

# WHERE *to* RETIRE

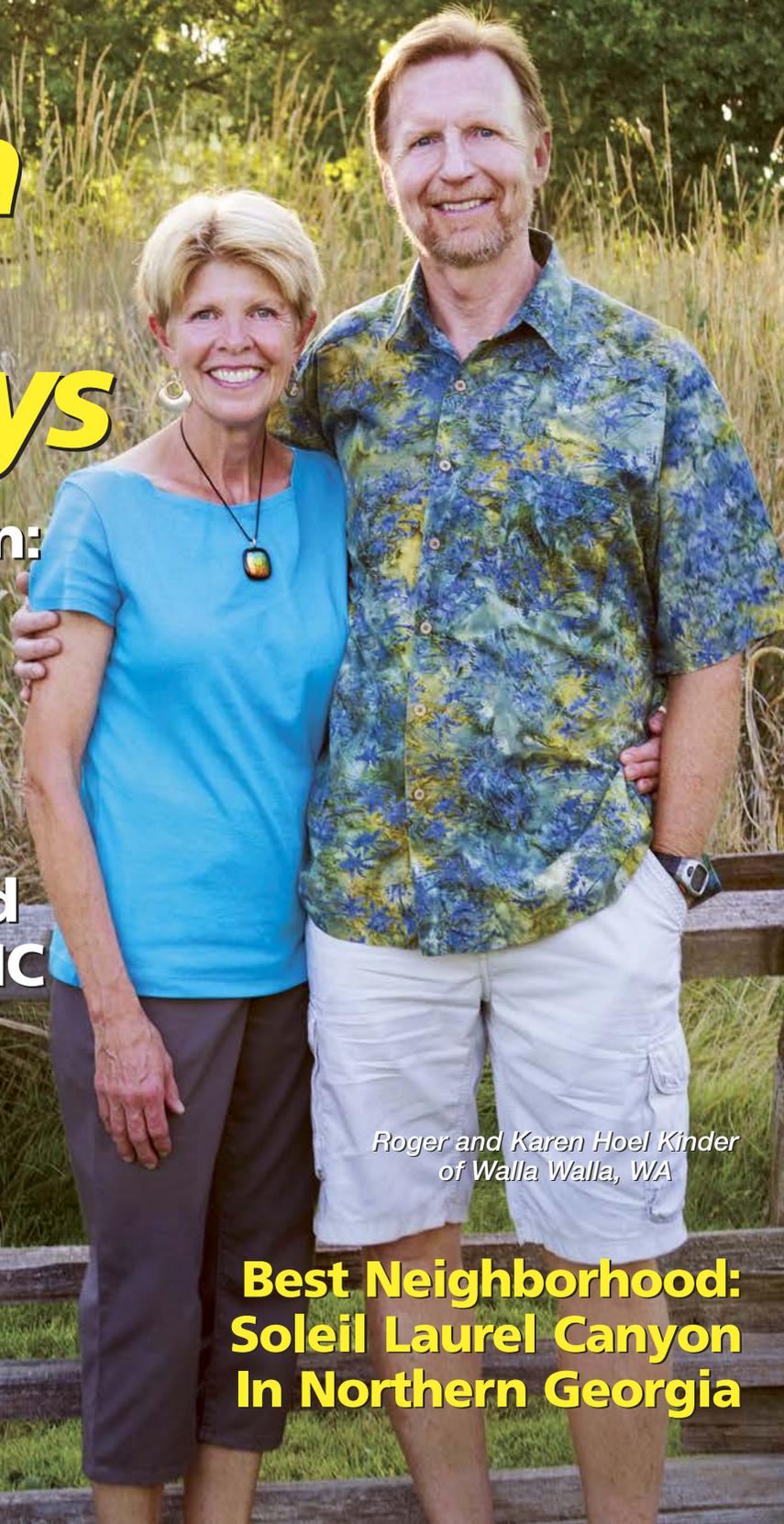
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## **4 Florida Beach Hideaways**

**Undiscovered Haven:  
Walla Walla, WA**

**Reinventing  
Yourself for the  
Retirement Years**

**Hot City Perks Amid  
A Forest: Raleigh, NC**



*Roger and Karen Hoel Kinder  
of Walla Walla, WA*

**Best Neighborhood:  
Soleil Laurel Canyon  
In Northern Georgia**

By Jim Kerr

# Soleil Laurel Canyon

**Canton, Georgia**

**A**ngela and Gene Reilly are beach people. Forty-four years ago they met at Jones Beach State Park on Long Island, NY, where they both grew up, and when they married, they lived near the water in Long Island's Rockville Centre. But after looking at countless beach communities for retirement, they chose the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains and the spectacular sunsets of north-central Georgia.

Angela, 63, a former secondary schoolteacher, drove across Florida checking out places to retire as she visited relatives in the state. "It just didn't feel right to me," she recalls. "Unless you're on the ocean — where it's too expensive — it doesn't have much appeal, and I like the changing seasons." The couple also had been traveling to Georgia since 1989 because Gene, 66, has a brother living



SOLEIL LAUREL CANYON PHOTOS

**Tennis and swimming facilities are part of a 28,000-square-foot amenity center, which also lures residents like Angela and Gene Reilly (inset) with a variety of clubs and group activities.**



JIM KERR

in Marietta and another in Roswell, both outside Atlanta.

A friend "tipped us off to this place," Angela says of Soleil Laurel Canyon in Canton, GA, about 40 miles north of Atlanta. The active-adult community has 300 homes built of 728 planned on 350 acres within the larger Laurel Canyon development. "We looked at

all three Del Webb communities in Georgia and we liked them all," Angela remembers. "They all offered different things, like lakes and golf. But we kept coming back to Laurel Canyon with its hilly fields and woods. In a way, it reminds us of upstate New York." The couple sold their Rockville Centre home in two months and rented an apartment while Gene continued working in human resources for a beverage company. They picked out a lot at Soleil in September 2010 and began building. Gene retired in February 2011 and in April they moved into their 2,170-square-foot, two-bedroom house on

Larkspur Drive, a cozy cul-de-sac.

They were welcomed into a social network they had never imagined. Besides the monthly block party on Larkspur, there are dozens of clubs, activities and scheduled events, many of them held in the community's 28,000-square-foot clubhouse with its indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts, theater, aerobics studio, arts and crafts center, billiard and card rooms and library. Angela, a member of the gardening club, has a plot in the horticulture center where she grows sunflowers and veggies, and she and Gene belong to one of three popular cooking groups, which enthusiastically utilize the clubhouse's gourmet kitchen.

"I'm always busy," says Gene. "People are here from all over the country. It's extremely diverse, with well-attended fundraising events and two

social directors who send out updates twice a week.”

Like the majority of retirees in Soleil, Micki and Frank Farley also have relatives living nearby. It was a significant factor in their decision to relocate here from Gambrills, MD. Two of Micki's sisters live in Marietta and three brothers live in Louisville, KY, where Micki grew up.

“We'd been married 37 years,” says Micki, 57, who worked 33 years for the National Weather Service as a computer programmer and project manager, “and the agreement was I get to come home to the South when I retire.” Frank, also 57, is a former respiratory therapist.

They checked out several communities around Atlanta before deciding on Soleil and signing a contract in November 2009. It took 10 months to sell their Maryland home while their new house was being built in the summer of 2010. Although they downsized from 3,500 to 2,200 square feet, the Farleys were pleased to learn they could make changes to the standard floor plan. They opted for a larger kitchen, a sunroom instead of a porch and a bar area in the kitchen.

“We saw a lot of nice houses in other communities, but few had many



The 1,852-square-foot Cobalt floor plan offers a covered patio and the option for a third bedroom.

amenities,” says Frank. “And when we saw the clubhouse here and the adjacent golf course, that helped sell us. We are big golfers.”

While the revamped 18-hole Fairways of Canton wanders up and down the hills and through the woods of Soleil, as well as adjoining neighborhoods, it's owned by the city and operated under a long-term concession lease. It has clubhouse facilities, including a pro shop and restaurant, within a short distance of the community's gatehouse.

Residents can buy memberships, or

the course can be played at reasonable green fees. The sunset views can be spectacular, the Farleys say, although they admit the heat and humidity here were hard to get used to. “In July and August, we just hang out at the pool,” Micki says. “But as much as we hate the summer heat, it still beats Maryland winters and 4 feet of snow.”

While Soleil offers homes where potential buyers can stay at a reasonable cost, the Farleys checked into a local hotel on one trip to explore the town. Established in the 1830s, Can-

## Soleil Laurel Canyon

**Location:** Soleil Laurel Canyon is in the foothills of the Blue Ridge in Canton, GA, about an hour from Atlanta. It's part of the larger Laurel Canyon development. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is roughly an hour away.

**Developer:** Active Lifestyle Communities, a partnership of Southeast Capital Companies and Patrick Malloy Communities

**Home sizes and prices:** There are eight new model homes and nine floor plans ranging from 1,418 square feet to 2,813 square feet. Choices include two bedrooms with two baths, two bedrooms with three baths and three bedrooms with two and a half baths. Prices start at \$199,000 and go into the \$300,000s. Options include upstairs bonus rooms, studies and double master suites.

**Community size:** Currently, there are 300 homes built of 728 planned on 350 acres. The entire Laurel Canyon development, which includes the golf course and other neighborhoods besides Soleil, is about 1,100 acres.

**Amenities:** The community's 28,000-square-foot clubhouse is the centerpiece attraction, with an outdoor swimming pool

and heated indoor lap pool. There are aerobics and weight rooms, sauna and massage rooms and a fitness center as well as a theater, card and billiard rooms, ballroom, media room with bar and library. Six clay tennis courts and two all-weather courts are outside along with bocce courts, a community garden and greenhouse. Additional amenities include a gourmet teaching kitchen, arts and crafts center, lakeside gazebo and walking trails throughout the development.

**Community fees:** The \$265 monthly homeowners association fee includes use of the amenities, lawn maintenance, basic cable TV and in-home security monitoring. There is a \$1,590 capital contribution at closing that covers maintenance of the clubhouse, tennis courts and other common areas.

**Age restrictions:** Residents must be 55 or older.

**Resident mix:** The north-central Georgia location draws buyers from across the country, and a high percentage of them have relatives living within a day's drive.

**Visitor arrangements:** For those interested in learning more about the community, a three-day, two-night package with accommodations



in one of the homes is offered for \$79. It includes two rounds of golf, tennis lessons, clubhouse activities, breakfast or lunch for two, complimentary on-site activities and a private tour. Lodging also is available in the area.

**Information:** Soleil Laurel Canyon, 215 Aster Court, Canton, GA 30114, (678) 880-3071 or [www.soleillaurelcanyon.com](http://www.soleillaurelcanyon.com).



SOLEIL LAUREL CANYON PHOTOS

ton is the seat of Cherokee County, heart of a legendary, if short-lived, 19th-century gold rush. Once a thriving mill town, it was named after Canton, China, because of that city's famed silk industry.

Today, its downtown has a 200-seat theater with live shows, and the performing arts center at nearby Reinhardt University offers plays and symphony concerts. Canton also features a variety of restaurants, an attractive central gazebo for concerts and weddings, a museum housed in an old courthouse and an assortment of shops and county government buildings. In addition, the town hosts a lively farmers market every Saturday from May to September.

In contrast to Canton's laid-back

pace and rural surroundings, metro Atlanta is about an hour away with major shopping, theater and sporting events, including Braves baseball and Falcons football, and some of the nation's top medical facilities. Frank, a longtime diabetic and recent kidney transplant recipient (thanks to a donation from Micki), travels occasionally to see doctors at Atlanta's Emory University Hospital, which reminds him of The Johns Hopkins teaching facility in Baltimore. A new 84-bed hospital also is being built in Canton, adding to the county's existing services.

Despite shopping centers and big-box stores a few miles from their community gate, Terry and Rosemary Zameroski are confident that "the sounds of silence" will remain at Soleil in an atmosphere that is pleasingly different from the nine urban areas where they have lived and worked. The last location was Tampa, FL, where Terry, 64, sold document maintenance solutions and Rosemary, 63, worked in the hospitality industry.

"In searching for retirement places, we honed in on areas that interested us and did a lot of research through the Internet and in *Where to Retire* magazine," says Terry. "We had decided on Aiken, SC, but neighbors in Tampa suggested we look at Soleil Laurel Canyon, where they were building a house. The views here were

breathtaking with the surrounding mountains, and the clubhouse was like being at the Masters golf tournament. We were hooked, and we signed a contract on our first visit."

The couple bought a spec home that was nearing completion, a 2,300-square-foot house with two bedrooms, a den/office, two full baths, a formal dining and family room. And they added a screened-in porch, their favorite spot for those sounds of silence.

Aside from relaxing, playing golf and gazing at sunsets, the couple enjoy community activities and making friends. Terry belongs to the men's cooking club and Rosemary likes to play mahjong and bridge. They also are involved in Optimist Club fundraising for community projects, particularly helping underprivileged children in the county.

"For 25 years, I was very active and engaged in my work, flying off someplace almost every week," remembers Terry, who pondered whether he would be bored in an idle retirement setting. "But the question 'What am I going to do all day?' has never come up here. The sign on the front gate says it all: 'Welcome to Soleil — Active Adult Community.' People are definitely active. There's never a dull moment." **WR**

*Jim Kerr is a writer in Raleigh, NC, and a regular contributor to *Where to Retire*.*



**Resident golfers can tee off on an adjoining course, Fairways of Canton, while arts and crafts enthusiasts (above) pursue their passions at the community clubhouse.**