

September 8, 2006

HAVENS | SANDPOINT, IDAHO

Old West Atmosphere in a Sporting Paradise

By JEFF SCHLEGEL

SANDPOINT has always emphasized the outdoors life, from its heyday as a 20th-century logging center to its current incarnation as a polestar for fresh-air recreation.

Embedded in the far north of Idaho's panhandle, the town sits snug against Lake Pend Oreille, a clear 43-mile-long lake that has no shortage of boaters in summer. Around the region are the Selkirk and the Cabinet Mountains, which attract skiers, hikers and mountain bikers.

"The outdoors is a big part of why we came," said Bill Friedmann, who moved to Sandpoint six years ago from Los Gatos, Calif., with his wife, Kathy, and their three children.

The Friedmanns, who owned a tree-service company, looked in Montana, New Mexico and other places for possible relocation, but ultimately chose Sandpoint for its recreational opportunities and laid-back way of life. In 2000, they bought a 4,000-square-foot ranch-style house on five acres for \$250,000, and they now run a landscape and masonry supplies business.

The Friedmanns got in early, because several favorable articles in national and regional publications about Sandpoint in 2004 led to a land rush in 2005. "Last year was just nutso," said Darla Wilhelmsen, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Resort Realty in Sandpoint. She said people had bought property sight unseen off the Internet.

During the last two years, the median price for a home in town jumped from \$225,000 to about \$375,000. In addition, prices for houses on the water rose from \$500,000 to between \$700,000 and \$1.5 million.

Things have cooled down this year, Ms. Wilhelmsen said, with sales volume off roughly 40 percent from 2005. But because of last year's frenzy, she said, the market was still strong, with more housing developments planned.

The Scene

Schweitzer Mountain Resort, 10 miles northwest of town, is the region's recreational hub when winter arrives. The mountain is 6,400 feet with a vertical drop of 2,400 feet. It gets 300 inches of snow on

average in ski season, from November to April.

But summer is Sandpoint's busiest season, when boaters take to the water, families flock to the sandy beach adjacent to downtown, and hikers and bikers swarm into the hills. Residents also tout the huckleberry picking on Schweitzer Mountain.

"We can easily boat into Sandpoint," said Ralph Gamon, an insurance salesman from Spokane, Wash., who owns a waterfront vacation home three miles west of town. He built his cabin in 1983, and has since added several bedrooms, expanding it to a total of 3,000 square feet. "There's a resort atmosphere here," he said, "with a lot of things to do."

The city is host to an annual two-week summer concert series called Festival at Sandpoint, and performers for this year's festival, held last month, included Tanya Tucker, David Gray and Etta James. The Panida Theater, a refurbished Spanish Mission-style building that opened in 1927, is home to a range of cultural events all year.

First Avenue, the town's main street, has many turn-of-the-20th-century two-story brick buildings with arched windows that lend an old-fashioned atmosphere. Coldwater Creek, the women's clothing company, is based in Sandpoint and recently opened a flagship retail store there.

Mom-and-pop retailers, dining and drinking establishments, galleries and real estate offices line First Avenue and Cedar Street. After a day spent outside, many people head to Eichardt's Pub, Grill & Coffeehouse, a comfortable place with hearty fare and many Pacific Northwest microbrews on tap, like Rogue Brutal bitter and Big Sky Moose Drool Brown Ale.

The best way to approach Sandpoint for the first time is to take the long bridge on State Route 95 that spans Lake Pend Oreille. That dramatic drive floored Robbie Gleason when she and her husband, Bill, first visited Sandpoint in their search for a retirement home. "I looked across the lake as we came across the bridge, and said I'd be perfectly happy to be right here," she said.

Both Gleasons work for Lockheed Martin near San Jose, Calif., and they eventually bought a 1.25-acre lot last year for \$275,000; it's surrounded by state forests and has access to a boat-launching area on the Pend Oreille River. They plan to build a house in time for their retirement in 2008. "I wanted a waterfront lot," he said, "but property prices increased around here so much that you either need a lot of money or have to settle for less property to be on the water."

Pros

The emphasis on active outdoor lifestyles and the surrounding natural beauty are Sandpoint's primary draws. It's also a sporting paradise. Twenty-pound trout thrive in the region's lakes and rivers, and come autumn the hills are full of deer and elk.

The small-town feeling is another plus. "Everyone I've met in Sandpoint is just the nicest person," said Syd Buck, a semiretired financial adviser from Newport Beach, Calif. He fell for the town during a ski vacation, then bought a 1,900-square-foot, three-bedroom condo at Schweitzer Mountain Resort for about \$400,000 in early 2005. He and his wife, Sonya, visit Sandpoint monthly for four or five days, and plan to build a 4,200-square-foot lodge-style home on 1.8 acres that has access to the water. They bought the land for \$300,000.

Cons

Heavy traffic is common on Route 95 through town. Efforts to build a bypass face resistance from certain locals who oppose plans to build it along the waterfront. There's also concern that new development aimed mostly at affluent seasonal — if not occasional — homeowners is diluting the sense of community. "We're seeing people coming here to increase their real estate portfolio," said Jeff Nizzoli, who owns Eichardt's, "and not become part of the community."

The Real Estate Market

The upscale mountain-cabin look is the prevalent style, with healthy doses of wood, slate and natural stone as the basic materials.

A property reassessment earlier this year upset homeowners, who fear that it could ultimately lead to higher property taxes. The assessed value of the Friedmanns' 4,000-square-foot house on five acres, for example, was double the \$250,000 that they paid for it in 2000. And they're building a new home that will eventually be a 3,200-square-foot mountain chalet on a 20-acre parcel bought for \$150,000 in 2002; that property was reassessed at \$1.3 million.

"The saddest part for us is some of the longtime locals who give Sandpoint its character can't afford to live here anymore," Mr. Friedmann said.

Several new developments are in the works for the Sandpoint region. One, the Idaho Club, will be a resort community with a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. Plans call for 206 lots priced from \$295,000 to \$950,000, and 150 cabins priced from \$695,000 to just under \$1 million.

The Dover Bay residential waterfront resort community plans to add roughly 500 new condominiums and free-standing houses, along with a 274-slip marina. First occupancy is this summer, and the five-year plan includes condos priced from \$350,000 and waterfront lots ranging from \$250,000 to \$1.7 million. The Crossing at Willow Bay has plans for 82 lots and 139 boat slips, with lots initially offered at \$265,000 to \$700,000.

"Sandpoint prices are still cheap, vis-à-vis similar lakefront properties in Montana," Ms. Wilhelmsen of Coldwell Banker said. In Sandpoint, she said, a foot of waterfront goes for as much as \$5,000 to

Susan Moon Son (Brandon) The Sky's the Limit 208-255-7921/208-610-4685 cell

\$10,000. Agents in Montana cite higher figures for lakefront property there: \$15,000 a foot at Flathead Lake and \$25,000 to \$30,000 at Whitefish Lake.

"And not many places have the lake like this, and the skiing," she said.

Lay of the Land

POPULATION About 8,100.

SIZE 7 square miles.

LOCATION Sandpoint is in the Idaho panhandle on the northern shore of Lake Pend Oreille. It's 60 miles south of British Columbia and 75 miles northeast of Spokane, Wash.

WHO'S BUYING Baby boomers looking for either a retirement home or a vacation home. Most new home buyers come from California.

GETTING THERE The closest major airport is in Spokane. From Spokane, take Interstate 90 east to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, then take Route 95 north for roughly 45 miles. The highway crosses Lake Pend Oreille and feeds into First Avenue in downtown Sandpoint.

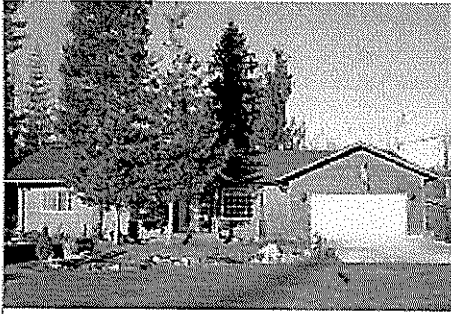
WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING The Church Street House Bed & Breakfast (401 Church Street, 208-255-7094; www.churchstreethouse.com) is an early-20th-century Arts and Crafts bungalow within walking distance of downtown. Its two guest rooms start at \$90 a night. Monarch Mountain Lodge (363 Bonner Mall Way, Ponderay; 208-263-1222, www.americasbvi.com) is a mile north of downtown. Double rooms start at \$72, and include a substantial breakfast with homemade sourdough Belgian waffles. Children under 12 stay free.

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

THREE FOR SALE

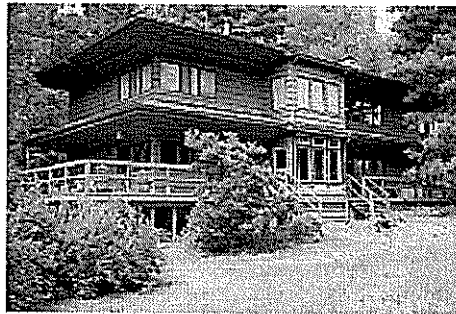
Fishing, Skiing and More in a Four-Season Mountain Town



WHAT 4-bedroom house
HOW MUCH \$299,900

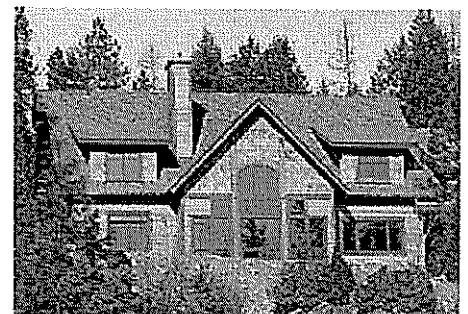
This 1,464-square-foot cedar-sided house, built in 1998, has hardwood floors, a gas fireplace, two bathrooms, a back deck and a garage. The lot is a quarter-acre. Agent: Charesse Moore, Evergreen Realty, (208) 255-6060; www.evergreen-realty.com.

Information on properties was supplied by the listing companies.



WHAT 5-bedroom house with guesthouse
HOW MUCH \$615,000

This lodge-style house has a large kitchen, a new dining room, two fireplaces and a full basement. It is in Selle Valley on six acres with apple and cherry trees. The guesthouse is two stories and has two studio apartments. An adjacent 6.4-acre lot is available for \$149,000. Agent: Susan Moon, Tomlinson Black Real Estate, (208) 265-1623; www.susanmoon.com.



WHAT 3-bedroom house
HOW MUCH \$1,275,000

With unobstructed views of Lake Pend Oreille and the surrounding mountains, this 3,447-square-foot custom-built cedar house has vaulted ceilings, a stone fireplace, and a large kitchen. It's a short walk to a community beach, a dock and a picnic area. Agent: Nancy McCanlies, Coldwell Banker Resort Realty, (208) 610-5072, www.cbsandpoint.com.