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HAVENS | ANGEL FIRE, N.M.

## An Affordable Ski Town, All About Nature



Rick Scobelli Jr. for The New York Times

In Angel Fire, N.M., the attraction is the outdoors. As for night life, residents say there isn't much.

By LISA SELIN DAVIS  
 Published: March 12, 2009

FIFTY-FIVE years ago the LeBus family of Wichita Falls, Tex., began grazing beef cattle on 18,000 acres they had bought in the Moreno Valley of northeastern [New Mexico](#), 8,500 feet up in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. In 1964, they opted for a much more profitable use of the land in the form of the Angel Fire Resort, replacing pastureland with Alpine [ski](#) trails, a lake stocked with trout, a [golf](#) course and condominiums and homesites.

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The ski area now has more than 70 runs, and houses dot the hills, but even now, the Angel Fire Resort, which was incorporated as a town in 1987 and has a population of 1,118, includes little else in its 39 square miles: no traffic lights, nightclubs or casinos, though there are three banks, mountaintop high-speed Internet service and a Chinese restaurant.

"It's all about being in nature here," said Jack Fuehr, a retired executive and second-home owner from Dallas who said he often spied bears and heard bugling elk from his

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Rick Scibelli Jr. for The New York Times  
The town has three banks, mountaintop high-speed Internet service and a Chinese restaurant.

windows. In 1981, after a three-day vacation here, Mr. Fuehr and his wife, Sandy, bought a lot on impulse for \$15,000 that came with a 14-year time share. In 1993 they spent around \$350,000 building their 3,500-square-foot house, where they spend six months each year, two in winter and four in summer, skipping the madhouse times of Christmas and spring break.

Like Mr. Fuehr, about 50 percent of Angel Fire's second-home owners hail from the Lone Star State, giving the town the nickname of Little Texas. The area is both closer and less expensive than Colorado, and Texans remain unfazed by driving 11 hours from Dallas or 14 from Houston.

Don Borgeson, a local real estate broker, said the 50 percent of second-home owners who weren't Texans tended to come from Kansas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. He said part-timers made up 80 percent of the population. "We suspect we have more full-time elk than full-time residents," Mr. Borgeson said.

Second-home owners are drawn by the beauty of the Moreno Valley, its weather — 300 days of sunshine annually, 210 inches of snow and cool, dry summers — and price: some describe it as a poor man's Aspen, where a 3,500-square-foot home like the Fuehrs', within striking distance of ski slopes, can easily be had for less than \$500,000. Brian Curtis, a news anchor from Dallas, calls it "the last affordable ski town in America — a real undiscovered jewel." He bought a three-bedroom, two-bath home here in 2003 for less than \$250,000 after giving up

on pricier Taos and Santa Fe.

Because it was settled so recently, Angel Fire lacks the architectural and cultural charms of such towns. There is no real urban center. Instead, ski shops and unpretentious restaurants are scattered in wood-framed strip malls along what passes for the main street, and log cabin-style homes perch in the hills — precisely what Mr. Curtis likes about it.

"It isn't overly developed," he said. "The valley is the star. It's not about cute shops and five-star restaurants." There is nothing Texan-centric here, either — no barbecues or cowboy boot shops. Mr. Curtis describes it as "an antidote to Dallas."

**The Scene**

Summer and winter seasons often attract different part-time residents. Some come only for the holidays and place their houses in rental pools the rest of the year. "Around Dec. 21," Mr. Borgeson said, "the whole valley picks up 15,000 people in 48 hours."

In summer, residents [hike](#) and golf; in winter, they ski and snowshoe; wildlife-watching happens year-round. But living with nature occasionally means succumbing to it. Angel Fire is accessible only by steep mountain passes that can be treacherous in bad weather, and managing the driveway is no picnic.

The town's nurse practitioner has snowshoed down to her office three times this season, unable to reach her car. Mr. Fuehr leaves snowshoes at a neighbor's house so he can hike up his driveway and clear a path for his wife when they arrive in winter. This year, neighbors performed the ultimate act of generosity: plowing before the Fuehrs arrived.

If nature ceases to amuse, Angel Fire offers little else in winter, something Mr. Borgeson bemoans. "We need more entertainment for the folks after hours," he said, and Mr. Fuehr said that an unofficial curfew of 9 o'clock reigned.

In summer, though, Angel Fire hosts cultural events including a classical [music](#) festival



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1 | 2 [NEXT PAGE »](#)

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