

Arizona welcomes Canadian buyers

BY PAMELA IRVING, THE EDMONTON JOURNAL JANUARY 25, 2009



Morrow/LaBonte home in Casa Grande Arizona has lovely landscaping, pool and gardens with a price tag of under \$US 200,000.

Photograph by: Sandy Wascher, Supplied

Realtor Sandy Wascher of Rox Real Estate Arizona has sold many homes to people from the Edmonton area.

Her region of specialty is the small city of Casa Grande, situated between Phoenix and Tucson on Interstate 210, an area that is "absolutely blossoming" according to Wascher.

"Casa Grande is weathering the economic swings and doing very well in general. The population has doubled in the last six years. We were a sleepy town of 20,000, now there are over 52,000 residents," says Sandy Wascher from her office in Casa Grande.

Wascher says that Edmontonians like the atmosphere and buy investment and holiday homes to spend part of their year there. Retirees often spend six months of the year, but there is also a trend to younger people purchasing investment homes.

Edmontonians love the sunshine, and prices are considerably less than in the Scottsdale area. Buyers can purchase a brand-new 1,700-square-foot home, with all new fittings, such as granite countertops,

double garage, and beautiful gardens and yards, for as little as \$184,785 Cdn and can put in a pool for \$34,484.80.

"Now is a good time to buy," Wascher says.

Family investment

The latest trend in Casa Grande is intergenerational purchases. Wascher has sold several properties to family groups, such as parents with their grown children.

Family members or friends pool their money and buy the house cash down in one person's name. They then set up a private Limited Liability Company whereby they all have partial ownership. They can use the property as a timeshare among themselves or go for a big family holiday.

"This arrangement puts control of the property in their hands, not some management company, and they know they are sharing with family or friends, not strangers," explains Wascher.

St. Albert resident Angela Labonte, 27, and her husband are happy with the purchase of a second home in the master-planned community of Villago in Casa Grande. They own the home with three other couples -- Angela's mother and father, a cousin and her husband, and family friends.

"We paid over \$247,220 for our house, but the same property would go for less now," says Labonte.

U.S. Homes built the house in 2006. It is a single-level, frame-and-stucco home, approximately 2,200 square feet, with a heated pool in the backyard. The kitchen opens to the great room and boasts granite countertops and tile flooring. There are three bedrooms, a den, two baths and a two-car attached garage with electric door opener and another attached single-car garage. The beautiful backyard has a covered patio with barbecue.

"Every couple gets 30 days free use, and friends and family can use it when vacant for a small cost recovery. Anything above the 30 days, we pay the same cost recovery," explains Angela Labonte.

Labonte prefers fall and spring because temperatures are warmer, over 30 degrees Celsius midday, while the other couples prefer winter where temperatures are about 10 to 15 C.

In their absence, the property is managed for maintenance, security and cleaning. Two people regularly check on the property for \$60 per month in addition to an installed security system.

The community features plenty of lush green space, walkways, schools, a sports facility with tennis and basketball courts and a water park.

"We find a smaller town like Casa Grande doesn't have the formality and pretense of Scottsdale," says Labonte, "It's relaxed and comfortable. We take our nine-month-old daughter with us, so it has to be."

From an investment perspective, Casa Grande has potential. "It is small, but all the big-box stores and

chain restaurants are building there."

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