



## The Final Word

# Where Will The Boomers Go? Many Say To The Country

By Lou Francis, President, United Country® Real Estate

**B**ack in 1999, a nationally-known research company called Market Facts conducted a survey that told America what Baby Boomers plan to do when they retire. This survey revealed that nearly 40 percent of Boomers plan to retire to rural areas - that's three percent more than those who plan to retire to a warmer climate. (Bear in mind that many rural areas are in a warm climate, so the 40 percent figure could actually be much higher.)

Additionally, during the 1990s, rural areas in the U.S. grew by more than 3 million people, with two-thirds of them departing from urban areas. Now in the 21st century, we are witnessing a continuance of this trend with no indication of slowing down.

Why the country? There are many reasons why country living is appealing to those of retirement age. First, the lower cost of living is very appealing to those who realize that their monthly income will decrease dramatically, often to nothing more than social security income and possibly a monthly pension payment. The amount you may spend on a very modest two-bedroom home in the city or suburbs typically will buy you a larger home with an ample yard in a rural community or even acreage a few miles out from town.

The increased availability of quality healthcare in micropolitan and rural America is also luring more Baby Boomers to the country. Many (if not most) micropolitan communities offer a wide array of medical services including readily available transportation to the nearest metropolitan area in the event that specialized care is required.

An abundance of leisure activities also abound that are not available in urban areas, such as hunting, fishing, boating, hobby farming, and the like. For many retirees, the thought of spending their newfound free time engaged in a favorite pastime is enough to encourage them to leave the city behind for good.

Depending on the particular location you choose, chances are good that you won't have to sacrifice many of the conveniences

to which you've grown accustomed in metropolitan America. An increasing number of rural communities (and the majority of micropolitan areas) boast such conveniences as a Super Wal-Mart store, McDonald's, fine dining, a movie theater complex, Starbuck's, Kinko's, Walgreen's, and much more.

### **BOOM OR BUST - MARKETING IS THE KEY**

The phenomenon of Baby Boomers retiring to the country is a tremendously important one for those of us involved in the sale of rural real estate. For United Country, it represents one of the key factors in our success over the past several years. A growing percentage of our property sales are to retiring Baby Boomers. And with this group just beginning to reach retirement age, this one trend - in and of itself - should continue for another 20 years or more.

Talk about opportunity! The largest segment of America's population is entering its retirement years, and close to half has indicated a strong interest in moving away from the cities and suburbs.

This opens up an oyster full of pearls in terms of target marketing. Probably the brightest and best pearl involves capitalizing on the Internet. Most Boomers, by necessity, have become fairly Internet-savvy. Like it or not, they had to. They were still working when the computer revolution overtook virtually every aspect of the business world. They had to sink or swim. Fortunately, many are embracing the way we now do business and how we seek out information on an endless number of topics, including where to live in retirement.

At United Country Real Estate, we have experienced the enormous impact of Internet marketing first hand, and to an ever-increasing degree. In the past few years, our Web site, [www.unitedcountry.com](http://www.unitedcountry.com), has become a central element in the success of our company.

Unlike the majority of in-town residential purchases, Boomers researching country properties are often looking hundreds, if not thousands of miles away from their current/primary residence. The Internet makes

it easy for buyers to narrow down their search before leaving home.

While the Internet obviously has made life easier for us, print media still plays a significant role in attracting the attention of your target audience to your property listings. It's expensive, but still represents a tremendous way to target prospects. Knowing where the majority of your buyers are located, and what they read, is a key factor in targeting specific publications. Moreover, your Web address should be prominently featured in your ads to maximize traffic on your Web site. Our approach at United Country is to utilize print media in a manner that makes certain our "Web voice" is heard above the ever-growing "noise" on the Internet.

Yes, the rural real estate market is booming, thanks, in part, to the desire of the Baby Boomers to find a quiet place in the country...with Internet access, of course!

**Lou Francis**, president and chief executive officer of United Country Real Estate headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, has spent his entire 34-year real estate career with United.

United Country is the only national franchise system specializing in small town and rural America. Founded in 1925, the company hosts an award winning Web site at [www.unitedcountry.com](http://www.unitedcountry.com) that features the entire listing inventory of its franchise system. United Country today numbers more than 400 offices in 34 states.

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