



Ron and Sylvia Vickery's twin-engine Beech Baron is poised for flight on the driveway in Spruce Creek, Fla., while Mark Martin's CitationJet is stored in the family garage



Homing In

Fly-in communities soar in popularity as families find the best of work and play worlds

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEZA SZUROVY

It would be hard to beat Mark Martin's commute to work. When the star race car driver has to leave home for his next NASCAR Winston Cup event, he saunters across his family room into the personal hangar attached to his home and fires up his CitationJet. He taxis it down the street to the community's 4,000-foot runway and blasts off for the racetrack.

The 39-year-old Martin lives in Spruce Creek, Fla., an exclusive fly-in community just outside Daytona Beach. About half of Spruce Creek's 1,200 homes come with sizable hangars attached to them, making it as easy for a home owner to access his airplane as a family car parked in the garage. Owners of homes without attached hangars have access to independent hangars near the runway or to open-air parking spots. No resident is more than a short walk or bike ride from his plane.

Fly-in communities have been around for decades and were traditionally the domain of die-hard flying fanatics, since their personal airplanes were the focal point of their lives. But recently places such as Spruce Creek have also become increasingly popular with people from all walks of life. While the common thread is flying, some choose Spruce Creek for business needs, while others enjoy the sheer beauty of the community.

As technological advances give entrepreneurs and professionals greater flexibility in choosing where to live and work, many are opting to live and work far from the frenzy of urban life. Often, those with Airplanes are willing to consider a fly-in community, provided it delivers the housing standards and lifestyle luxuries expected of preferred properties. Spruce Creek is one of a handful of fly-in communities nationwide that should satisfy the most demanding connoisseur. Other fly-in communi-

ties are Cameron Park in Sacramento, Calif., and Crest Airpark in Kent, Wash.

The properties at Spruce Creek range from spacious two-bedroom condominiums that sell for as little as \$150,000 to homes that sell for well over \$1 million.

"There is still room for development, and much of the new construction is at the high end of the price scale," says Lenny Ohlsson, a transplanted New Yorker who runs Spruce Creek Fly-In Realty with his wife, Pat.

Spruce Creek has an architectural review committee to ensure that any proposed construction meets not only certain specifications but also the spirit of the community's general character.

BEECH BARON BINGO

Ron and Sylvia Vickery's recently completed five-bedroom designer home is a perfect example of the kind of homes found in Spruce Creek. An airy foyer leads into a gorgeous living/dining area that forms the core of the house's gracious open floor plan. Soaring sets of polished marble columns subtly draw your attention to the various wings off the central living area. A richly paneled study to the left is nicely balanced by another seating area to the right. The impeccable decor in natural earth tones and cream is elegant yet comfortably informal. The spacious en suite master bedroom's ambiance is reminiscent of a suite at Singapore's famed Raffles Hotel.

Clustered around the pool in the back is an amble kitchen and family room and a guest wing that can be isolated from the rest of the house for complete privacy. As you step

through a door off the kitchen, you come to the raison d'être of Spruce Creek: a sparkling twin-engined Beech Baron in the Vickery's hangar.

The Baron gets them around the country to meet Ron's responsibilities as the president of the American Bonanza Society, an international association of Bonanza pilots, as well as on their private jaunts. The tarmac in front of the hangar adjoins one of several Spruce Creek streets that are used by airplanes and cars and leads to the nearby runway.

One of the compelling features about Spruce Creek is its strong sense of community. There are 12 distinct residential areas available, grouped by style, each having the feel of a village within a larger community. The roads meander comfortably throughout the place with no visible sense of any master plan. The attractive landscaping is skillfully blended in places with the original flora that embraces the creek, giving the community its name. It creates a soothing feeling of being amid mature, natural vegetation.

In fact, passing through Spruce Creek's main gate is like driving into a spacious park. Two golf courses and a country club with eight tennis courts are integrated into the community. The country club is an independent entity within Spruce Creek, much as a country club in any neighborhood. While membership is optional, the club's recreational opportunities, fine traditional restaurant, and bar are hard to resist.

The wide range of properties make Spruce Creek a vibrant, diverse community. "This is not a bone yard," quips Ohlsson, referring jokingly to Florida's many retirement communities. "We've got school buses coming in here."

Many families are attracted to Spruce Creek for the sense of safety and security. "It is a great place for kids," says Martin, who has four children. Martin chose Spruce Creek because he found it appealing for families and convenient for business. As a result, he's been able to spend valuable time with his family.

Martin's CitationJet can reach every racetrack on the NASCAR circuit within a few hours and can whisk him home just as quickly after his races. "on most days I'm home by 7 PM," he says. "You couldn't do that if you didn't live in a place like Spruce Creek." Martin does much of the flying himself, but he hires a professional pilot when his own demanding professional life intervenes.

ONCE AND FUTURE RESIDENT

Spruce Creek will soon be home again to actor John Travolta and his family, who lived in the community for many years until Hollywood's demands on Travolta's time temporarily took him away. Travolta, an accomplished pilot, found the place a good base for his vintage military jets and Gulfstream II.

Ohlsson estimates that about one third of Spruce Creek's residents are seasonal, part of the annual migration from the north to escape the winter. Other residents come and go on business or pleasure. For example, a Swiss home owner flies his Citation from Europe regularly. Among the permanent residents are several airline pilots who like to tinker with airplanes in their free time. For them, Spruce Creek is ideal. Pilot are typically gone for long stretches followed by breaks that often last longer than a week. When it's time to go to work, they commute from Spruce Creek to any number of airline hubs throughout the country.

OK, so Spruce Creek boasts great golf, attractive neighborhoods, and work advantages. But if you are a dyed-in-the-wool airplane nut, the big attraction is the airplanes and the company of kindred souls. In this respect, too, you won't be disappointed. Spruce Creek is a microcosm of the entire world of recreational flying. Antiques, homebuilt aircraft, aerobatic

airplanes, motor gliders, and war birds abound. One resident even owns a hot air balloon. It is not uncommon for residents to own several aircraft, one for business and the rest for fun. "At one end of the scale we have over 10 Piper Cubs based here," says Ohlsson, whose wife has a 180-hp four-seat Grumman Tiger that she lets him fly. "At the other end there are a King Air 200 and several executive jets."

To keep the focus on the owner pilot, Spruce Creek generally restricts aircraft to those with a gross weight of 12,500 pounds or less. The runway has lights for night operations and offers gas, but the field, like thousands of others nationally, doesn't have a control tower. Pilots maintain separation from each other by broadcasting announcements about their positions at various points during takeoff and landing. The system works well and is preferred by Spruce Creek's residents.

PERFECTING THEIR CRAFTS

Hans Peier, a native of Switzerland, is typical of the airplane buffs drawn to Spruce Creek. He's a former Swissair pilot, a corporate jet pilot, and a DC-3 captain. But what he enjoys most is restoring antiques and flying the former Warsaw Pact L-39 trainer/ground attack aircraft that he imports and sells in the United States. Peier says Spruce Creek is the perfect place for pilots who like to work on their airplanes. "Everyone is a perfectionist around here," he says. "Several of the top aircraft welders and engine guys on the planet are within walking distance. And they are always ready for the next challenge."

Peier's personal airplane is a real Art Deco throwback, an immaculate Grumman Goose amphibian that was a pile of junk when he rescued it from the Long Beach airport and turned it into an award-winning restoration. The airplane, with two powerful Pratt & Whitney radial engines on the wings, provides room for eight in the cabin.

"It is the perfect airplane for Florida with all of this water around," says Peier, "but it fits into my hangar literally only by an inch, so I'm in the market for another Spruce Creek home, mostly because I want a bigger hangar."

Parked under the Goose's wing is a seductive classic Jaguar roadster, which the perfectionist Peier insists is in a dire need of restoration.

It is mid afternoon on a lazy sunny day, and Peier and a group of friends have dropped by Martin's place. Martin may be one of the world's best race car drivers, but at home he's just one of the guys. Anyone is welcome to wander by and shoot the breeze about airplanes if he's around. Everything sparkles in the spacious hangar, including the CitationJet and the black-and-white checkerboard floor. From the plane's cockpit, the pool shimmers invitingly beyond the family room's sliding glass doors.

Martin talks about his racing schedule, his love of flying, and the strong sense of community at Spruce Creek. But he best captures the essence of fly-in living with a simple line.

"You know," he says, "there's nothing in the world like taxiing your airplane right up to your front door." ♦

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