

# GULFSCAPES

FINER GULF COAST LIVING

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*Rosemary Beach, Florida*

A photograph of a wooden deck with a set of stairs leading up to a lounge area. Two large white patio umbrellas are open on the upper deck, and a dark wooden Adirondack chair is visible. The deck overlooks a body of turquoise water. The sky is blue with light clouds. The text 'find your perfect retirement spot' is overlaid at the bottom in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**find your perfect  
retirement spot**

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO FINDING YOUR OWN **PIECE OF PARADISE**

Gulfscapes asked **Cathi Montgomery**, an expert and lecturer on retirement, to give us some guidance on how to choose a coastal retirement home. Montgomery worked for the Department of Defense for 32 years. During her tenure, she held several management positions for a range of essential programs, including time as a Congressional Liaison for a major Defense agency. She oversaw the operation of hundreds of millions of dollars; was key in standing up several new organizations at the agency level; and managed financial resources and contracts. After successfully battling breast cancer, Montgomery set out to plan her retirement with her husband. She has taken her careful, methodical approach and turned it into a lecture series to help others gain the retirement they desire. She shared her advice with us.



CATHI MONTGOMERY

**Ideally, when should you start searching and researching for your Coastal retirement home?** I find that we are all so busy with our lives and once we begin thinking about buying a vacation or retirement property we simply don't know where to begin. There is so much data out there and it is hard to start organizing it into a practical guide to start the search. My approach is not rocket science, but a thoughtful and methodical approach to finding the community of your dreams.

So when do you start your search? As soon as you begin to think about it! My husband and I "talked" about it for years; where did we want to retire? Mountains, water, big city, small town, an over 55 community, south, north, east or west? As you travel for vacation or business start paying attention to your surroundings - you may find some areas you are interested in researching further. Subscribe to magazines that cover retirement living and communities

(Gulfscapes, Southern Living, Coastal Living, AARP publications). Attend home shows and expos, and surf the web. Over time – a few years and some online research – my husband and I decided on North Carolina and decided to look closer to the coast than to the mountains. Then the research really began. We found retirement property in a golf and marina gated community and plan to begin building in the next 3 years. We also own an oceanfront condo in Ocean City, MD. We plan to spend our summers at the beach condo.

**How do you go about finding your perfect retirement home?** Research, research, research. Travel to the areas you are considering. Talk to the locals, pick up brochures and guides at the visitor centers located in most towns. Take pictures so you can remember what you looked at. The web is a wonderful thing and you can gain so much knowledge about the areas that you are considering. Visit the city and town web page and learn about local government, businesses, things to do and see, medical facilities and local culture. Study the taxes and figure out where you will be happy and have a good/reasonable tax situation (all the states have web sites that explain their tax structure). While many states might exclude some or all of your pension from income taxes, you need to consider other taxes, such as sales tax and property taxes. Most communities have web sites and you can glean a wealth of information to help in deciding whether or not the community is worth a look to you. Develop a spreadsheet and use it as a checklist when considering what you want as your dream property. Once you have narrowed it down, contact the community or a realtor in the area to make arrangements for a visit. Many communities have what they call "discovery packages" which provide for lodging at a reduced rate and may include other goodies such as a free round of golf, or a meal at the (Continued on page 34)



# checklists help you make an educated decision

## SELECTING THE THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR RETIREMENT

club house. Ask about these packages when you call. As I was visiting potential properties, I stayed in some nice villas and hotels at less than \$100 per night.

**What details should you take into consideration when selecting your retirement home?** Make a checklist of issues that are important to you: location, amenities, state taxes, property taxes, medical and hospital facilities, military bases, shopping, culture and entertainment, churches, airports and other public transportation, interstates and highways, and the weather.

When my sister and I decided to buy retirement properties I created a spreadsheet of all the amenities we thought we wanted; did the research to find properties in the areas we were interested in; and created another spreadsheet of all the properties we wanted to visit. We figured out in what order we would visit the properties and how long we would stay in each location (some locations had multiple properties). We made appointments for visiting and hit the road. It was a great road trip. We were gone for 10 days and by the time we returned home each of us owned a new piece of property. We took cell phones, a digital camera and my laptop, and each day we would email our husbands the best of what we looked at, providing details over phone calls. Once we each bought a piece of property all the details were worked out, including settlement, by email and mail.

**Many people buying a second home on the coast will be experiencing a new type of ownership – a condo. What things should they know about owning a condo? As for second homes, what terms might be new about owning a second home?** Condo ownership is great for a second home, vacation home, or for people that don't want to be bothered with outside maintenance. There are condo fees involved and the amount will depend on the size of the condo community and the amenities associated with the condo – like a pool, golf course, tennis courts, workout room. We have a beach

condo and we pay a condo fee quarterly — we have a pool and an elevator, two parking spaces and common areas that have to be maintained. We don't worry about much except for having fun and enjoying the beach life. These days there are not many communities that don't have homeowner's fees associated with their property. These fees are used to maintain the common grounds, as well as the amenities. Most communities are trying to become all-inclusive, so you don't have to go far to swim, play tennis, play golf or exercise. The cost of the fees are associated with the type of property/community – is it a golfing, tennis and/or marina community? Are there bike and jogging paths to be maintained? Is there security? Second homes are just like owning your primary residence, except you don't live there full time. One thing to do once you are seriously considering a property is to check with the Homeowner's Association – you can get this information from your realtor, and some associations can be found online. An important item to check is the association's reserve funds – are they collecting a sufficient amount to replace/repair aging amenities and emergencies? If not, an owner could be hit with special assessments and it could cost thousands of dollars. You want to make certain the Homeowner's Association is planning ahead, as well as managing the day-to-day issues.

**Do you have any tips about buying that reflect the current economic state? It's a buyers market; how do retirees take advantage of this market?** BUY NOW. Even if you don't keep it, it will likely sell for more than you paid because the market has to go back up. Consider it an investment – part of your portfolio. There are some great deals to be had and the buyer has the negotiation power right now. You may be able to ask for extras, like having the club membership fees paid, or some free golf rounds. Financing is another issue and depends on your personal economic situation. Some choose to finance the property; some take out equity loans on their primary residence; others dip into their portfolios...it is a personal choice.