

HOMES

Families Flock to the Nashville Suburbs for Good Schools, Low Taxes and Some Southern Charm

The real-estate market in Williamson County, Tenn., is booming amid coronavirus and corporate relocation and expansion



Laura and Daniel Piraino moved from Wilmington, Del., to Franklin, Tenn., last year and paid \$2.1 million for a roughly 6,000-square-foot brownstone that is located just off Main Street. ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Beth DeCarbo

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In downtown Franklin, Tenn., a giant Christmas tree and Victorian-era storefronts draw flocks of shoppers in search of very merry merchandise. This chic charm is wooing scores of new home buyers, too.

“We love the downtown,” says Daniel Piraino. “We love being outside, walking early and late and feeling secure.” He and his wife, Laura Piraino, moved from Wilmington, Del., to Franklin last year and recently paid \$2.1 million for a roughly 6,000-square-foot brownstone that is located just off Main Street.



Christmastime in Franklin
PHOTO: ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Pirainos—he owns an aviation business and she is a pastor—bought a weekend home in 2018 after attending a fundraiser in Franklin. Mr. Piraino, 50, says he felt that God called them to move there full time, which they did last year. They sold their vacation home for \$1.8 million. “We have met a lot of people since we’ve been here. We remark on how welcoming people are. Every time we turn around somebody’s trying to introduce us to someone new.”

Making a Home in Franklin



The Pirainos' new house is down the street from one they owned as a vacation home before moving to Franklin full time.
PHOTOS: ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL(3)

In November, the median price for a single-family home in Franklin was \$628,000, up 14.6% compared with November 2019, according to the Williamson County Association of Realtors. In nearby Brentwood, which, like Franklin, is in Williamson County, the median was \$1.025 million, up about 28% from the year before. Demand has reduced inventory in both cities, which is driving up prices.

Inside a Tennessee Brownstone



The Pirainos already had a vacation home in Franklin, but sold it for \$1.8 million and purchased their current brownstone for \$2.1 million.
Above, the living room and dining room. STEVE HARMAN

The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated sales throughout the county, real-estate agents say. But the relocation and expansion of corporate headquarters in recent years also attracted professionals. Nissan North America and Mitsubishi North America are both based in Williamson County, as are Mars Petcare and Tractor Supply Co. Two of the county's largest employers are Community Health Systems, which operates acute-care hospitals in 16 states, and Randstad USA, an employment and recruitment agency.

"With low taxes and relatively low home prices, when compared on a national level, people from New York, Chicago and L.A. see a lot of value," says Cindy Stanton, principal broker of Parks Real Estate in Brentwood.

Young families relocate to Williamson County because it has some of the highest-ranked schools in the state, Ms. Stanton adds. According to the Tennessee Department of Education, in 2018-19, 77.9% of high-school students in Williamson County demonstrated readiness for college and careers. Statewide, 40.7% of high-school students demonstrated such readiness.



Brian and Amy Maas moved from Orange, Calif., to Brentwood, Tenn., in August mainly because of the public-school system. They have three children, back row from left, Marisa, Derek and Justin.

PHOTO: ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Amy and Brian Maas moved from Orange, Calif., to Brentwood in August because of the public-school system. The couple have a ninth-grader and twins in the 11th grade. "We were not happy with the high-school options in Southern California," says Ms. Maas. "We sent our kids to Lutheran schools, which was a long drive to Irvine. Sometimes I spent three hours a day in the car." Mr. Maas took a job as general counsel at a commercial real-estate company in Nashville.

Ms. Stanton's firm helped the family find a 7,550-square-foot house on 1 acre. The couple paid \$1.77 million for the home, which is located down the street from Brentwood High School. "It changed the rhythm of our entire family, being so much closer," says Ms. Maas.

A Home Near the High School



Amy and Brian Maas moved to Brentwood, Tenn., in August and bought this 7,550-square-foot house on 1 acre.
ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Having more free time has made it easier for the family to explore the area. Ms. Maas and her daughter frequently go to the farmers market in Nashville, where they also took a Segway tour on the grounds of a historic home. “And downtown Franklin is just darling,” she adds.



The Franklin Theatre
PHOTO: HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF WILLIAMSON COUNTY

“There is usually something going on downtown every month—a Pumpkifest, Dickens festival, wine tastings,” says Sean Simons of Fridrich & Clark Realty. “The shops are boutiques, not all chain stores. Grays on Main, a former drugstore, has burgers and craft cocktails. The Red Pony and Cork & Cow restaurants are also popular.”

The Cork and Cow in downtown Franklin
PHOTO: ABIGAIL BOBO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



A lot of celebrities, musicians and pro athletes have bought or built homes in posh gated communities within Franklin and Brentwood, real-estate agents say.

In October, country singer Alan Jackson listed his home for \$23 million in Franklin’s Laurelbrooke subdivision, according to news reports. The community is notable for its grand estate homes set among mature trees and lush landscaping.

Earlier this year, singer Carrie Underwood and her husband, former Nashville Predators forward Mike Fisher, sold their home in a Brentwood development called The Governors Club for \$1.41 million, according to news reports.

Two new master-planned communities in College Grove are also generating buzz. The Grove has a Greg Norman golf course and an equestrian center among its amenities.

The Troubadour Golf and Field Club offers a Tom Fazio-designed course along with an outdoor music amphitheater and lake activities.

For even more privacy, some celebrities buy large properties in the countryside. In 2017, Miley Cyrus paid about \$5.8 million for a home on 33 acres, according to news reports. Last year, Justin Timberlake reportedly paid \$4 million for 126.63 acres near Leiper’s Fork, a little village centered on Puckett’s Grocery & Restaurant, which opened in 1953 and is now a local icon. Fridrich & Clark recently listed a 349-acre property in Leiper’s Fork that includes a main house, guesthouse, entertainment barn and farm manager’s home. The property, currently owned by a corporate executive, is asking \$16.7 million.

Despite the area’s small-town vibe, just about every imaginable national chain restaurant and retail store can be found in Cool Springs, a sprawling commercial district that includes a Galleria mall.

But with that convenience comes traffic jams, compounded by a continuing construction project on the Mack Hatcher Memorial Parkway. Downtown Franklin has some congestion as well and finding a parking space can be difficult.

Ms. Maas, the Brentwood buyer, laughingly points out a couple of things out-of-staters should know when moving to the South.

“I really had to adjust to the bugs,” she says.



Scenes from Franklin's annual Dickens of a Christmas festival, this one held during a Christmas Past.
PHOTO: HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF WILLIAMSON COUNTY

Coming from Southern California, she is also unaccustomed to the humidity.

“This summer I was sitting outside at 8 p.m. and I still couldn’t breathe.”

Still, she says, the family has no regrets.

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