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Pa. is popular destination

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Kelly and Wayne Nagrowski knew they wanted to leave Long Island.

Like some of their friends, the Levittown couple considered North Carolina.

But when it came time for them to move a year ago, the Nagrowskis picked a place closer to home - the Poconos.

With family still on Long Island and since her husband had a job he enjoyed in Rockland County, Kelly Nagrowski said, "We wanted to be able to stay within driving distance."

While sunny climates such as in North Carolina, Florida and Arizona still draw large crowds of Long Islanders, one northern destination is growing in popularity: Pennsylvania.

The state was the fourth-most popular nationwide for ex-patriate Long Islanders between 1995 and 2004, according to a Newsday analysis of Internal Revenue Service migration data. In the 1995-96 period, about 2,400 Long Islanders moved to Pennsylvania. In 2003-04, that number jumped to 3,200 - a 35 percent increase. Migration to North Carolina, by contrast, grew by about 7.5 percent in the same period.

Among the most popular counties are Bucks County, a popular vacation area, and Pike and Monroe counties in the Poconos.

Like the Nagrowskis, many recent transplants keep their jobs, say planners. About 20,000 of Monroe County's 163,000 residents commute to New York or New Jersey, said John Woodling, Monroe County's planning director.

A commuter bus leaves from Milford in Pike County several times a day for New York City - about a 90-minute drive - and Amtrak stops just a few miles away in Port Jervis, N.Y.

Many Long Islanders who move to Pennsylvania have a financial edge over existing residents. In Monroe County, Long Island newcomers earn about 13 percent more than their neighbors. In Pike County, they earn 20 percent more, and in Bucks County, they earn 14 percent more.

Still, says Naomi Daly, a sales associate for Davis R. Chant Realty in Milford, most families don't make the move for money alone.

"Most people are looking for a better quality of life for their family and themselves," said Daly, who herself moved to Pike County from Merrick 18 years ago.

All those newcomers - who come not just from Long Island but other parts of New York and New Jersey - are changing the quiet nature of the Poconos, some say. The Pocono Mountain School District, in Monroe County, is growing so fast that a new middle school is opening this month to accommodate the growth in students, said Dwight Pfenning, the district superintendent.

And now that the middle school is finished, he said, "People are already asking us what's next."

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