

How to . . . feel at home in a new place

Getting out of the house and involved is the best way to get comfortable in a new community

By JENNIFER VOGELSONG

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May 8, 2006 — Susan Kerch still remembers the panic she felt the first time she had to take a detour.

The 22-year-old from western Pennsylvania was new to the area and used the same roads to go to work and run errands - until the day she was detoured.

"That was traumatic because I didn't know any of the roads," she said.

Getting lost is just one of many struggles people encounter in a new area. Often, finding your way around is the least of your worries. More pressing is the need to make friends and find ways to make the new place feel like home.

Kerch, who works in public relations for Coldwell Banker in Lancaster, said it doesn't happen overnight. "You have to have patience when it comes to meeting new people because it takes long."

That said, you don't have to sit at home hoping that one day you'll wake up and feel like you've lived in your new place all your life. There are certain things you can do to speed up the process.

Set up your refuge

The first priority when you move is often to unpack boxes and set up shop. Getting your immediate surroundings in place can make it easier to venture out into the scary new world.

Drew Smith, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Bob Yost, said one of the best things you can do to make a new house feel like home is cook or bake something you liked to eat at your old place. "The biggest trigger for memory is smells, so if you're in a house that doesn't smell at all like home, that's hard."

Other suggestions:

If you liked the color scheme of your old abode, stick with it to make your new place look familiar.

Unpack personal belongings that make your house unique and get them in their places.

Get connected. Don't put off hooking up your cable and Internet or subscribing to the local paper. They're all great resources for learning about your new community.

Call or stop by the local Chamber of Commerce. Most offer relocation information.

Take advantage of any assistance your real estate agent offers when it comes to settling in to your new place.

Establish routines. This is especially important if you have children. It adds structure to the

unknown.

Be neighborly

When Dece Tuengel moved from Maryland to a new housing development in Springettsbury Township in December, no one came knocking on the door with cookies and a warm welcome to the neighborhood.

"It would be nice if people still did that," she said. "I think that's something I'm going to try to start doing."

She and her husband, Jon, both work from home, so it's hard for them to meet new people. This spring, she plans to organize a neighborhood picnic or barbecue to meet her neighbors and maybe try to pull together a directory of sorts.

Other suggestions:

If your neighborhood has a homeowners association, get involved.

Spend time outside in your yard and garden. Wave to or chat with neighbors who are also out.

Take a walk around the block and greet everyone you see.

Get involved

When Jeff Nagle moved to Windsor Township from Maine in September with his wife, Patricia, and two young children, the first thing they did was join local organizations. For Jeff, that meant membership at Strictly Fitness in Springettsbury Township. His wife joined a mothers' club.

"I think a lot of it is what you make of it," he said. "You have to look for things to do and be a little bit more outgoing."

Kerch joined a church and a young professionals organization after moving to the area last year.

Other suggestions:

Volunteer.

Join an athletic team or club.

Take a class in something you've always wanted to learn. Local school districts, municipalities, community colleges and universities are good places to look.

If you have children, enroll them in community programs and stick around to meet other parents.

Join local professional organizations and attend business networking mixers.

Out and about

Brewing a cup of joe at home is cheaper than buying one at the local coffee shop, but consider the extra cost as an investment in getting to know your new area.

Check out a different coffee shop each week, or become a regular at one you really like. Don't forget to glance at the bulletin boards for community announcements while you're there - you never know what you'll find.

Other suggestions:

If you have a dog, take it for a walk. Strike up conversations with people you meet along the way.

On a nice day, take your lunch to a community park. Check out walking/jogging paths, sports fields and playground equipment while you're there.

If you're religious and your place of worship holds socials after the service, hang around.

Go to a local diner late Sunday morning. Sit at the counter and chat up the waitresses and your seatmates.

Visit your local library. Pick up fliers about local events, lists of children's story times, information about local book clubs.

Play tourist

Ask yourself if you'd look at your new locale differently if you were a tourist with only a few days to see the local attractions.

Visit the local tourism bureau and bring home lots of brochures.

Spend time at the historical society, learning about the history of your new area.

Get a good map and keep it in your car. Use it to take a different route to work or just go for a drive and explore.

Get a second map of your new town and hang it on the wall inside your home. Use pushpins to mark places you have visited. This is especially good if you have children.

Take a walking tour if your new town or city offers one.

Wander through the local farmer's market.

Consider taking your business to smaller, local establishments. This goes for bookstores, restaurants and the like.

Visit local shops and art galleries.

Attend or participate in local events such as parades, fairs and festivals.

Find the closest fire company and stop by for its next homestyle meal.

Other tips

Get recommendations. When choosing a new doctor, dentist, mechanic, vet, hairstylist, daycare provider - or any of the other service providers you'll need sooner or later - don't just flip open the phone book. Ask co-workers, neighbors and friends where they go and what they've heard about

different places.

Play host. Invite neighbors in for a cup of coffee or glass of lemonade. Plan a backyard barbecue or movie night and invite co-workers and/or friends. Having people over will create memories and thus make your new digs feel more like a home.

Don't become a workaholic. If you moved for a job, it might be easy to throw yourself into your work because you want to prove you were worth hiring. But keep it in balance. Too much time in the office can keep you from getting to know your new community and getting involved with other activities and people.

* * *

Leslie Levine, author of "Will This Place Ever Feel Like Home? Simple Advice for Settling In After You Move," said it can take anywhere from a year to five years to really feel at home in a new place, so it's important not to feel frustrated if things don't come together as quickly as you'd like.

"In a sense, you're starting all over - and depending on where you go, the social structure can be very ingrained - so it's normal to take a few steps back."

There might not be a welcome wagon stopping at your house or people calling to invite you out, but that doesn't mean residents of your new place aren't friendly.

"We're a much more mobile and independent society, but sometimes I think we have expectations from another era," she said. "People are busy, so they're not going to come and find you."

But if you take the initiative and reach out, chances are you'll be feel at home in your new town much sooner.

Reach Jennifer Vogelsong at 771-2034 or jvogelsong@ydr.com.

YORK FLAVOR

Longtime residents might agree that York County is home to a few places every newcomer needs to know about, no matter what their age or interest. Here are some places you can go to get a real feel for what this area is all about:

York Expo Center, 334 Carlisle Ave, York

Known mostly as home to the York Fair each September, this place also plays host to all variety of events year-round. From postcard and stamp shows to antique events and home expos, there's something for everyone. For details, check <http://www.yorkexpo.com>.

Central Market House, 34 W. Philadelphia St., York

Whether you want fresh produce, homemade baked goods, or a great salad and sandwich, this is the place to go. Open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, the market also sells some local handicrafts.

For details, check <http://www.centralmarkethouse.com>.

Factory tours

York County is known for making all sorts of goodies to send out into the world - everything from snack foods and wineries to motorcycles and wallpaper. Many manufacturers welcome the public with free tours and samples.

For details, check <http://www.yorkpa.org>.

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GOOD TO KNOW

Here are some handy resources to help you get acclimated to the area:

Area events

From hot rods to the York Halloween parade, home tours and art festivals, there's usually something happening in the area. Make a list of must-attends and add them to your calendar.

For details, check <http://www.flipsidepa.com>.

Libraries

Whether you go for the architecture, the books, access to the Internet or the activities, you'll need to know where to find the closest library.

For details, check <http://www.yorklibraries.org>.

Parks

York has both county- and state-operated parks where you can enjoy a picnic lunch, go boating, hiking and biking - or just soak up the great outdoors.

For details, check <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/parks> or <http://ycwebserver.york-county.org/Parks/index.htm>.

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DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Real estate agent Drew Smith of Coldwell Banker said York County can be a tough place for newcomers.

"When you're the new person, they don't really talk to you."

He remembers his wife trying to strike up conversations in the grocery store after they moved to the area: "People would look at her like she was crazy."

Eventually, he realized that the area's German heritage makes the people in York County a bit standoffish.

"They're not necessarily rude, just more private," he said. "When you do get through that tough shell, they're really good people and very loyal. They will eventually accept you, it just takes longer."

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