

The New York Times

Where Part-Time Residents Often Become Full-Time

By WENDY KNIGHT

LIKE most homeowners in Warren, a Mad River Valley town in the Vermont mountains, Win Smith, a former Merrill Lynch executive, started out there as a seasonal renter, taking winter vacations with his wife and children. In 1992, he bought 200 acres for less than \$800 an acre and built a 10,000-square-foot house.

"Warren is a gem," he recalled. "I came up every chance I got." Often that meant flying into Vermont from Hong Kong or London on a Friday night.

He liked the area so much, in fact, that he bought in big. Mr. Smith was one of four local investors who purchased Sugarbush Resort in 2001 from the American Ski Company, in part, he said, because of concern for the resort's future.

"We realized if Sugarbush didn't survive, the area wouldn't survive," Mr. Smith said. Now he is president of Sugarbush Resort, and the Smith family owns the Pitcher Inn and the Warren Store in the village.

A fierce sense of stewardship characterizes the citizens of the Mad River Valley. Full-time and part-time residents alike embrace their roles as caretakers of the scenic rural landscape and the peaceful way of life. With a balance of growth and preservation in mind, town leaders have enacted ordinances to restrict building above ridge lines while encouraging development in designated areas.

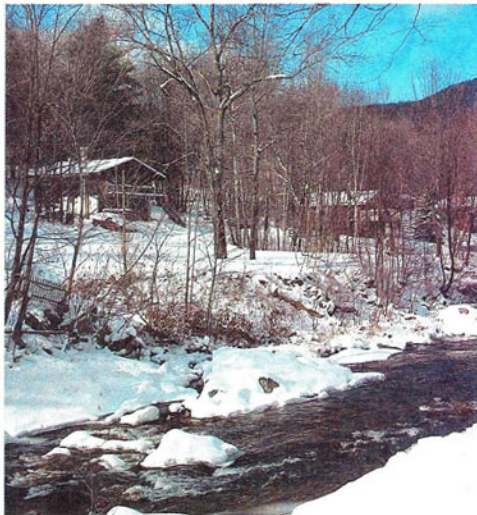
The Scene

Warren lies along Route 100, buttressed by the Northfield Range to the east and the Green Mountain Ranges, where Sugarbush is situated, on its western flank. Waitsfield and Fayston, hamlets with equally close ties to Sugarbush, border Warren to the north.

The Mad River, the town's recreational nexus, winds through the historic Warren village, which hasn't changed substantially since the 19th century. On Main Street, you'll find a library, municipal offices, an antiques store and the Warren Store, whose customers one morning in November reflected the mix of people in the area: a crew of construction workers, a retired man in a tweed hat and a young man with an earring and a goatee. Farther up Main Street is a classic covered bridge. Along the Sugarbush Access Road are many ski and snowboard shops, restaurants and pubs.

For city and suburban dwellers, Warren is a sanctuary.

"It's not rush, rush," said Chris Vannozi, who moved there from New Jersey. After years of staying with friends who had second homes in the area, she and her husband, Ken, an electrician who works near Atlantic City, bought a two-acre plot for \$45,000 in 2000. They had planned to build a retirement home on the property someday, but when



Paul O. Boyer for the New York Times

RIVER RUN The Mad River is the recreational heart of the Warren area.

Mrs. Vannozi was laid off in 2001 and they received an unsolicited offer on their home, they decided it was time to act. They built a three-bedroom clapboard house with a great room and a large stone fireplace. She lives there full-time, and he is there more than half the time.

"Whenever we came to Warren on the weekends, it felt like coming home," she said. "Now it is home."

During the winter, you won't find much activity off the mountain. "Real skiers go to Warren to ski," said John Rhodes, an oil company executive from Garden City, N.Y. "They park their cars and don't move them for three days."

Mr. Rhodes bought a two-bedroom condo in 1989, for \$115,000, during a fall foliage visit with his wife. "It was love at first sight," he said, "or maybe we're just impulsive buyers." The couple, both nonskiers, began going to Warren "as much as possible" with their five daughters. Now three of the daughters have purchased their own condos in Warren.

Even after dark, when most ski towns are lively, the town is quiet.

"We're on the mountain at 8:30 a.m. when the lifts open, 7:30 on a powder day," said Chris Hayes, vice president for global sales of MacGregor, an investment-management technology company. "Sometimes we work up the motivation to go out to the Hyde Away or Phoenix for a few beers after skiing, but usually we just have dinner at someone's house and relax by the fire."

After six seasons in a ski club, an informal time share with a group of Boston friends, Mr. Hayes bought a three-bedroom mountain-side condo for \$150,000 last year that he said "needed a whole lotta love."

Pros

"It's not Killington," Mr. Hayes said, contrasting Sugarbush with the famous ski area farther south in Vermont. The smaller crowds are a big inducement for weekenders who appreciate Warren for its low-key vibe and dog-friendly atmosphere.

"Everyone in the valley has a dog," Mrs. Vannozi said.

Despite the remoteness, Warren residents enjoy cellphone reception, high-speed Internet access and the kind of reliable municipal services that are something to value in the mountains. "When it snows, the roads are plowed," Mr. Rhodes said.