

**“The best thing about this whole area undoubtedly is the people.”**

— Bill Alford, who moved to Verrado in Buckeye, AZ



**“You can be busy here from 7 a.m. until you fall over at midnight if you want to.”**

— Robin Riegel, who moved to Cresswind at Lake Lanier in Gainesville, GA



# 50 THE SHORT LIST

## The Short List: 50 Best Master-Planned Communities in the United States

BY BRENT STOLLER with an introduction by Annette Fuller

**JANE SUNDERLAND** has a ritual that brightens her days in the Brunswick Forest master-planned community in Leland, NC. “My neighbor and I sing, ‘It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood’ when we see each other, because that’s how it is,” she says.

She and her husband, Gerry, both 60, moved from Massachusetts to North Carolina in 2015. Their retirement relocation inspires Jane to sing the “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” theme song on a routine basis, bringing a recurring smile to both her and her friend.

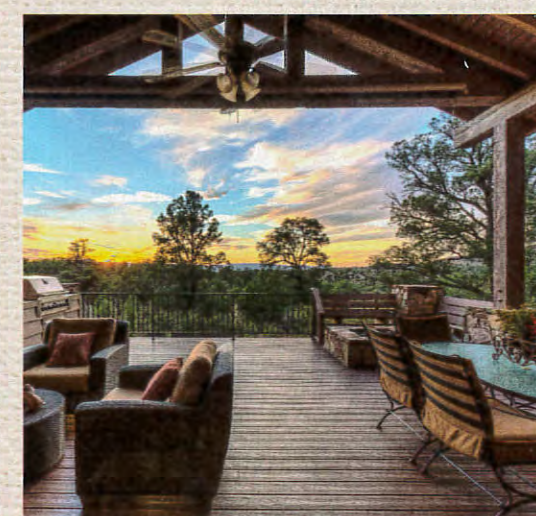
Isn’t it nice when everyday living leads to breaking out in song?

A superb translocation, like the one Jane and Gerry made, requires a move to an advantageous and nurturing spot, so here is our list of the 50 best master-planned communities across America. Every other year

in the July-August issue, we bring our readers a comprehensive look at the best of the best. This time around, the developments are in 18 states, in towns that are stunning in the viewfinder. Check out locations on the coast, in the mountains, near low-humidity deserts, by rivers and lakes and in proximity to major cities.

Our staff has been working on this issue for nearly a year. It is our 10th listing; our first such feature was in 1999. We evaluated hundreds of communities, but chose only established neighborhoods with enough acreage to build at least a year’s supply of homes.

With every 50 best issue, we see trends, such as an emphasis on fitness through pools, trails and exercise equipment. Other enticements are dog parks, communal gardens and green home options. Of course,



**“Neighbors are more than just people who live next to each other.”**

— Claudia Rimai, who moved to NorthWest Crossing in Bend, OR



many have golf courses and tennis courts.

For years, people choosing a master-planned community had to decide whether they preferred an active-adult or all-ages neighborhood. A new trend combines the two, with a 55-plus section inside an all-ages development, so that your inner circle is people of your own age, and your outer circle includes families, teenagers and tykes. (See our story on page 44 that gives the pros and cons of all three options.)

Retirement relocation means the logistics of selling and then buying a home. But a year after uprooting yourself, your thoughts about the success of the move most likely will be based on more than paint colors, kitchen countertops and closet space.

“We will never ever leave, because it’s so wonderful,” says Kris

Close, 59, who moved from Minnesota in 2015 with husband Kerry, 62, to the Sugar Mill Pond community in Youngsville, LA. “We came for the house, but we’re staying for the people.”

**A quick preface to this feature:**

The 50 communities are listed alphabetically, by state and then by development name. This is not a ranking, so they are not numbered. Each has a short description, including interviews with residents. A databox shows home prices, websites and more. Note that costs fluctuate; use them as a guide. Lastly, the chart on pages 98 and 99 lists all 50 as well as a rundown of amenities, making comparisons easy. ▶

## Arizona

### CANTAMIA AT ESTRELLA

GOODYEAR, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Amid the beauty of the Sonoran Desert, within the master-planned development of Estrella, this neighborhood epitomizes the active-adult lifestyle. Residents never stop improving, boosting their fitness capacity in the exercise complex and their brainpower in classes on writing, gardening, social networking and astronomy. Nature lovers stretch their legs on walking paths surrounding a lake, and golfers test their skills on an Estrella course designed by Jack Nicklaus' company. The clubhouse, reserved solely for CantaMia, boasts a demonstration kitchen, billiards room and indoor and outdoor pools, among other features.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** In their quest for a place that offered more age-specific activities, Pat and Don Straka, who lived in Estrella, attended an open house at CantaMia. "We looked around and said, 'This is it,'" recalls Pat, 69. "And we had just remodeled our other house." Since moving just 4 miles south in 2015, the couple have enjoyed walks, bike rides and visits to the pet park with their dogs. Don, 68, joined the community's advisory committee, and Pat keeps fit in water aerobics classes. They also are regulars at neighborhood events like trivia and casino nights, happy hours and murder mystery dinners. At their first Thanksgiving celebration here, the Strakas joined some 250 people for dinner. "I've never seen so many different green bean dishes," Pat says with a laugh.

**DEVELOPER** AV Homes Inc.

**PRICES** \$180,000s to \$310,000s for single-family homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$209



**STATUS** 500 homes built of 1,716 planned on 540 acres within the 19,800-acre Estrella development

**AGE-RESTRICTED** Yes

**INFORMATION** CantaMia at Estrella, 17700 W. Star Point Drive, Goodyear, AZ 85338, AVHomesInc.com/CantaMia or (800) 284-6637

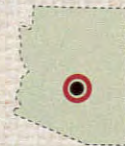


Dolce Vita

### DOLCE VITA

APACHE JUNCTION, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** This development delivers a vibrant lifestyle in the shadow of the Superstition Mountains. Good times are plentiful in the Mediterranean-style clubhouse, where residents play poker, shoot billiards, create pottery in a kiln and enhance their endurance in the fitness center. A movie theater with a vast film collection is the spot for relaxing evenings with friends, while the ballroom hosts communitywide concerts and celebrations. Making the most of the area's sunshine, outdoor amenities include a putting green, heated pool with two spas as well as bocce, shuffleboard and pickleball courts.



**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "I took a ride out here on a motorcycle and I fell in love with the whole thing," says Bill Bettencourt, 55, who made the 1,700-plus-mile trek from his Chicago suburb. "The area is beautiful, and the amenities are incredible." A resident since 2016, Bill likes Dolce Vita's quiet location and appreciates

the lack of pressure to participate in neighborhood happenings. "If you want to join 50 activities, have at it. If you don't want to join any, that's just as good," he says. In addition to volunteering within the community, Bill enjoys exploring the region on his three-wheel motorcycle. "The side roads are absolutely gorgeous — the mountains, the terrain," he says. "And it's right out my back door."

**DEVELOPER** Murex Properties

**PRICES** \$80,000s to \$160,000s for single-family manufactured homes; lots are leased

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$199 to \$648 (lot rent)

**STATUS** 350 homes built of 720 planned on 137 acres

**AGE-RESTRICTED** Yes

**INFORMATION** Dolce Vita at Superstition Mountain, 3301 S. Goldfield Road, Apache Junction, AZ 85119, Dolce-Vita-AZ.com or (877) 992-1212

### EASTMARK

MESA, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Residents of this development connect while taking outdoor yoga classes, bicycling pedestrian-friendly streets and enjoying more than 25 parks. The Eastmark Great Park, the community's crown jewel, features green spaces, a lake, stream, splash pad and twisting playground climbing structure. During spring evenings, First Friday concerts are held on the event lawn. In the active-adult section of Encore, the 55-plus crowd delights in ▶



CantaMia at Estrella



2015 Best Premium Cruise Line  
Travel Weekly's 13th Annual Readers' Choice Awards

EXTRAORDINARY.  
TO THE ENDS  
OF THE EARTH  
AND BACK.



VACATIONS  
To Go

800-338-4962

Monday-Friday 5:30am-1am CST

Sat 7am-10pm CST • Sun 8am-10pm CST

Celebrity X Cruises®

SAIL BEYOND BORDERS



Eastmark

the amenities just for them, which include a cafe, fitness center, pool and sports courts.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "There are people my age living here, and people much younger than me living here, and we all mix together," says Steve Ventre, 69, who moved from another city in Arizona. He discovered Eastmark while helping his daughter search for homes in the community and fell in love with its design and vision. "This wasn't something they just threw together," he says. Steve relocated here in 2015, and soon after, his son did, too. Within walking distance of his children's houses, Steve spends many mornings entertaining his grandsons. "I almost feel like I'm overblessed," he says. "I get to spend all day doing what I want to do. It's the beginning of a new kind of life in retirement."

**DEVELOPER** DMB

**PRICES** High \$100,000s to low \$500,000s for single-family and multifamily homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$93

**STATUS** 900 homes built of 15,000 planned on 3,200 acres

**AGE-RESTRICTED** No, but the Encore neighborhood is age-restricted

**INFORMATION** Eastmark, 10100 E. Ray Road, Mesa, AZ 85212, Eastmark.com or (855) 327-8675

### ROBSON RANCH ARIZONA

ELOY, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Life is a vacation at this development, located halfway between Phoenix and Tucson.

The recreation complex features multiple pools, 16 pickleball courts, exercise facilities and massage and steam rooms for recovering from the day's activities.

Residents hit high notes in karaoke club, create stained-glass windows in the arts center and give back to the local community through philanthropic initiatives. The golf course unfolds like an emerald green carpet against a desert backdrop, and the new Ranch House includes a bar,

grill and billiards tables. A gated entry and roving patrol give folks a sense of security.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "You have to say 'no' to things, because you've got so much going on," Rebecca McKinney laughingly admits. Retirees from San Diego, she and husband Tom, 56, are members of the RV club and enjoy dance lessons, hiking and pickleball.

Rebecca, 60, also is involved in charitable efforts. "We do quilts for people who may be suffering or have lost a spouse," she says. During their initial visit, the couple were floored by the community's beauty and hospitality, and that sparkling first impression has proved prophetic since they relocated here in 2015. "I haven't regretted it and my husband hasn't regretted it," Rebecca says. "We just love it."

**DEVELOPER** Sun Lakes-Casa Grande Development LLC

**PRICES** High \$170,000s to \$500,000s for villa townhomes and single-family homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$311.17 for villas and \$186.17 for single-family homes

**STATUS** 922 homes built of 8,747 planned on 3,600 acres



Robson Ranch Arizona

**AGE-RESTRICTED** Yes  
**INFORMATION** Robson Ranch Arizona, 5687 N. Robson Blvd., Eloy, AZ 85131, Robson.com or (800) 770-7044

### SUN CITY ANTHEM AT MERRILL RANCH

FLORENCE, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Residents of this age-restricted neighborhood enjoy the best of both worlds with private facilities in their own community and access to amenities in Parkside at Anthem at Merrill Ranch. Fishing lakes, a golf course and rock climbing wall are a hit with adults, while the adventure playground and water park will have the grandchildren ready for a nap. At the Union Center clubhouse, the 55-plus crowd takes



Sun City Anthem at Merrill Ranch

classes in the enrichment academy, burns calories around the indoor walking track and unwinds at the pool. Medical care is available at an on-site hospital.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "The houses are a great value for the money," says Carla Henderson, 62, ▶

FROM TOP: ROBERT NABELE PHOTOGRAPHY; DEL WEBER; MARK ROSOL/ANHEM RESORT COMMUNITIES

Turret Tower Bay View from El Morro Fort — San Juan, Puerto Rico

# ALL PATHS LEAD TO ADVENTURE

This is not the Caribbean. This is the Royal Caribbean®.

Immerse yourself in new adventures with the only cruise line voted Best In The Caribbean 14 years running by *Travel Weekly* readers.

*Anthem of the Seas*®

5-9 NIGHT BERMUDA AND CARIBBEAN  
Sailing from Cape Liberty, New Jersey

*Oasis of the Seas*®

7 NIGHT CARIBBEAN  
Sailing from Orlando (Port Canaveral), Florida

*Liberty of the Seas*®

7 NIGHT CARIBBEAN  
Sailing from Galveston, Texas

For reservations and information, please contact Vacations To Go

1-800-338-4962 | [VacationsToGo.com/RCCL](http://VacationsToGo.com/RCCL)

Monday - Friday 5:30 a.m. - 1:00 a.m. CST | Saturday 7:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. CST | Sunday 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. CST



\*The pricing and promotions listed in this advertisement are being included by the travel agency and are not the responsibility of Royal Caribbean International or its parent company or affiliates. Contact your travel agency for more information. All itineraries are subject to change without notice. Prices are subject to availability and change without notice. © 2017 Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. "Ships" registry: The Bahamas. 17056610 • 5/1/2017

who came here with husband Doug, 67. "We love the tile roofs and stucco siding." The couple tested out Sun City Anthem by staying in a friend's vacation home and were impressed with the amenities. And since relocating from Denver in 2015, they have come to appreciate their neighbors. "They are good people from different walks of life and different areas of the country," Carla says. Recovering from a health challenge, Doug is feeling better and enjoys exercising. Carla has been energized by line dancing, clogging and going to the pool. "I feel young again," she says. "I wish we'd moved here earlier."

**DEVELOPER** Pulte Homes

**PRICES** \$180,000s to \$260,000s for single-family homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$125

**STATUS** 1,200 homes built of 3,800 planned on 1,573 acres within the 3,200-acre Anthem at Merrill Ranch development

**AGE-RESTRICTED** Yes

**INFORMATION** Sun City Anthem at Merrill Ranch by Del Webb, 3855 N. Sun City Blvd., Florence, AZ 85132, DelWebb.com/SunCityAnthem or (877) 937-6396

## SUN CITY FESTIVAL

BUCKEYE, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Endless recreation and resortlike amenities instill a vibrant atmosphere in this active-adult community. The desert landscape sets the scene for the Copper Canyon Golf Club, and a beach-entry pool features lap lanes for zero-impact workouts. More than 30 clubs give folks the chance to create at the potter's wheel, swing for the fences at the softball stadium and waltz in dance classes. A continuing-education program offers courses in subjects such as meditation and the Beatles.



Sun City Festival



Talking Rock Ranch

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "One of the things we like is it's not in the city," explains Steve Garner, 61. Adds his wife, Eileen, "You can appreciate the landscape because there are no busy roads. It's just peaceful and beautiful." As snowbirds, the couple have been escaping the Virginia winters since 2014 and have found it easy to become — and remain — part of the community. "When we come back, it's like we never left," says Eileen, 53. While Steve plays golf and exercises at the gym, Eileen walks, hikes and works out, and she hopes to learn how to paint. "It's like a five-star hotel: the amenities, the events, the shows, the activities," Eileen says of the development. "If you're bored, it's your own fault."

**DEVELOPER** Pulte Homes

**PRICES** \$200,000s to \$290,000s for single-family homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$139.33

**STATUS** 2,200 homes built of 7,200 planned on 3,100 acres

**AGE-RESTRICTED** Yes

**INFORMATION** Sun City Festival by Del Webb, 26415 W. Desert Vista Blvd., Buckeye, AZ 85396, DelWebb.com/SunCityFestival or (866) 450-9322

## TALKING ROCK RANCH

PRESCOTT, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** Hawks soar overhead as wildlife roams the landscape of this community situated on a working cattle ranch. Conversation abounds each morning in Coop's Coffee Shop, and at Morgan's Bar and Grill, where golfers gather after a round on the development's par-72 layout. Grandparents teach youngsters to fish at Windmill Pond, stocked with bluegill and bass. The neighborhood garden grows fruits, vegetables and flowers. Home designs incorporate the best in outdoor living, energy efficiency and high-desert architecture.



**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "We were sitting in the rocking chairs having a glass of wine, looking at the mountains, and Scott turned and said, 'I know where I want to go,'" Karen Galbraith recalls of the couple's Discovery Visit. They relocated here in 2014 from San Diego for Arizona's lower taxes and temperate climate, and they love the golf club's easygoing environment. "The membership is friendly and the course is beautiful," says Scott, 64. The Galbraiths also enjoy hiking and appreciate the quiet of this secluded community. Thoughtful neighbors go the extra mile. "Every week, I get texts from different people saying, 'I'm heading to town. What do you need at the store?'" says Karen, 63. "People really take care of one another."



Trilogy at Vistancia

**DEVELOPER** The True Life Cos. and Harvard Investments

**PRICES** High \$400,000s to \$1 million and higher for single-family homes

**MONTHLY HOMEOWNER FEE** \$90 to \$243

**STATUS** 250 homes built of 1,500 planned on 3,600 acres

**AGE-RESTRICTED** No

**INFORMATION** Talking Rock Ranch, 15075 N. Talking Rock Ranch Road, Prescott, AZ 86305, TalkingRockRanch.com or (877) 922-4440

## TRILOGY AT VISTANCIA

PEORIA, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** At the 35,000-square-foot Kiva Club, morning coffee brews in the cafe, lectures are delivered in the Center for Higher Learning and a massage at the spa offers a post-workout reward. A second social center, the Mita Club, debuted in 2016 and features a pool, arts studio, demonstration kitchen and terrace brimming with mountain views. After a jog on the Discovery Trail or a round on the golf course, members adjourn to V's Taproom, a neighborhood joint serving burgers and craft beers.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "We hike at least once a week, we play softball twice a week and we have golf lessons," says Sally Schulz, 53, who fled Michigan's cold with husband Bill. "We fill in the rest of our time with the car club, bunco and book club, and Bill started a euchre club." As Bill, 59, laughingly explains, "We grossly overcommitted, but we're having fun." Test-driving Arizona as a relocation option, the couple purchased a condo in the area and visited several times a year, but they struggled to make friends — until they moved to Trilogy at Vistancia in 2016. "From the moment we came here, we were invited to do all sorts of activities," Sally says. "When you move



Verrado

Trilogy Blvd., Peoria, AZ 85383, TrilogyLife.com/Vistancia or (800) 685-6494

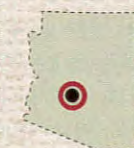
## VERRADO

BUCKEYE, ARIZONA

**THE LURE** More than 70 parks dot this desert development, meaning every home is within a short walk of green spaces and neighborly outdoor fun. Folks here stargaze in astronomy club and grill hot dogs poolside during an afternoon at the swim park. Other days, they shop, dine and attend festivals and farmers markets along Main Street, a commercial district that also features medical and business services. The Giving Tree, a philanthropic program that connects residents with volunteer opportunities, takes its name from the Southern live oak that towers over the Grand Lawn.

**WHAT RESIDENTS SAY** "We like the small-town atmosphere. We feel safe," says Diane Alford, 65. "It's the friendliest community I've ever lived in," echoes her husband, Bill, 69. "Rather than just being neighbors, it's like we're family." Diane and Bill originally left the Seattle area for another Arizona location, but moved here in 2015 for a more dynamic lifestyle. They play pickleball, hike in the White Tank Mountains and enjoy movie nights and other activities planned by the community's event coordinators.

"They keep things very active for us," Diane says. Last fall, the couple attended the inaugural grape stomp in Victory, the 55-plus section of the development that has its own 3-acre vineyard.

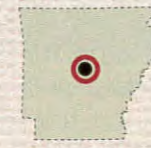


# Arkansas

## CHENAL VALLEY

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

**THE LURE** Majestic trees canopy the undulating landscape and line the neighborhood parks of this quiet community on the west side of Arkansas' capital city. Chenal Country Club touts a swimming complex, eight tennis courts and two Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf courses. Members burn calories in the fitness center, then head to the family dining room for a casual lunch. Shops, eateries and an Imax movie theater are at The Promenade at Chenal, and outdoor adventure



Chenal Valley