

Linville Ridge, Linville N.C.: Silver, Best Lifestyle. (Complete community results begin on page 28.)



Best of the Mountains

This year's Mountain Homes best-of awards take a look at the Hall of Fame for towns and communities. Plus we visit 11 great mountain towns that offer great cultural goings-on, bustling downtowns and a natural touch.

BY NORMA LUGAR AND JESSICA WRIGHT

It's bouquet time again.

Time to recognize the best and brightest of the Southern Mountains' communities, cities and towns. Places that make us proud of the creativity and quality we find throughout the area from parts of Maryland to the Virginias, Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia and even a bit of Alabama.

We believe, without false modesty, that we're justified in saying this is among America's most beautiful areas and offers one of its most desirable lifestyles.

But since we know some spots are always unbeatable, we're setting them aside in special categories as All-Time Winners. As for new selections, please see the Undiscovered Treasures section in these pages.

If you're looking for your own perfect treasure, we hope you'll be guided by our selections, based on a staff point system and current economic health and hardiness.

Read. Look and enjoy. There's something here for everyone.



Asheville, N.C.: All-Time Classic Town Over 25,000.

**ALL-TIME WINNERS:
CLASSIC TOWNS, UNDER 25,000**

Abingdon, Va. – An “American Dream Town,” Abingdon boasts the world-famous Barter Theatre, historic Martha Washington Inn and Virginia the Highlands Festival, one of North America’s Top 100 events.

Brevard, N.C. – Home of the internationally known Brevard Music Center for the past 70 years, the town attracts major stars for its 80 annual public performances and the city adds numerous festivals to showcase local artists and musicians.

Dahlonega, Ga. – Named one of the 50 Best Small Southern Towns, Dahlonega is surrounded by extraordinary mountains, rivers and waterfalls, is the historic site of America’s first gold rush and today holds 15 festivals and town events annually.

Hendersonville, N.C. – The essence of *joie de vivre*, it’s distinctive because of 90 years of summer street dances, a decade of Music on Main Street and its two-day annual Garden Jubilee Festival.

Lewisburg, W. Va. – Buzzing with artists and professionals, Lewisburg is a healthy example of a second-career environment. There are also many outdoor facilities, resorts, country clubs and recreation centers, as well as great outdoor fun nearby.

Sevierville, Tenn. – An outdoorsman’s paradise, Sevierville is notable for its abundance of fishing, hiking, canoeing and horseback riding opportunities, musical theater shows, dining, Winterfest and the Dumplin’ Valley June Fest.

Waynesville, N.C. – Blessed with a growing art center, the town has studio walking tours and festivals, is more than 100 years old and sometimes shuts down its Main Street for block parties and street dances. Recipient of many national accolades.

For more information, see the card on page 51.

**ALL TIME WINNERS:
CLASSIC TOWNS OVER 25,000**

Asheville, N.C. – The “Paris of the South,” Asheville is increasingly sophisticated, reflecting the presence of such icons as The Biltmore Estate and Grove Park Inn. The city has received national accolades for festivals, shopping and general livability.

Charlottesville, Va. – A fabulous place with history, an outstanding university and medical center in gorgeous horse country. Rated #1 best city to live in U.S. and Canada by “Cities Ranked and Rated.”

Chattanooga, Tenn. – Bright and exciting after a major restoration, it’s filled with river parks, cruises, an eight-mile river walk, abundant health care and education plus The Hunter Museum of American Art, The Tennessee Aquarium and The Tivoli theater.

Greenville, S.C. – All the best of things – Southern charm, scenic beauty, culture and historic roots. Home to The Little Theatre, the Greenville Museum



Dahlonega, Ga.: All-Time Classic Town Under 25,000.



Sevierville, Tenn.: The Dolly Parton statue is a signature feature of this All-Time Classic Town Under 25,000.



Abingdon, Va.: The All-Time Classic Town Under 25,000 is home to the Barter Theatre.

of Art and the Greenville Symphony Association, dining, shopping and a year-round fun center.

Knoxville, Tenn. – Rated one of the country’s 10 best towns by 10best.com, Knoxville has just a hint of the Wild West in Patrick Sullivan’s Saloon, a host of excellent medical facilities and the awe-inspiring World’s Fair Park, site of the 1982 World’s Fair.

Roanoke, Va. – The hub of Southwest Virginia, it’s endowed with banking, law, culture, shopping and media, as well as the expanding Carilion Clinic and upcoming medical school. Must-see spot: the new \$66-million Taubman Museum of Art, Jefferson Center and historic Farmers Market.

For more information, see the card on page 51.

11 UNSUNG TREASURES

Goodbye skyscrapers. Hello mountain scenery. Small towns know how to lure folks from big-city life. Less traffic, great views and distinctive attractions create an ideal getaway or place to relocate. These 11 gems showcase the ambiance of easy living with quaint downtowns, escapes to nature and cultural gatherings.

Blue Ridge, Ga. – This railroad town, founded in 1886 thanks to the arrival of the Marietta and North Georgia Railroad, entices with antiques and specialty shops, art galleries and restaurants along Main Street and its heart, Blue Ridge City Park. Here, folks gather for picnics and annual festivals such as Concerts in the Park in July and August, and Arts in the Park in May. A journey aboard the Blue Ridge Scenic Railway train showcases the beauty of the Toccoa River, which runs parallel to the tracks, and other natural wonders from Blue Ridge to McCaysville. Of note are the Chattahoochee National Forest and Chattooga River, where the movie “Deliverance” was filmed.

Banner Elk, N.C. – The town may be small – with a population of about 1,000 – but residents and visitors never long for something to do. Banner Elk, named for the wildlife that settlers found there, serves as ski central, sitting at an elevation of about 3,700 feet between Sugar and Beech mountains, both of which offer great winter recreation opportunities. And when the snow melts, these peaks go green and make for ideal hiking and horseback riding. Visitors laud the downtown shopping area, the variety of dining options, plus the golf courses and fishing holes. Annual activities include the Woolly Worm Festival, in October, and summer theater productions at Lees-McRae College.

Black Mountain, N.C. – Dubbed “the front porch of Western North Carolina” because of the fabulous mountain views from about 2,400 feet at practically every turn, Black Mountain sits just minutes from the Blue Ridge Parkway and Chimney Rock State Park.



A stroll through downtown promises a peek inside upscale gift shops and Appalachian-style craft stores. Popular outdoor activities include a visit to Lake Tomahawk, golf at Black Mountain Golf Club and hiking on one of the numerous nearby trails. The town’s art scene is not to be missed, including LEAF, an arts festival in May and October, and the Black Mountain Arts and Crafts Show in June.

Mars Hill, N.C. – Built around Mars Hill College, founded in 1856 and known as the oldest educational institute in Western North Carolina, Mars Hill holds steadfast to its roots. The Rural Life Museum, located on the college campus, showcases Southern Appalachian culture. The downtown boasts shopping and dining locales, as well as a farmer’s market. Each summer, the Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre presents enlightening dramas, comedies, musicals and heritage plays, and the town’s location off Interstate 26 gives residents easy access to Asheville, Burnsville and other areas.

Seneca, S.C. – The largest town in Oconee County, Seneca sits in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This scenic spot was developed around the Blue Ridge Railroad (now part of the Norfolk Southern Corporation), and residents and visitors enjoy views, as well as recreational activities at Lake Keowee and High Falls County Park. There’s plenty of shopping available on Ram Cat Alley in historic downtown, learning experiences at Duke Energy’s World of Energy visitor center and live shows at Oconee Community Theatre.

Gatlinburg, Tenn. – From nature-based fun at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to family adventures at Ripley’s Aquarium of the Smokies, Gatlinburg features big-city amenities and easy access to the outdoors. For the best views of the area’s beauty, visitors take the Gatlinburg Sky Lift and Aerial Tramway. The town’s cultural heritage is showcased along the Tennessee Heritage Trail while outlet malls, specialty shops and arts and crafts stores pres-

ent a plethora of mountain shopping. Not to be missed are the old-fashioned wagon rides in the fall and the popular Civil War reenactments during summer months.

Harrisonburg, Va. – Home to James Madison University, this college town appeals to more than just the school’s students. From art galleries and bookstores to boutiques and restaurants, the revitalized downtown provides plenty of shopping and dining options. Walking tours among historic buildings also are available. Harrisonburg’s scenic spots include the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and Botanical Garden, a popular – and colorful – place to propose marriage and bring out-of-town guests, and the George Washington National Forest, complete with hiking and biking trails and picnic areas.

Salem, Va. – With hot spots for cultural events and great shopping, Salem thrives as a smaller city. Picturesque churches dating back more than 100 years

Marlinton, W.Va., home to Snowshoe Mountain resort, also offers scenic trails for hiking and biking.



Historic buildings fill the downtown area of Harrisonburg, Va. Walking tours of these old structures are available.

and the distinguished Roanoke College are nestled among mountain scenery. Salem's proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway presents plenty of places for hiking, biking or sightseeing. Salem Civic Center's full schedule of events ranges from concerts, festivals and three national title sporting events, including the NCAA Division III men's basketball Final Four and the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl at adjoining Salem Football Stadium. Downtown, residents and guests stroll among boutiques, antique shops, restaurants and a bustling farmers' market. Annual activities include Olde Salem Days in September and Salem Red Sox baseball games from April to September.

Marlinton, W.Va. – Marlinton is a ski enthusiast's dream. But that's not all. In addition to the chance to swoosh down the slopes at Snowshoe Mountain resort – where elevations reach above 4,500 feet – this Pocahontas County town, situated along the Greenbrier River, has scenic trails and the Monongahela National Forest for hiking and biking, as well as an opera house for the performing arts. The Pocahontas County Arts Council showcases the talents of local artisans and its guild sponsors painting and ceramic classes for residents or visitors.

Fayetteville, W.Va. – Noteworthy are downtown's historic charm, scenery and eye-catching photo opportunities. Located on the rim of the New River Gorge, Fayetteville bustles with outdoor adventure, including whitewater rafting, fishing, hiking and mountain biking. The town is home to the spectacular New River Gorge Bridge and the annual Bridge Day in October, when brave folks B.A.S.E. jump or rappel off the arched beauty. Within Fayetteville's downtown district, gift shops, bookstores, antiques shops and restaurants are housed in the notable buildings. Audiences fill the Historic Fayette Theater, restored in 1993, for performances of all genres of plays year-round.

McHenry, Md. – During the summer, McHenry's manmade Deep Creek Lake is the spot for boating, fishing and swimming. Come winter, skiing reigns supreme at Wisp Resort. Perhaps its biggest draw, the Garrett County Fairgrounds hosts the annual Agriculture Fair in August, complete with tractor pulls, music, contests and food. In addition to water-related activities, Deep Creek Lake's state park – as well as other parks in the area – is ideal for picnicking, hiking and other recreation.

For more information, see the card on page 51.

**ALL-TIME WINNERS FOR COMMUNITIES:
MOUNTAIN HOMES' HALL OF FAME**

For the 2010 Mountain Homes Community Awards, our editors have combed through the past six years of



The Homestead Preserve, Hot Springs, Va.: Gold, Best Conservation Community, Best for Health.



*ABOVE: The Preserve at English Mountain, Sevierville, Tenn.: Silver, Best Conservation Community.
LEFT: Glade Springs Resort, Daniels, W.Va.: Silver, Best Private Golf.*

recognitions and recognized those that have been chosen year after year as having achieved excellence in our categories of selection. Platinum, gold and silver levels were determined by the number of category wins per community over the period, including repeat same-category wins from year to year.

PLATINUM

Glenmore, Keswick, Va.: Best Lifestyle, Best Equestrian Community, Best for Health

Rarity Bay, Vonore, Tenn.: Best Lifestyle, Best Equestrian Community

The Greenbrier Sporting Club, White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.: Best Lifestyle; Best Equestrian Community; Best for Health

GOLD

The Virginian, Bristol, Va.: Best Private Golf

The Water's Edge, Smith Mountain Lake, Va.: Best Golf; Best Waterfront Community

Jefferson Landing, North Wilkesboro, N.C.: Best Value; Best Golf; Best Family Gatherings

Sunalei Preserve, Boone, N.C.: Best View/High Elevation; Best Outdoor Community

The Homestead Preserve, Hot Springs, Va.: Best Conservation Community, Best for Health

SILVER

Big Canoe, Big Canoe, Ga.: Best Family Gatherings

Cadence, Blue Ridge, Ga.: Best Equestrian Community

Champion Hills, Hendersonville, N.C.: Best Lifestyle; Best Value

Echota, Boone, N.C.: Best for Family Gatherings

Glade Springs Resort, Daniels, W.Va.: Best Private Golf

Grandfather Golf and Country Club, Linville, N.C.: Best Private Golf

Highland Forest, Waynesville, N.C.: Best View/High Elevation

Linville Ridge, Linville, N.C.: Best Lifestyle

Mountain Air, Burnsville, N.C.: Best Lifestyle, Best Golf

Rarity Ridge, Oak Ridge, Tenn.: Best Value

Seven Falls Golf & River Club, Hendersonville, N.C.: Best Private Golf; Best Waterfront Community

The Cliffs Communities, North-South Carolina: Best for Health

The Preserve at English Mountain, Sevierville, Tenn.: Best Conservation Community

Wade Hampton Golf Club, Cashiers, N.C.: Best Golf

Waterdance, Tuckasegee, N.C.: Best Waterfront Community; Best for Health

Best Climate: Lake Toxaway, N.C.; Roaring Gap, N.C.; Lake Keowee, S.C. ▲