

REAL ESTATE

# Summit, N.J., a Place to Grow Into and Stay

Living In

By DAVE CALDWELL    OCT. 28, 2015

Allison and Michael Busam recently took their three daughters, ages 11, 9 and 7, to a school fair near their home in Summit, N.J., where they found a teacher they knew sitting on the bench in a dunking booth. He was promptly dunked three times.

The soggy teacher told the Busams he was attending his reunion at Summit High School that night. Since moving to Summit from Hoboken 10 years ago, the Busams hear stories like that all the time.

“I know a million people here who grew up here,” Ms. Busam said.

Summit, a city of around 21,000 with a small-town feel in Union County, is a desirable place to live, with prices to match: About a third of the nearly 100 homes on the market are listed for \$1 million to \$2 million, and bidding wars are commonplace. But people who find their way to Summit, drawn by its highly regarded schools, good access to highways and convenient commute, often stay.

No longer newcomers, the Busams have followed another long-established pattern in Summit: the upgrade. A year ago, they paid \$1.195 million for a five-bedroom house built in the early 1900s, moving from a smaller home a few blocks away.

“It’s a very social town, which is nice — we sort of just fit in with the people in Summit,” said Ms. Busam, a lawyer who recently returned to work part time.

Dave and Laurie Sukoff fit in so well they decided to live in Summit twice. They met in South Florida, and when Mr. Sukoff started an investment management company, they wanted to return to the Northeast. He grew up in Long Island; she grew up in Massachusetts. “We really didn’t consider northern New Jersey,” he said.

They considered Summit only after Laurie’s brother mentioned it, and ended up moving there in 2003. They moved to Massachusetts in 2007 for personal reasons, Mr. Sukoff said, but, as he added, “every year we were in Massachusetts, it was like, ‘Should we move back? Should we move back?’ ”

So they moved back, paying \$1.68 million last year for a five-bedroom three-and-a-half-bath brick colonial on Blackburn Place, the same street as their first house. Their 13-year-old son plays lacrosse, and Mr. Sukoff coaches him. Their daughter, 11, is a cheerleader. They go to the farmers’ market in town on Sunday mornings. “It’s hard to imagine a better experience than raising a kid in Summit,” Mr. Sukoff said.

Vivian Boucherit, who works in marketing for Lois Schneider Realtor in Summit, has lived in three houses since moving to Summit in 1987, most recently a 1903 carriage house that she bought in 2007, paying about \$100,000 over the asking price of \$850,000.

She has two daughters, 33 and 30; one lives in New York City, the other in Hoboken. Asked if she expected them to move back to Summit someday, Mrs. Boucherit laughed and said, “I would hope so.”

Ellen Dickson, who is running for her second four-year term as Summit’s unpaid mayor, considers herself typical in that she has lived in Summit for 22 years and is in her second home — which she bought from Ms. Boucherit. “People get their first house in Summit, get a bigger house, then move back down,” Ms. Dickson said. “We do a lot of that in Summit.”

### **What You’ll Find**

Summit is a six-square-mile Union County **city** on the Second Watchung Mountain (hence its name) about 25 miles west of Manhattan. Interstate 78, with an exit for Summit, runs near the southern boundary of the municipality. State Route 24 forms the eastern boundary, with the Mall at Short Hills on the other side of the highway. Newark airport is about 10 miles, or 15 minutes, to the east, and New York is a 45-minute drive on a good day. The city’s neighbors include Millburn, Chatham and New Providence.

The center of town is charming and **walkable**, with a village green across the tracks from its busy train station. Lined with shops, a multiplex and a growing variety of restaurants, Springfield Avenue is the main commercial street. Summit Avenue runs north from the center of town; a cluster of apartment buildings is within walking distance of the train station, with larger homes farther from the center.

### **What You’ll Pay**

There were 95 homes listed on the Garden State Multiple Listing Service site on Oct. 22, ranging from a one-bedroom one-bath unit in a 1924

apartment building near the train station for \$220,000 to a 1929 Tudor estate with six bedrooms and five and a half baths on 2.46 acres for \$5.25 million.

There were 28 properties listed for rent on the M.L.S., ranging from \$1,700 for a two-bedroom apartment to \$8,500 for a 1931 house with four bedrooms, four full baths and two half-baths.

Lucy E. Thompson, an agent for Keller Williams Realty Premier Properties in Summit, said buyers continue to be willing to pay a **premium** to live in municipalities that, like Summit, have New Jersey Transit Midtown Direct train service to New York. Single-family homes in Summit have been on the market for an average of 39 days this year through Oct. 19 and sell for an average of 101.4 percent of list price, she said.

According to M.L.S. figures supplied by Terry Londenberg, an agent for Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, 129 homes closed between May 30 and Oct. 22, averaging \$1.013 million and 37 days on the market; averages were \$850,000 and 47 days on the market a year earlier.

## **What to Do**

Summit has a nine-hole, par-3 municipal golf course (\$50 annual membership fee in 2015 for an adult resident), a seasonal **aquatic center** (\$375 in 2015 for family membership) and community programs, including a seniors club (\$10 annually for residents). Youth athletic programs include football, wrestling and karate.

The Summit Playhouse, a community theater founded in 1918, has productions of “Driving Miss Daisy” and “Godspell” on its 2015-16 schedule. Dreamcatcher Repertory Theater, at the Oakes Center on Morris Avenue, produces three plays annually, plus a holiday special, an **improv comedy** program and a cabaret special, among other events. The Visual Arts Center of

New Jersey, on Elm Street, has exhibitions and a studio school with classes for all ages.

Roots Steakhouse on Springfield Avenue is popular, as is the Broadway Diner on River Road. The retro Summit Diner near the train station is a local institution. Natale's, on Broad Street, is a classic small-town bakery whose signature item is the "Philly Fluff" poundcake.

### **The Schools**

The Summit Public Schools system is a big **drawing card**. It includes two primary centers with preschool and kindergarten; five elementary schools for Grades 1 to 5; the Lawton C. Johnson Summit Middle School, for about 1,000 students in Grades 6 to 8, and Summit High School, with about 1,200 students in Grades 9 to 12. Average SAT scores at the high school for 2013-14 were 576 in reading, 599 in math and 583 in writing, compared with state averages of 496, 521 and 497.

### **The Commute**

The Summit train station, in the center of the city at 40 Union Place, has New Jersey Transit service to New York's Penn Station, with most direct **trains** scheduled to take around 40 to 50 minutes. The fare is \$298 monthly. There is also service to Hoboken. Six municipal parking lots are within walking distance of the station; parking for residents is \$4 daily and \$80 monthly.

### **The History**

According to an article by Arthur Cotterell in The Historian, the Summit Historical Society's newsletter, land that is now part of the **Summit Municipal Golf Course** was used by George Washington during the Revolutionary War in the summer of 1781 to build what appeared to be an **encampment**,

including storehouses and a brick bakery. But the encampment was a hoax. While the British commander, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, headquartered in New York, fortified the city because he believed Washington was preparing to invade, American and French troops marched to Virginia to meet Gen. Lord Cornwallis's forces — and won the Battle of Yorktown.

A version of this article appears in print on November 1, 2015, on Page RE10 of the New York edition with the headline: A Place to Grow Into and Stay .