said William Frey, demographer at the Brookings Institution. On April 20, 2006, the *Associated Press* reported that just about everywhere, people are escaping to the outer suburbs, also known as exurbs. As you will discover in this book, many of the desirable small towns we recommend are in the exurbs.

In our first edition, we referred to Harry Dent Jr.'s book *The Roaring 2000*. According to Dent, technology in the fields of communication, energy, and transportation will prompt major migration from suburbs to small towns and exurbs. Dent predicted that, "We are going to see at least 20 percent of the population of North America, or approximately 70 million people, migrate to exurban areas, small towns and new-growth cities in the next three decades." As the exurbs and towns grow and as demands for services and businesses increase, job opportunities expand. Many of the towns cited in this book offer living proof of this trend. We have found that those new to small town life are choosing smaller cities and towns as the place to live. They can have a larger home than they can afford in or near a city, and are willing to commute for work if they cannot find higher paying jobs in the smaller towns or cities.

The payoffs in small-town living can be extensive: less traffic and congestion, a less complex lifestyle, and cleaner air, to name a few. Also, fewer commuting hours can mean more time for family, children, and friends, and the potential to develop new avocational interests and new business opportunities. Finally, many are attracted to small town living because they are looking for a closer feeling of community along with a stronger sense of personal identity.

The southward migration seems to be driven by several factors. Little data on why people were moving to small towns in the South was available for the first edition of this book, but baby boomers nearing retirement are being actively pursued by smaller communities throughout the South. “Communities are recognizing that retiree migration can be a profitable industry,” according to an October 9, 2002, article in *The Charlotte Observer*. An article in *U.S. News and World Report* on June 13, 2005, stated, “smaller communities are starting to recognize the wave of retirees who may come their way.” Due to their numbers, baby boomers are going to continue to have a significant impact on the growth of and interest in small towns and small cities in the South. Census Bureau reports released in mid 2006 and interpreted by *USA Today* and *The Associated Press* in several major news stories reveal the desire for cheaper houses and open spaces as the key reason for moves to the exurbs. Additional factors appear to have influenced the decisions of more people to move further out. The first is the lower cost of living, including housing costs. Housing is typically a family’s greatest expense; lowering this cost can free up dollars for other areas. It can also make a difference in the number of work hours needed to support a comfortable lifestyle. If costs are lower, you may be able to work fewer hours. Another draw is the South’s strong economy, due largely to a significant increase in industry and businesses. Land and office space are generally cheaper and the labor pool is plentiful. The slower pace in small Southern towns can be a welcome contrast to the hurried style of many larger cities. A growing number of people are returning to their hometowns, a reverse of earlier movements from small hometowns to larger urban areas.

#### **FAVORABLE CLIMATE**

The moderate climate may be the most appealing aspect of the South. Throughout the nine states covered in this book, you can find a wide range of climates—from the crisp, cool autumns and snowy winters of the Blue Ridge Mountains

and the Great Smokies to the warm summers and mild winters of the Golden Isles along Georgia's coast. Although snow accumulation is rare in the southernmost states, in some parts of North Carolina and Tennessee annual snowfalls are sufficient for good skiing and other winter sports. Outside of the mountainous regions, high humidity and temperatures in the nineties are common during the summer months, but air conditioning in most homes, cars, and businesses eases the effect of the heat.

Between these two extremes lie many moderate, four-season locations. Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and northern Georgia and Alabama offer mild temperatures, distinct seasons, occasional light snow, and lower humidity. Winter lasts only two to three months in much of the South, a marked contrast to other parts of the country, where winter begins in October and ends in April. Indian summers often extend the mild weather well into the fall months. Further south, the trade winds along the southeastern coast provide pleasant summer evenings, and tropical breezes bring relief from the high humidity. The hurricanes of 2004 and 2005 have scared some residents away from south Florida, southern Louisiana, and Mississippi. Those who have decided to relocate aren't moving out of the south, but rather are settling in north Florida (inland), Georgia, North and South Carolina, Texas, and other southern states, usually finding the foothills and inland destinations attractive.

### **LOWER COSTS**

The National Association of Realtors reports the national median price for an existing home was \$223,000 in the second quarter of 2007. This compares to \$139,100 for 2000 when the first edition of this book was released. That's a whopping 60 percent increase in seven years. The same source gives the median home price for the South as \$185,000, compared with \$128,200 for metropolitan areas in the South in 2000. The increase in the South was 44 percent for the same seven-year period. In an April 1996 article entitled "America's 50 Hottest Little Boomtowns," *Money* magazine compared housing costs for a typical three-bedroom house in each town. Two-thirds of the towns with the lowest housing costs were in southern states.

According to ACCRA's average of the fourth quarter 2006 and first quarter 2007 reports, the housing costs index in cities throughout the United States

shows that the overall cost of housing for cities in the South is lower than in the other sections. Some examples are listed below.

While housing prices (whether purchase or rental) are good indicators of the relative cost of living for a community, other factors also come into play. As a rule, small towns in the South have lower land prices and property taxes. A survey prepared by CNNMoney, entitled “How tax-friendly is your state?” and based

### **COST OF HOUSING INDEX FOR SELECTED U.S. CITIES**

*(100 is the national average for all participating cities)*

<b>SOUTHERN CITIES</b>		<b>NON-SOUTHERN CITIES</b>	
Birmingham, AL	95.4%	Phoenix, AZ	101.7%
Jackson, MS	92.4%	Cleveland, OH	98.1%
Columbia, SC	91.3%	Chicago, IL	111.7%
Nashville, TN	95.1%	Milwaukee, WI	99.5%
Charlotte, NC	88.8%	Portland, OR	121.7%
Louisville, KY	97.6%	Denver, CO	102.3%
Jacksonville, FL	98.0%	Boston, MA	132.8%
Atlanta, GA	95.3%	Los Angeles, CA	145.2%
Richmond, VA	109.9%	Manhattan, NY	213.7%

on a study done by The Tax Foundation for 2005, shows what residents pay in various taxes, including state and local income, property, sales, fuel, and others. For property taxes, three of the best-ranked states were Arkansas, Alabama, and Kentucky (though it is not included in this book, Arkansas is considered by many to be in the South). The ranking by states for overall tax burden showed Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, and Texas were among the ten lowest. For those considering a retirement destination, Retirement Living Information Center (see [www.retirementliving.com](http://www.retirementliving.com)) has a table showing effective state and local tax burdens by state and rank projected for 2006. All states covered in our book except Kentucky are listed with a tax burden as a percentage of income below the U.S. average. Those moving to small southern towns usually find they also have more modest fees for personal or medical services, and less expensive entertainment and recreation. Groceries, fuel, and household goods, however, can often cost more because of the expense of transporting goods and a lack of intense competition. Utilities will likely cost the same in the small town as the larger city.

## **XIV** The 50 Best Small Southern Towns

Resort areas and small towns located near large cities generally have a higher cost of living than non-resort towns and towns more than seventy miles from a city. Overall, the best value in housing costs and overall living expenses are found in small towns near small cities.

### **A GENTLER PACE**

The Hollywood stereotype of life in the South—unhurried and laid back—has a basis in reality. People who move to smaller towns in the South can't help noticing the slower pace—and many like it. Southern residents are perceived as more friendly, more courteous, and less likely to be in a hurry. It's no wonder that so many stressed-out city dwellers from all over the country head south.

Americans' longer working hours and greater responsibilities have led to higher levels of stress, increased health problems, less time for family and friends, and less enjoyment of life. A national shift in priorities, rooted in the movements toward "simple living" and "downsizing," is now building demand for a slower-paced and a more balanced lifestyle.

We usually assume that the natural time to look for simpler, more relaxed living is when you are approaching retirement age. The first edition of this book came out shortly before September 11, 2001. Many people reevaluated their choice of big city life following that day, and chose to relocate to smaller cities away from the large East Coast cities. Beginning in 2002, many readers contacted us via our website about their desire to move their families to southern small cities and towns. People in their twenties feel strongly that the opportunities in small companies and in small towns are preferable to working long hours for large corporations in crowded metropolitan areas. Young families recognize the value of spending more time with each other. People of all ages are choosing a calmer, more rewarding way of life.

### **STRONG ECONOMY**

In the 1990s, the South led the nation in housing starts, population growth, and employment gains. Population growth has increased in all the southeastern states. According to *Southern Business and Development* magazine, the south has the world's third-largest economy and is the most preferred region for investment by foreign companies, the region with the lowest utility rates, and the region with the lowest business costs in the United States. It also leads

all regions by a wide margin in new incorporations and has the lowest business failure rate. Like the rest of the nation, the recession of 2002 and 2003 led to job losses in the south. Traditional industries like textiles and furniture saw major plant closings and wholesale job losses to Asian manufacturers.

In recent years, the South has been the preferred location for new Japanese, German, and Korean auto manufacturers who have opened assembly plants in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, and expanded existing plants in Kentucky. Nissan Motors recently announced the relocation of its U.S. headquarters from California to Nashville, Tennessee. Boeing Aircraft is assembling part of the new Dreamliner jet in Charleston, South Carolina. Embrear Aircraft (a Brazilian manufacturer of regional jets) is opening a new facility in Nashville and Dell Computers has opened its first assembly plant outside of Texas in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Google Inc. is furiously building large data centers in both North and South Carolina. It operates one of its largest data centers outside Atlanta. The south will likely attract more of these centers due to low land cost and the ability to attract qualified technicians and engineers.

Large and midsize companies are attracted to the Southeast because of the lower capital and operation costs. Land is cheaper; buildings cost less to lease, buy, or construct; and overall labor costs are lower. Reduced overhead means greater opportunities for a wider profit margin. More companies moving into the southern region means more jobs for those who live there. While the major cities in the South get a large share of the credit for the strong growth and economic showing, small southern towns have also grown. A ripple of prosperity from the large southern cities has spread to small towns, especially those within a one- or two-hour's drive of large cities.

### **OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

With its diverse geography and mild climate, the South offers a year-round range of outdoor recreation and activities such as gardening, biking, and walking. The extensive coastline and many inland lakes and rivers provide opportunities for boating, swimming, fishing, and related activities. Golf and tennis are popular throughout the South and can be played in most of the southern

states for at least nine months of the year. The Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains draw a wide range of outdoor enthusiasts for hiking, camping, white-water rafting, canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. With less time spent commuting to and from work and easier access to recreational facilities, individuals find they have more time to participate in recreational opportunities.

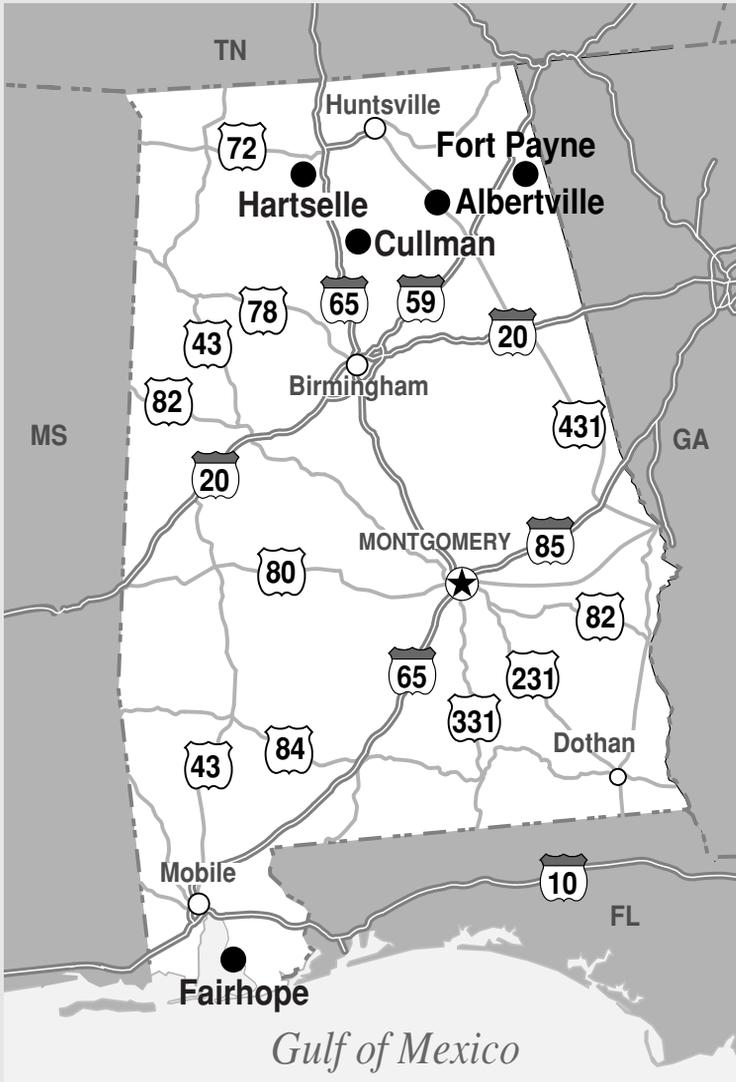
#### **TELECOMMUTING AND E-COMMERCE**

As city commuting time captures a larger share of our workday, the dream of telecommuting from or operating a small business in a small town, sparks many to explore this style of living. Working outside a traditional office setting is appealing to employers as well as employees. The development of technology that supports telecommuting enables people to live farther from their employer. Entrepreneurs interested in small town living can build businesses that are not dependent on a specific location.

High-speed internet service providers offer both cable and DSL service in nearly all small towns, giving computer users the same access as the residents of a major city. Alpine Access of Golden, Colorado, the world's leading outsourced call center service, uses home-based customer service agents working from their home PCs. Rural Sourcing Inc. of Durham, North Carolina, provides low-cost, high-quality information technology services to major companies with qualified IT professionals working on their home PCs in small towns all over the country. Web-based meeting software like WebEx and GoToMeeting allow individuals living in small towns to work in collaboration with others anywhere in the world. According to Thomas L. Friedman, author of *The World Is Flat*, the "globalization of the local" is flattening the world, and is strengthening local and regional identities, including the South.

**T**here are many reasons for individuals and families to seek out a new town. In the best of small towns, you can be an individual in a welcoming community, pursue challenging creative and recreational opportunities, realize increased value in the dollars you have to spend, and find greater peace of mind to enjoy life. Whatever the reasons that draw you to exploring the idea, we hope you will find this book the resource you need.

# ALABAMA



## ALABAMA

# ALBERTVILLE

### **2006 POPULATION**

18,424

### **NEAREST CITIES**

Gadsden, AL (22 miles)

Huntsville, AL (40 miles)

Birmingham, AL (60 miles)

### **ESTIMATED 2006**

#### **MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

\$36,704

#### **COST OF LIVING**

Average 3-bdrm home—\$135,000

Average rent, 2-bdrm apartment—\$600

Cost-of-living comparison—88.4%

#### **SALES TAX**

8%

#### **PROPERTY TAX**

Average 3-bdrm home—\$600

The small-town friendliness and forward-looking optimism of Albertville will appeal to young families and retirees. Situated in one of the fastest growing counties, this Alabama town has undertaken renewal of the downtown business district to bring shoppers back to Main Street. Loft condominiums and apartments have been built over downtown commercial space and a new city hall and other public buildings have been constructed. Albertville has a very low crime rate, some of the lowest housing costs in all the South, and very low TVA electricity rates to entice those looking for a solid small town.

Visitors from all over the country marvel at the spectacular natural beauty and colorful panorama

of nearby Lake Guntersville, the largest lake in Alabama. To the southeast is Boaz, the first major factory-outlet shopping center in the South. Guntersville (7 miles), a neighboring town in a picturesque lakefront setting, attracts retirees with a variety of programs and services. Residents of Albertville can commute about fifty minutes to Huntsville for high-tech jobs. If you are looking for a wholesome family-oriented community, Albertville is worth consideration.



### RECREATION

Lake Guntersville State Park is home to the crown jewel of Alabama's lakes. This beautiful 69,000-acre lake, with 959 miles of shoreline, is perfect for fishing, swimming, boating, and skiing. The park, featuring 5,500 acres of natural woodlands, is located on the pinnacle of Taylor Mountain, where visitors have a magnificent view of the lake below. Ample accommodations include a rustic resort inn, a lodge, chalets on the ridge tops, lake-view cottages, and a modern campground on the lake below. The park features an

eighteen-hole golf course, a beach complex, a fishing center (the finest bass fishing in Alabama), miles of hiking trails, nature programs, and a day-use area. Small to medium-size sailboats and yachts are berthed at several full-service marinas on the lake.

Buck's Pocket State Park, another popular recreation area, is located to the northeast of the main body of Lake Guntersville on an upstream tributary. Set in a natural pocket of the Appalachian Mountain chain, this 2,000-acre park is a nature lover's dream. It features a campground, a playground, and hiking trails, as well as a boat launch and fishing area.

Golfers can enjoy two eighteen-hole golf courses in Guntersville and a private eighteen-hole course in Albertville; there are a total of eight public and private golf courses in the county. Several world-class Robert Trent Jones Trail courses are located in Huntsville. Recreation centers in Albertville offer child and adult team sports and other individual sports for all ages. These facilities include an Olympic-size pool and

tennis courts; programs such as softball and basketball for men and women, and soccer for boys and girls are available.

**CULTURAL SCENE**

The Mountain Valley Council on the Arts in Guntersville brings workshops and cultural events to the area. The Whole Backstage, a community theater group in Guntersville, performs an annual summer musical. Ryder's Replica Fighter Museum in Guntersville houses the world's largest collection of replica World War I aircraft. The Guntersville Museum and Cultural Center occasionally offers special exhibits in addition to permanent exhibits about the TVA and the damming of the Tennessee River. The museum has dedicated a section to local Native American history in memory of the Cherokee and Creek who were evicted from their homes and forced to travel the Trail of Tears.

Several thousand spectators visit the Taste of Freedom BBQ Cookoff the first weekend in July, which features entertainment and

arts and crafts. Guntersville offers Art-on-the-Lake in April, the Gerhart Chamber Music Festival in June, and a Seafood Festival in September. On one evening during the Christmas season, the light-bedecked boats and yachts in the popular Parade of Lights dazzle crowds on the shore.

Residents can easily reach the many major cultural attractions in Huntsville and Birmingham. Huntsville is home to the Huntsville-Madison County Botanical Garden, the world-famous U.S. Space and Rocket Center, the Alabama Constitution Village (a demonstration Southern village), and the Twickenham Historic District (Alabama's largest antebellum district). Birmingham offers the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which tells the story of the Civil Rights Movement through audio, video, photography, and artifacts. Birmingham's Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame showcases jazz musicians who have ties to Alabama, such as Nat King Cole and Duke Ellington. The hall is in a historic theater where live jazz performances are held.



**MAIN STREET**

Albertville Candy Store serves homemade candy and hand-dipped ice cream favorites at an old-fashioned soda fountain. Among the popular local restaurants are Giovanni’s (casual, family Italian food); The Red Barn (fresh butter and great smoked chicken); the Food Basket; Jessie’s Café; the Yum Yum Tree (good taco salad); Reid’s Chicken Stop (fried/rotisserie chicken); and the Albertville Home Bakery (fresh baked cakes). The Lumpkin House caters parties and meetings in a large converted antebellum home.

In Claysville, located between Guntersville and Albertville, Bruce’s Restaurant serves an all-you-can-eat buffet of traditional Southern foods. In Guntersville, popular eating places include Wanda’s Restaurant and Ice Cream Parlor (hearty breakfasts and sandwiches and burgers); Neena’s Lakeside Grill (prime rib); and Craw Moma’s Seafood Shoppe (fresh gulf shrimp, crabs, and oysters). Residents of both Albertville and Guntersville enjoy eating in the dining room

at the Lodge at Lake Guntersville State Park.



**HOUSING**

New home prices are a bargain in Albertville compared to those in urban areas. Many people who work in Huntsville are willing to commute to this area in exchange for greater home value. The new home market is growing and residential subdivisions span a wide price range. Those seeking executive homes in the \$300,000 to \$400,000 range can find 2,800 to 4,000-square-foot homes on full-size lots convenient to the country club in Spring Lake Cove. Bent Creek has homes for young families, with prices ranging from the low \$100,000s to \$125,000. Whispering Pines subdivision offers both midrange pricing ( the low \$100,000s to \$130,000) and a great location near Albertville’s main highway, US 341. A gated housing community and two assisted-living facilities serve both Albertville and Guntersville.



**ECONOMICS**

**Number of employers with fifty or more employees—21**

Thanks to the Mueller Company (600 employees), the world's largest manufacturer of fire hydrants, Albertville is known as the "fire hydrant capital of the world." Chicken processors, Tyson Foods (1,200 employees) and Wayne Farms (1,100 employees), are the largest employers; manufacturing and retail are the largest employment sectors. Aerospace Integration Corporation (100 employees), which has recently opened, performs Blackhawk helicopter electronics maintenance.

Nearby Boaz is home to four major factory-outlet shopping centers, with approximately eighty stores. Recently unemployment has been higher than the national average because some plants have closed and moved operations to Latin America and because the Boaz center is losing customers to newer outlet malls opening near Atlanta. For those willing to drive a longer distance, larger employers as well as high-tech employers are located in Gadsden and Huntsville.

**EDUCATION**

**High schools—1; Middle schools—1; Elementary schools—2; Private school—1**

The Marshall Technical School offers vocational training beyond secondary education. Three junior colleges; Snead State College; and the University of Alabama campuses in both Huntsville and Birmingham are within commuting distance. Summer space camps at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville offer unique educational experiences for children and teenagers.

**HEALTHCARE**

**Marshall Medical Center—150 beds; Physicians—152; Dentists—37**

The two facilities at the Marshall Medical Center include 24-hour emergency care, general surgery, obstetrics, cancer care, and other specialties associated with similar-size hospitals. Large regional medical centers are located in Gadsden, Birmingham, and Huntsville.



**SPIRITUAL LIFE**

Ten Christian denominations are represented. The nearest synagogue is in Huntsville.



**STAYING CONNECTED**

Daily newspapers from Huntsville, Gadsden, and Birmingham are delivered in Albertville. The local weekly newspaper is the *Sand Mountain Reporter*. Cable television is available, as is local internet service. There are two bookstores in the community.



**GETTING THERE**

Albertville, located in the north central part of Alabama, is on AL 75 within two miles of US 431, which in turn connects with I-59 in Gadsden. Huntsville International Airport (45 miles) is served by four major carriers, and Birmingham International Airport (60 miles) has ten major and feeder airlines. The Albertville Municipal Airport features a 6,100-foot lighted runway for all-weather service to corporate and private aircraft.

The course of the Tennessee River runs close to Guntersville,

permitting boat passage to the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, which links Minneapolis, Minnesota, to the Port of Mobile, Alabama.



**RESOURCES**

Albertville Chamber of Commerce  
 316 East Sand Mountain Drive  
 Albertville, AL 35950  
 (256) 878-3821  
[www.cityofalbertville.com](http://www.cityofalbertville.com)

Lake Guntersville Chamber of Commerce  
 200 Gunter Avenue  
 Guntersville, AL 35976  
 (800) 869-LAKE  
[www.lakeguntersville.org](http://www.lakeguntersville.org)

Marshall County Convention and Visitors Bureau  
 P.O. Box 711  
 200 Gunter Avenue  
 Guntersville, AL 35976  
 (800) 582-6282  
[www.marshallcountycvb.com](http://www.marshallcountycvb.com)

**ALBERTVILLE  
VITAL STATISTICS**

**CLIMATE**

Annual average rainfall	47 inches			
Snowfall	2.7 inches			
Elevation	1,063 feet			
Temperatures (in degrees Fahrenheit)				
	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Oct</b>
High	49	72	89	73
Low	27	46	66	46

**OCCUPATIONS**

	<b>2006</b>	<b>Projected 2011</b>
Blue collar	37.8%	36.2%
White collar	48.3%	48.7%
Services	13.9%	15.2%

**ADULT EDUCATION**

	<b>2000</b>
Less than	
High School	37.8%
High School	27.5%
Some College	15.4%
Associates Degree	6.4%
College Degree	8.5%
Graduate Degree	4.3%

**POPULATION**

2006	18,424
2000–2006 Population: Annual Compound Growth Rate	1.06%
2006–2011 Population: Annual Compound Growth Rate	1.18%

Population by age group

	<b>2006</b>	<b>Projected 2011</b>
0-4	8.3%	8.1%
5-9	7.7%	7.5%
10-14	7.5%	7.7%
15-19	5.5%	7.0%
20-24	6.1%	5.1%
25-29	8.2%	5.8%
30-34	8.3%	7.7%
35-39	7.3%	7.6%
40-44	6.9%	7.4%
45-49	6.4%	6.9%
50-54	5.3%	6.1%
55-59	5.2%	5.6%
60-64	4.6%	4.7%
65-69	3.6%	3.8%
70-74	3.0%	2.7%
75-79	2.5%	2.4%
80-84	1.9%	1.9%
85+	1.8%	1.9%

*Sources for Vital Statistics listed above can be found in the Preface to this book.*

A guide to selecting the best town or small city for retirement provides detailed descriptions of fifty locations in nine southeastern states, noting cultural and recreational activities, health care statistics, and wildlife information. The 50 Best Small Southern Towns. Customer Reviews. Write a review.