

## Get to know The Villages

Located in central Florida, between Ocala and Orlando, The Villages is a census-designated place (CDP) encompassing Sumter County and portions of Lake and Marion counties. What makes The Villages unique is that some areas of the community are a part of an age-restricted zone, and require residents to be 55 and older to be able to reside.

The Villages is known as “Florida’s Friendliest Hometown,” and it is no wonder that The U.S. Census ranked it as one of the fastest growing U.S. cities two years in a row. Between 2010 and 2017, the area witnessed a growth of 32.8 percent, and as of March 2019, developers of the planned community, estimated a population of 122,460. Multiple publications, including a 2017 issue of Forbes magazine, named The Villages on the list of The 25 Best Places to Retire in the United States.

In the early 1960’s, business partners, Harold Schwartz and Al Tarrson, found that selling land tracts via mail in central Florida was extremely lucrative. However, this deal would last only until 1968, when the federal law made the practice of selling real estate via mail illegal. With their main sector of profit closed, the two decided to turn the land Northwestern of Lake County, into a mobile park home and named it Orange Blossoms Gardens. By the 1980’s, the community wasn’t growing as it was originally desired. As a result, Schwartz bought out Tarrson’s interest and recruited his son, H. Gary Morse, to join him in improving the community’s development. His decision to bring Morse on proved vital. Morse had a natural knack for community development, and noted that one way to expand would be to offer more amenities and nearby commercial developments. Schwartz followed suit, and soon began buying land in Sumter and Marion counties, and as the area grew, Morse officially changed the name to The Villages in 1992.

According to the most recent census reports, the demographic make-up of The Villages CDP was 98.3 percent white, 0.3 percent African American, 0.1 percent Native American, 0.8 percent Asian, 1.8 percent Hispanic, and 0.3 percent of other races. Whereas, 56.3 percent of the population is 65 years and older and over 50 percent is female. With the median age for both sexes being 67.5, it’s median is 29 years older than the typical community in the United States. Did you know The Villages is also home to the largest veteran population that isn’t on a military base?

The population within The Villages is considered very politically active, with golf cart rallies a common sight around voting season. Historically, the area leans more on the conservative side, with about 70 percent of the vote in the President election of 2016 going towards Trump. This makes The Villages a hot-spot for conservative candidates to visit in campaign season. Republicans outnumber Democrats two-to-one. Although the community is majority conservative, there is an active liberal community that participates on a regular basis as well.

As the population within The Villages continues to grow, businesses and commercial areas are keeping up. In 2016 alone, developers built 5.7 million square feet of commercial property, and have plans to continue expansion. The main business areas are the three town squares built by the developers. The town centers consist of retail shops, restaurants, entertainment services and more. Otherwise, the Villages contains all other shopper needs, and additional information about The Villages, such as education, healthcare, government, entertainment, and more can be found throughout Talk of The Villages.