

Commute With A View

Peaceful lifestyle reason enough for some to live on mountain, work in crowded city



Angie and Garry Tomashowski share a kiss before beginning the daily commute from their Mount Charleston home.

By John Przybys
Review-Journal

Here's the deal. You get to live in a rustic-looking home amid pine trees, friendly neighbors, ample wildlife, fresh air and temperatures comfortably cooler than those in the valley.

In return, you'll spend about double the time you now spend driving to and from work every day and you'll live far enough from civilization that running out for a quart of milk will be an actual trek rather than a quick errand.

Is it worth it?

About 1,054 Southern Nevadans would answer with an emphatic yes. That, according to Clark County demographer Don Matson, is the estimated number of county residents who live on Mount Charleston full time.

And, despite the occasional practical inconvenience associated with their lifestyle, those who make their home on Mount Charleston say they wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Angie and Garry Tomashowski have lived on the mountain for 13 years. Both grew up in Las Vegas and remember Mount Charleston as, Angie Tomashowski recalls, "a place we would go up on weekends to just get out of the heat."

But, she adds, "the more we went up, the more we fell in love with the area, and we decided to try to make it our home."

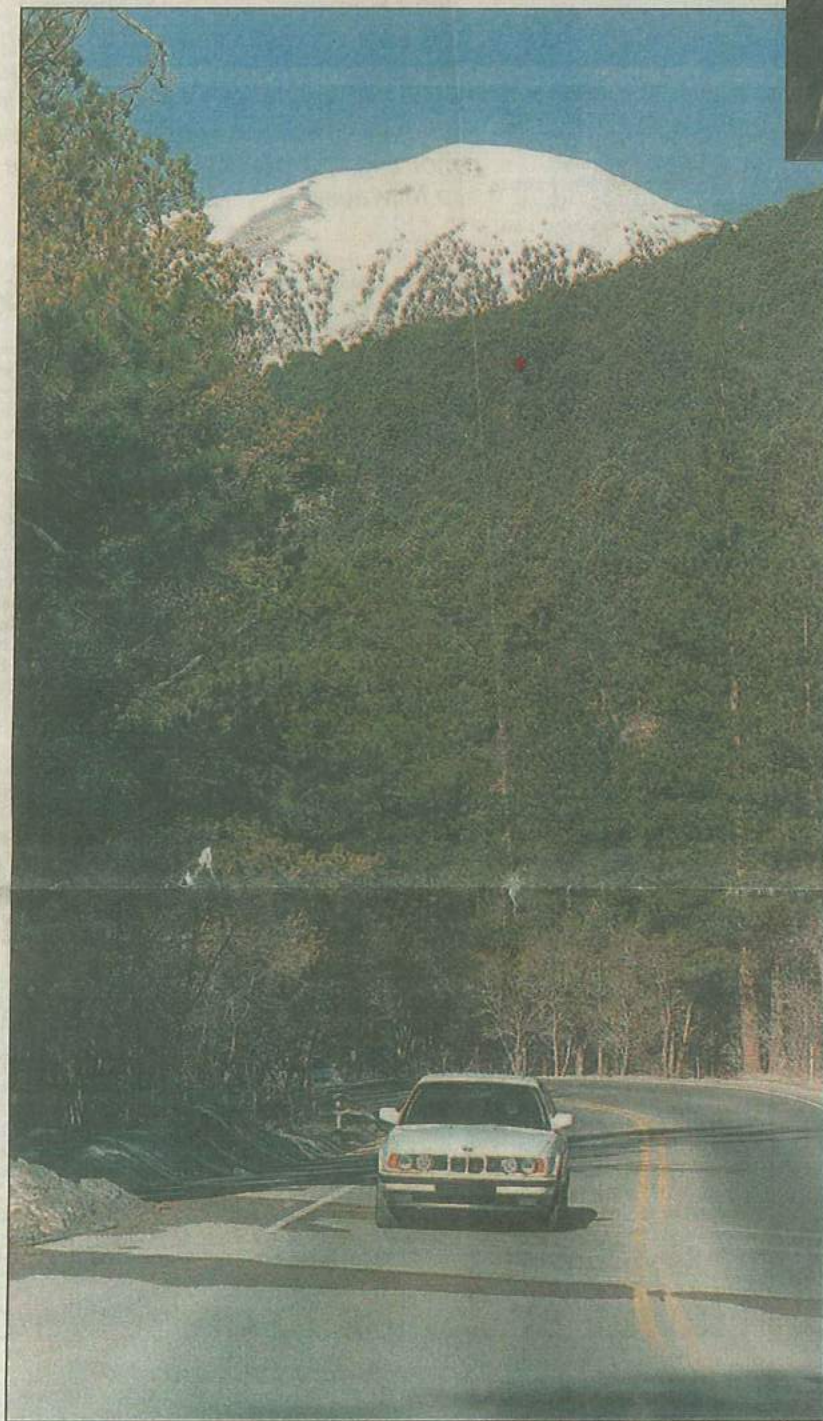
The couple not only live on the mountain with their three children but, as real estate agents, help others take the first step toward living a mountain lifestyle.

Angie Tomashowski says she drives into town to her office three or four times a week. She figures the trip takes about 40 minutes, roughly half of which is made up of the drive from the Mount Charleston Hotel to the U.S. 95 turnoff.

While some Las Vegans would consider a 40-minute commute outrageous, "we sell property to people from California and, for them, 2½ hours is nothing," she says.

In fact, she adds, "people driving from the northwest part of town to work on the south side of town take just as long to get to work."

Tomashowski uses her morning com-



Gary Thompson/Review-Journal

Angie Tomashowski leaves the scenery of Mount Charleston behind as she heads into town.

Commute

From 1E

mute as a means of gearing up for the day and her evening commute to decompress before arriving home.

"The way I look at it is, for that extra 20 minutes, look at where you're getting to live," she says. "Is that worth the fresh air, no crime, all the things you have to deal with in city life? I think it is."

Brian Dewhurst would agree. Dewhurst, a performer in "Mystere" at Treasure Island, moved to Mount Charleston last May.

"I lost my wife in October 1998," he says. "I was living in Sun City, and I found that I just wanted to move out of the house. I looked at other houses in Las Vegas but I found everything so similar in style, so I just decided to look up here."

And, he says, "I fell in love with this house," an A-frame built in 1968 and added onto in the late '80s.

"I'm very fortunate," Dewhurst says. "I don't have to leave here until 5 o'clock, and it takes me 40 minutes, observing all the speed limits, to get to Treasure Island."

Dewhurst's return commute begins just after midnight. "It's amazing how busy it is, just from Treasure Island down to the Spaghetti Bowl," he says. "Then, as soon as you turn and go up (U.S.) 95, it gets easier."

Dewhurst, too, has come to enjoy his commute. "We do have a library here and I do (borrow) talking books and play those on tape," he says.

N.G. Collet and James Collet have lived on the mountain for about four years. Both grew up in Las Vegas and, N.G. Collet says, the small-town feel of life on the mountain is akin to "recapturing the kind of emotional tone Las Vegas used to have before Las Vegas became a metropolitan center."

Collet travels into town about three times a week to her job as senior psychiatrist at Southern Nevada Child and Adolescent Services.

"It takes 20 minutes to get from the housing development up here to the turnoff where (state Route) 157 meets (U.S.) 95," Collet says. She turns on the cruise control, listens to educational tapes during the commute — which, all told, usually takes about 35 minutes — and tries to schedule her day to begin at 9:30.

"If I had to go to work at 8, it would probably add 20 minutes of traveling time," she explains. "I go to work at 9:30 and miss all the morning traffic. If I had an 8-to-5 job, it would be more of a problem."

John Hamilton, who buys and sells collectible coins and currency, is no stranger to either long commutes or driving in snow. Until about 1½ years ago, he was living in Sheboygan, Wis., and would drive 90 minutes, morning and evening, seven days a week, to Milwaukee.

Now, the daily commute



Angie Tomashowski usually can arrive at her 3560 S. Jones Blvd., about 40 minutes after leaving her Mount Charleston home.

John Hamilton, who buys and sells collectible coins and currency, is no stranger to either long commutes or driving in snow. Until about 1½ years ago, he was living in Sheboygan, Wis., and would drive 90 minutes, morning and evening, seven days a week, to Milwaukee.

from his home on Mount Charleston to his office at the Hughes Center takes about 45 minutes, only about 20 minutes longer than the commute he used to make from the Painted Desert golf course community in the northwest valley.

"For some people, it might seem to be a long way," Hamilton says. "For me, this is just so pleasant."

Still, he concedes, "I do know people in town who are 10 minutes away from their jobs who moved five minutes closer, and that makes them happy."

Hamilton finds the wintertime snow on Mount Charleston no hindrance to his commute. In Wisconsin, he says, "we get two feet of snow and it's like a flurry."

"We have four-wheel drive vehicles," Tomashowski says, adding that residents "learn how to drive in the different elements."

So much so, she notes, that "a lot of times, it's the (non-residents) who are driving up the mountain that make it a little precarious."

"This last snowstorm we had, I was watching the car in front of me and it had chains on, and I'm thinking, 'That's good, they're responsible people,' until I realized it was a front-wheel drive car and they had chains on the back tires."

County and state road crews do a good job of snow removal, Tomashowski says,

"and there's never been a day we could not get off the mountain."

Tomashowski concedes some newcomers end up overestimating their willingness to accept the burden of a longer daily commute. "They love the ambience of the mountain," she says, but "I think what happens to some people is they may get tired of the commute."

Some decide they don't want to deal with wintertime snow. And, Tomashowski says, "some people who have children, the one negative of living up there is if you want the children involved in activities. For us, for example, we have to drive a half-hour to take the kids to gymnastics or karate or dance class."

Living on the mountain does seem to give its residents a keener appreciation of time and distance. Collet, for example, says living on the mountain offers no logistical hardships "as long as everything I do is in the northwest part of town."

A recent trip to the Galleria at Sunset mall in Henderson made her realize that, as she puts it, "I might as well go to California. That was a big deal, going into Henderson."

Collet's general rule is "under an hour I consider reasonable (for a drive), over an hour is a trip."

Living on the mountain also seems to foster residents' organizational abilities, since

running out of milk requires more than a quick trip to the corner convenience store.

"It's just planning," Tomashowski says. "You have to keep your list of groceries and things like that."

"The closest store is a good 35 minutes away," Collet says, "so you can't just say, 'I feel like going out for ice cream' and go out and get it."

"You have to be organized. Every time I come home from the city, I always check before I hit Cheyenne (Avenue) what my gas is so I know I'll have to jump into the Union 76 so I can make it up and back."

But Collet finds a positive even in this. Trips into town "become more special," she says, and a trip to a coffee shop or a restaurant "would be like going to Disneyland — 'Oh, we're in town. What can we do?'"

However, Hamilton notes that civilization is creeping closer to the mountain all the time.

"Five years ago, Ann Road was about the edge of town. Now, there's a subdivision going in at the base of Kyle Canyon Road," he says. "Kyle Canyon Road will become the edge of town, probably, in the next couple years."

"I think what people don't understand is we're not that far away anymore," Tomashowski says. "It's 20 (additional) minutes."

Regardless of the logistical problems that might arise, the residents wouldn't think of exchanging their lifestyle for 20 or 30 fewer minutes in the car each day.

"I remember when I came up here to buy the house," Dewhurst says. "Angie and Garry said, 'Why don't you rent a house for a couple of months to see if you like it?' I said, 'No, I'm going to like it.' I just jumped in with both feet, and I enjoy it and have absolutely no regrets."