



Blairsville: Take the Exit and Don't Look Back

By Katie Monsour

CRUISE ROUTE 22, and you may find that you have spotted outcroppings of urban spread that some may misidentify as Blairsville, Pa.: large-box retailers, chain gas stations and corporate restaurants. If you find yourself in the parking lot of one of those plazas, dial back your GPS, and take the Blairsville exit to discover Blairsville Downtown.

Off the exit, you will find the idyllic, centrally located throwback town, where picturesque storefronts line Market Street to the east and west.

On these streets, Blairsvillians enjoy an ice cream parlor, family-owned restaurants, an old-fashioned tobacco shop, a deli, two coffee shops, a bakery, a craft store, a few beauty shops, a localized pharmacy, some doctors' and attorneys' offices, a few bars, an antique store, a bank and the list goes on.

This business district ends with the town's "diamond," a decorated historic bandstand near the Conemaugh River, where the Blairsville Riverfront Village Housing Development is about to start.

Residents find enjoyable activities such as a walkable and bikeable community and a meandering riverfront trail, fishing with kayak/canoe boat launch points and an amphitheater, a Veteran's Wall and park - facets that have earned Blairsville the seal of a being a "greenway community."

Nestled between a backdrop of the gently rolling Appalachian mountain range and the lulling flow of the Conemaugh River, Blairsville provides a space to call home for more than 3,200 citizens, in both rural and town settings alike. Residents need not travel far to participate in cultural activities: the town boasts an active historical society, a paint-and-sip with displays by local artists, several churches, a community center, exercise classes, wineries, hotels and two nationally-recognized golf courses with conference and wedding/banquet facilities that offer a gorgeous view of the golf courses and the mountains.

Blairsville also prides itself on its re-invention as a thriving residential hub, especially in the arena of planning for construction of market-rate housing. As the Blairsville renaissance continues, areas of vacated land are being transformed to accommodate the changing needs of the town's citizenry: one of these needs is housing for families and singles. The town has started to prepare vacant lots for new construction.

Blairsville plays host to traditional neighborhoods, as well. Young professionals find Blairsville's architecturally diverse neighborhoods, filled with intricate Victorian houses, sprawling post-war ranches, and new construction to be the ideal places to live, work and play. According to a local resident, "We're all neighbors in Blairsville." With walkable neighborhoods, residents quickly acquire new friends and continue to nurture old relationships with their neighbors.

Additionally, Blairsville's geographic location provides easy access to Routes 22 and 119, and from there to: Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Indiana, Greensburg, Murrysville, Monroeville, State College and Altoona. Almost 50 colleges and universities are within a 55-mile range from Blairsville, including world-renowned Carnegie Mellon University.

Not only are educational entities within driving distance, but also outdoor activities such as Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Laurel Mountain Ski Resort, and Blue Knob, Yellowcreek and Keystone State Parks, Indiana County parks and trails, Cambria County trails, the West Penn Trail and a rapidly growing network of trails.

Blairsville offers diverse businesses, things to do, housing and neighborhoods. If you ever find yourself on the Route 22 corridor, be sure to look for the sign announcing Blairsville: a Greenway Community. It is worth taking the exit.

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