

How mobile are the golden years?

Will I stay or leave?

Why stay? Why leave?

How do we create an elder-friendly region?

When I'm 65

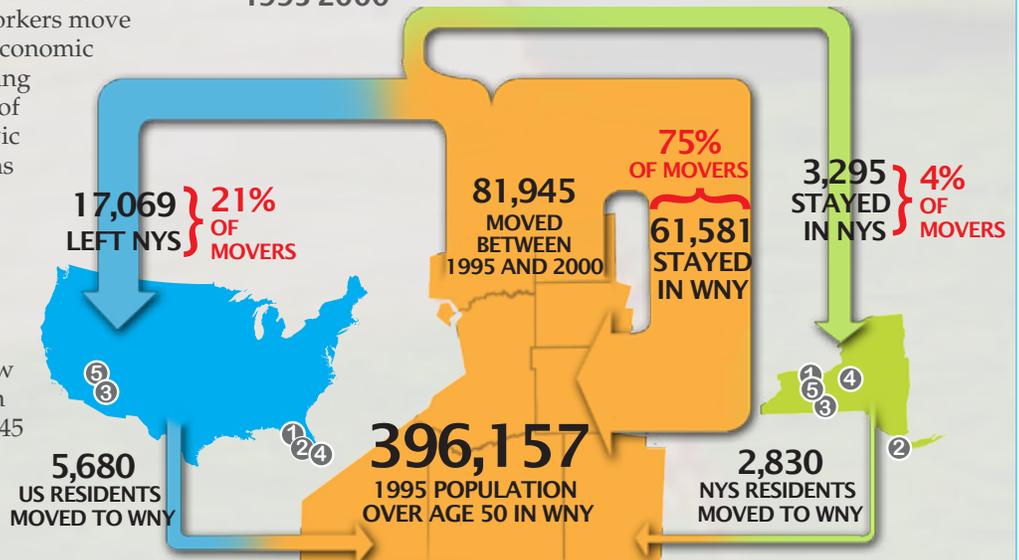
Western New York has a net outflow of midlife and older adults, but the vast majority of residents age 50+ stay—and plan to stay for the long haul. A recent survey of Erie County households finds that 82% of people over age 50 want to remain in their current homes for as long as possible, with property taxes posing moderate concerns. With its graying population intent on staying, making ‘aging in place’ easy should be a top regional priority.

How mobile are the golden years?

The loss of young adults to other regions is a chronic concern in Western New York, with each move a symbolic forfeit of future returns. The loss of older adults should provoke similar unease. When midlife and older Western New Yorkers move away, the region experiences the economic loss of their accumulated purchasing power. Equally critical is the loss of social capital—the talent, time, civic engagement and social connections of adult lifetimes that form an invaluable community resource.

The latest available data on the movements of the region’s older residents refute the notion of an exodus to the Sunbelt, but do show a net outflow. One in five Western New Yorkers over age 50—or 81,945 people—moved between 1995 and 2000, with the vast majority (61,581 or 75%) doing so within the region, whether across the street or county line. Of the 20,364 movers who left the region, 3,295 moved to other parts of New York and 17,069 moved to other parts of the U.S., with Sunbelt destinations the top draw. Influxes from beyond the region—5,680 residents from others states and 2,830 from other regions in New York—only partially offset the outflows, yielding a net loss of almost 12,000.

Migratory Flows of WNY’s 50+ Population, 1995-2000



Top 5 US Destinations

- ① Pinellas Co., FL
- ② Lee Co., FL
- ③ Maricopa Co., AZ
- ④ Sarasota Co., FL
- ⑤ Clark Co., NV

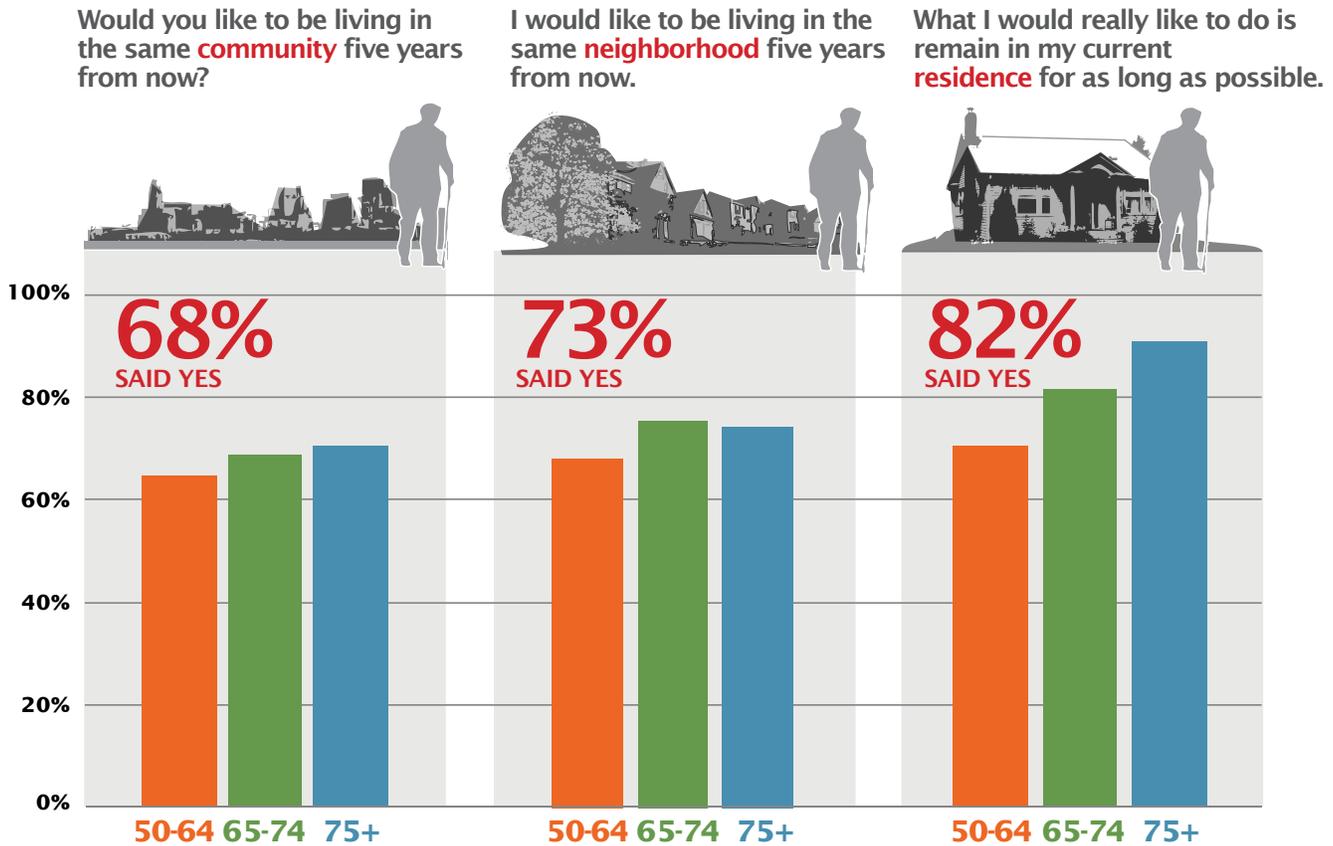
Top 5 NYS Destinations

- ① Monroe Co.
- ② Bronx Co.
- ③ Steuben Co.
- ④ Oneida Co.
- ⑤ Livingston Co.

Source: Regional Institute analysis of Census 2000 (SEDF) migration data, based on gross and net migration tabulations and county to county migration flow data (1995 to 2000); 1995 population is estimated and does not include 1995-2000 ; these data are the latest available at this level of detail.

Will I stay or leave?

A variety of factors influence a mature adult's decision to stay in the region or leave—some similar and some very different from those of younger people. An interdisciplinary team at the University at Buffalo has initiated a survey project to learn more about these factors and the perceptions and experiences of midlife and older residents. The project's first phase, a random sample survey of Erie County residents and an oversample of the City of Buffalo, was completed in June 2008.



Source: Four Seasons Aging Survey of Erie County, NY, residents, 2008, University at Buffalo; survey findings are drawn from 481 cases, with small variations in response rate to each question; percentages in red refer to overall responses across all 50+ age groups.

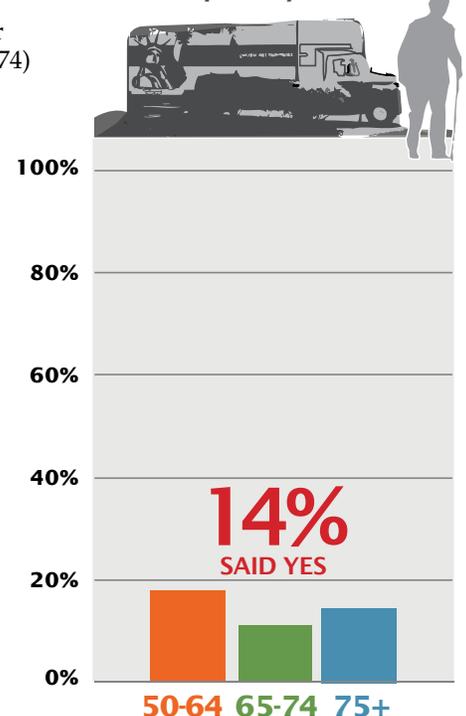
Survey analysis by Dr. Debra Street, professor of sociology and a Regional Institute faculty fellow, shows that the vast majority of Erie County residents over the age of 50 intend to stay where they are over the next few years and, in many cases, beyond. When asked if they would like to live in the same community five years from now (i.e., their current city, suburban or rural environment), 68% of all respondents said yes. When the question was narrowed to the respondent's particular street or neighborhood, 73% said yes. In both cases, persons past the traditional retirement age of 65 were more likely—by about five percentage points—to answer yes than were midlife adults (ages 50-64).

Questions about intentions to stay in one's current home yielded comparable responses. When asked if they wished to remain in their current residence for as long as possible, 82% of all respondents said yes, with a range from 71% of midlife adults to 91% of those over age 75. On the other hand, only 14% of all respondents expect

to move from their current residence in the next few years. Midlife adults are more likely to expect a move than are the other age groups, while early retirees (ages 65-74) are more likely to be uncertain.

The differences between age groups in this survey reveal changing sensibilities as people grow older. The strong and increasing preference with age to remain in one's current home reflects a desire to "age in place," a trend among older individuals throughout North America that stems, in part, from the strains that accompany moving. Not surprisingly, the midlife group is significantly less likely to commit to their current residence, since most individuals in that group may have job-related moves or downsizing choices ahead of them. Those who have left the region, though not surveyed, also play a role in the variations between age groups—by their later years, those with a strong desire to leave have already left.

I expect to **move** from my current residence within the next couple of years.



Why stay? Why leave?

The factors compelling older adults to move—be it across town or across the country—vary widely. For some, proximity to family or friends is a key factor. For others, housing type, cost of living, leisure activity or economic opportunities top the list. Decisions to move among relatively affluent and healthy midlife individuals and early retirees can be quite different from the choices that much older adults confront—moves that less often express preference and more often reflect the need to accommodate increasing frailty.

For older Western New Yorkers, decisions to remain in or leave the region are influenced by a number of forces that push them away and others that pull them closer. High taxes are frequently cited as a major “push factor.” Among survey respondents—represented by proportionate numbers of urban, suburban and rural residents—50% are very or somewhat concerned about being

able to afford the region’s relatively high property taxes. Midlife adults are the most worried, with 63% saying they are very or somewhat concerned about property taxes, compared to 39% of those 75 and over. The lower levels of concern among the oldest respondents may reflect experience in managing a retirement budget and a higher propensity to occupy smaller or rented properties.

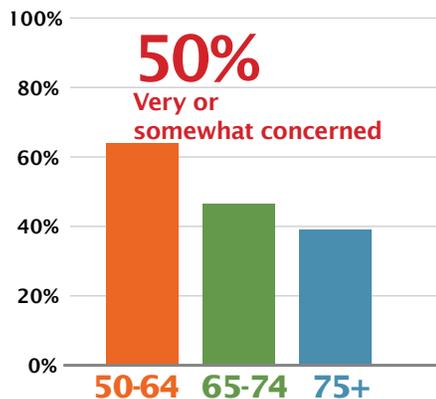
Western New York’s four-season climate is another factor often seen as pushing away older residents. Overall, 57% of older adults give the region’s climate a “C” or lower when asked to provide a letter grade (though only 13% gave it a “D” or “F”). Much higher negativity was expressed about the region’s economy, which received a “C” or lower from 80% of respondents. Those over 75 were the most negative (87% answered “C” or lower), reflecting concerns

about the ability of younger family members to find good jobs and, perhaps, memories of a more vibrant economy in the region’s past.

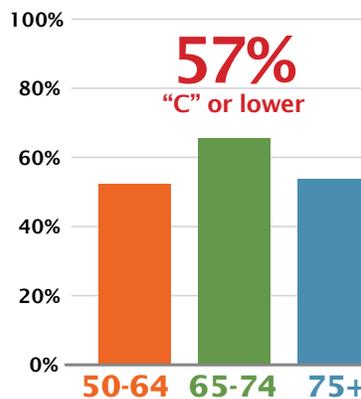
Many of the region’s frequently cited “pull factors” received generally high grades from survey takers. Neighborhood safety, religious communities, senior support services and access to quality medical care all received an “A” or “B” from at least two out of three respondents. Access to medical care and support services (services that help people maintain their independence as they age) received noticeably lower grades from the oldest respondents—those most likely to consume the services. Somewhat surprisingly, there was ambivalence about the region’s affordable housing stock, which might reflect concerns about property taxes and poor price appreciation.

Push Factors

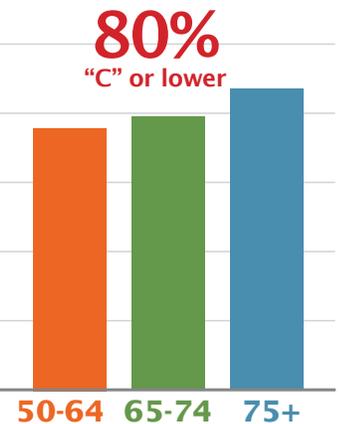
How concerned are you about being able to afford local **property taxes**?



What grade would you give WNY for... **Climate**

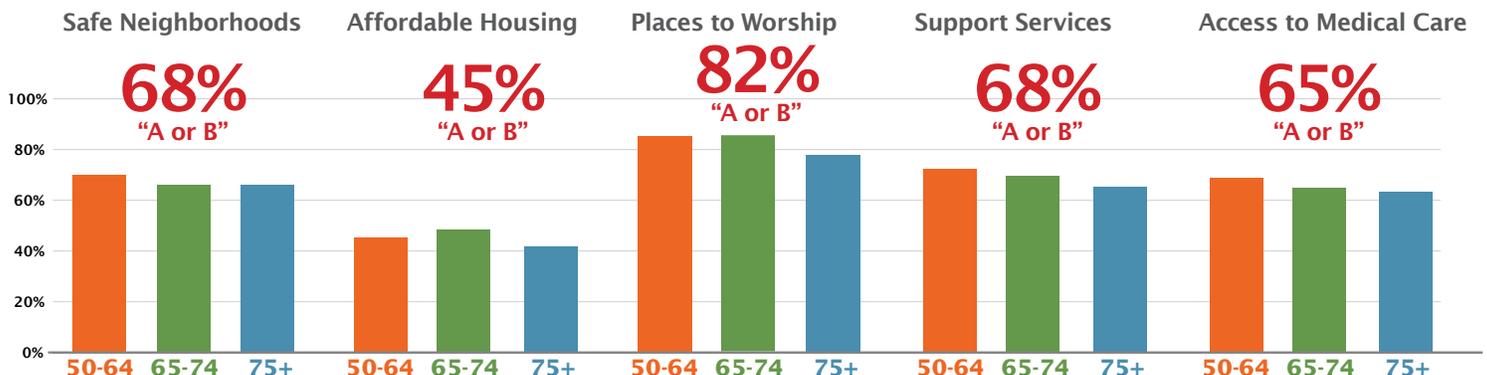


Job Opportunities



Pull Factors

What grade would you give WNY for...



Source: Four Seasons Aging Survey of Erie County, NY, residents, 2008, University at Buffalo; survey findings are drawn from 481 cases, with small variations in response rate to each question; percentages in red refer to overall responses across all 50+ age groups.



How do we create an elder-friendly region?

With populations aging rapidly in New York and most of the developed world, the need to provide a high quality of life for older residents is receiving greater attention. For communities in upstate New York, which tend to have older-than-average populations, the need is critical, whether it means holding on to footloose seniors or ensuring that those who age in place—the vast majority, according to this and other research—have what they need for vital, productive living.

Several organizations and regions in the U.S. are addressing this issue by advocating for ‘elder-friendly communities,’ places that provide older adults with an interdependent array of features and services—provided and maintained by public, private and non-profit entities—that make it possible to age in place successfully. These include:

- Multiple mobility options—e.g., sidewalks, public transit and paratransit—that lower the need to drive and increase physical activity
- Zoning and building codes that allow housing options such as first-floor bedrooms, accessory units, shared housing and assisted living
- Interior “universal design” features such as wider doors with easy-to-grasp handles, bathroom grab bars, adjustable-height kitchen surfaces and emergency alert buttons
- At-home and daily delivered support services (meals, medical and domestic) that prolong independent lifestyles
- Neighborhood centers promoting recreational, social and lifelong-learning activities
- Design standards for signage and infrastructure (e.g., larger typeface) that make communities safer and easier to navigate
- Resources and support services (e.g., adult daycare options) for “sandwich generation” caretakers responsible for aging parents
- Workforce development and civic engagement programs that make it easy for businesses and organizations to tap into the talents of older adults

Currently, most communities in the region have some elder-friendly features, but almost all have room for improvement. Organizations such as Partners for Livable Communities provide assessment tools that help places detect their weaknesses and implement improvement strategies. In Western New York, the University at Buffalo’s IDEA Center is a key resource on elder-friendly communities, specializing in barrier-free design concepts that make all aspects of the built environment easier to access.

For More Information

Aging in Place Initiative of the Partners for Livable Communities, online at <http://www.aginginplaceinitiative.org/>

Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA Center), University at Buffalo, online at <http://www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea/>

Four Seasons Aging Research, University at Buffalo, online at <http://www.regional-institute.buffalo.edu/research/research.cfm?ID=57>

Regional Institute Policy Briefs provide key data and analysis to frame issues, inform decisions and guide policy action.

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