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HAVENS | GRANBY, COLO.

# The Old Mountain West in Ski Resort Alley



Kevin Moloney for The New York Times

The town of Granby offers the snow-covered luster of the Rockies without the glitter of the better-known resort areas nearby. [More Photos >](#)

By CINDY HIRSCHFELD  
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FOR almost a century Granby, in a broad valley of north-central [Colorado](#) just west of the Continental Divide, kept a low profile, supplying local ranchers and later housing workers from the nearby resort towns of Winter Park and Grand Lake.

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Earlier this decade, however, people started paying attention to this rural community when, over a few years, the town annexed almost 7,000 acres and quadrupled in size. Three subdivisions aimed at second-home buyers were proposed for the land; Granby wanted to share in the long-term economic benefits, and the town had less-restrictive zoning laws than the county.

Now Granby is becoming known as a second-home destination, especially for buyers from the Denver area, about 85 miles or a 90-minute drive away. Within 25 minutes of town are four [golf](#) courses, Alpine and Nordic [ski](#) areas, miles of trails in the Arapaho National Forest and the less-crowded western side of Rocky Mountain National Park, and several lakes and rivers, including Lake Granby.

Though many recreational amenities had been in place for decades, a large inventory of desirable second homes had

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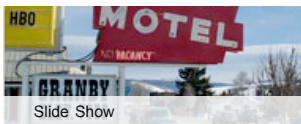


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Three for Sale

not. Construction of several subdivisions that appeal especially to vacation buyers seeking low-maintenance houses and clublike services has changed that. And a once potentially treacherous drive over the 11,300-foot Berthoud Pass is less so, thanks to road improvements.

The variety of activities and quick access appeal to active couples like Anna and Steve Conrad of Castle Pines, Colo., south of Denver, who were about to buy a condominium in Keystone. But on a summer [hike](#) at the SolVista Basin ski area in Granby, where the on-slope views take in the peaks of the nearby Never Summer Range and Rocky Mountain National Park, it hit them that they had found their place. “We looked at each other and said, ‘Wow, this is where we want to raise our kids,’ ” said Ms. Conrad, a lawyer.

The couple, whose children are 2 and 5, bought a two-bedroom condominium at Granby Ranch, a 5,000-acre development that includes the ski area, a golf course and three miles along the Fraser River. The Conrads paid \$218,000 for their condo in 2006 and use it every weekend. In summer, they hike, fish and [kayak](#) at the ranch, and Mr. Conrad enjoys the mountain-[bike](#) park at SolVista.

In winter, they ski at the area, which has 33 trails and gentle pitches well suited for beginners.

The Conrads take frequent advantage of an extensive slate of family-focused activities, including tubing and skiing parties, dinners and cooking classes, organized by Granby Ranch for its 400-some homeowners. “Some of our best friends are people we’ve met up there,” Ms. Conrad said. “We feel like it’s an extended family.”

While hardcore skiers may opt for a home closer to the more challenging slopes of Winter Park, 20 miles southeast, Brian and Lori Tiedge bought in Granby because they wanted easy access to both golf and skiing. The Tiedges, who live in Aurora, Colo., paid about \$550,000 for a four-bedroom town house on the golf course at the 437-acre Grand Elk Club & Ranch a little more than a year ago.

In winter, a shuttle owned by the club deposits them at Grand Elk’s private Alpine Club at the base of Winter Park, where the Tiedges can store their skis and relax by a fireplace after skiing. In summer, 18 holes of golf are right out the door. “It’s the best of both worlds,” said Mr. Tiedge, an architect.

### The Scene

Still a one-stoplight town (a second is on the way), Granby, with a population of 1,668 in a recent Census estimate, is decidedly unpretentious, more a traditional Western mountain town than a resort community.

It was incorporated in 1905 to serve the railroad, and trains on the [Amtrak](#) California Zephyr stop twice daily. U.S. 40 runs through town as the main street, Agate Avenue. Low-slung buildings house service-oriented businesses — furniture stores, an auto repair shop, the local newspaper office, a tattoo parlor — interspersed with family-style restaurants and motels.

A dark moment in the town’s history came in June 2004, when a local businessman involved in a zoning dispute plowed a bulldozer into cars and structures downtown, including the newspaper office and the town hall.

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The town's current path of measured reinvention started early last year, when the mayor at the time proposed a measure to limit tattoo and pawnshops downtown. "It was an elitist approach to managing main street," said Patrick Brower, a former editor and publisher of the newspaper. The measure didn't pass, and a new mayor was elected two months later.

The current government hopes to attract restaurants and retail shops to appeal to a growing number of second-home owners, as well as full-time residents. Though it's easy to dip into the local scene at places like the weekly summer farmers' market or Java Lava, a coffee shop that opened last year, second-home owners also say they've found a strong sense of community among their neighbors.

Two years ago, Sunday and John Mann of Denver paid in the mid-\$300,000s for a three-bedroom riverside house in the Edgewater subdivision so they could walk out the door and fly-fish. What they also found was a group of fellow [fishing](#) enthusiasts whom they quickly befriended.

At Edgewater, said Ms. Mann, an interior designer, homeowners host potluck dinners on their decks in summer and roast s'mores at the communal outdoor fire pits in winter. "We got to know our neighbors, and now we see them in Denver, too," she said.

### **Pros**

Granby is convenient to year-round recreation in all directions. Home prices are lower than in neighboring resort communities: about 40 percent below Winter Park, for example.

### **Cons**

Both locals and part-timers say there is a lack of variety among restaurants. The area has been hit hard by the pine-beetle infestation that is ravaging Colorado's lodgepole-pine forests. Buyers should check homeowners' association minutes to see if assessments for tree cutting or spraying are planned, said Penny Hamilton, owner of Forest & Lake Real Estate.

### **The Real Estate Market**

"Granby is a huge growth area in the county," said Chuck Haines of Coldwell Banker Mountain Properties. "Several years ago, there was really nothing to entice someone to go to Granby as a destination until Grand Elk and Granby Ranch got off the ground. There were some second-home opportunities, and some very nice ones, but not with the club amenities."

In 2008, according to the local multiple-listing service, the average sales price was \$379,124.

Vacation buyers who want newer homes and on-site recreation like golf and fishing gravitate to Granby Ranch and Grand Elk. Wyndham Worldwide is building a 44-unit fractional-ownership project at Grand Elk. C Lazy U, a luxury guest ranch about seven miles from town, offers homesites and cabins on 11,000 acres. One development plan, Orvis Shorefox, has stalled.

Second-home owners also buy in older subdivisions like Legacy Park Ranch, about three miles east of Granby, and Innsbruck-Val Moritz, at the southern end of town. Property on Lake Granby is hard to find because much of the surrounding land is federally owned.

So far, the economic downturn has primarily affected lot sales. "It's mostly vacant land where prices have gone down," said Becky Brosh, an agent with Edgewater Realty and president of the Grand County Board of Realtors. "The average sale price is down 38 percent from a year ago, while the sales price for residential is down just 7 percent and

holding steady.” And, Ms. Brosh added, “The average days on the market was 236 a year ago, and now we’re at 199. That’s a strong indicator that the market is not going to topple.”

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