

# Heaven on Earth:

## *Lake Toxaway Offers Privacy, Pristine Environment and Plenty to Do*

BY LEIGH PRESSLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT CROWDER

Bill and Dell Anderson both grew up around water, he on Orlando's lakes and she on the beach at St. Simon's Island. After raising two sons in Newnan, GA., the couple always planned to retire on the Georgia coast.

Then they discovered Lake Toxaway. Perched 3,000 feet above sea level between Brevard and Cashiers, this sparkling lake surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains is one

of North Carolina's hidden gems. Completely private, the three-mile-long, one-mile-wide lake sits in the middle of a gated community of just over 800 homes. Only 130 homeowners live here full-time.

"Dell had visited her mother up here one summer and wanted me to see the place," says Bill, a retired corporate attorney. "We fell in love with it immediately. We stayed at the Greystone Inn and the next morning we were

down at the real estate office."

The Andersons completed their custom-built 3,800-square-foot home in spring 2001.

Inspired by the mountains, the lake house features a shingle-and-stone exterior with rock walls, a stone patio, paneled walls, hardwood floors and antique beams and columns. Bark made by a company in Brevard is used in the living room eaves and even on the kitchen back splash.



Bill and Dell Anderson tear it up on Lake Toxaway in their 1941 Chris-Craft runabout.

The Anderson home is refinded rustic at its best.



“We didn’t want a big house like we had in Newnan; we did this as a vacation home,” says Dell. “But the more time we spent here, the more we wanted to stay. We didn’t realize how

wonderful the people would be and how much there would be to do.”

The Andersons own two boats – a 20-foot deck boat and a 17.5-foot 1941 Chris-Craft

runabout.

“We love cocktail cruises,” says Dell. “Bill and I will go by ourselves sometimes or we’ll ask another couple. We also enjoy going out to

Reg Heinitsh, Jr. and Reg Heinitsh III are following in Reg Sr.’s footsteps with the development of Toxaway.



the island to listen to music on the water. When our children come, they ski, and we’re looking forward to when our grandchildren are old enough to swim, too. It’s a very relaxing lifestyle.”

Lake Toxaway’s residents typically fall into three categories: year-rounders, weekenders and second homeowners. Many of them discovered the lake the same way the Andersons did.

“They come to the Greystone Inn and fall in love with Lake Toxaway,” says Reg Heinitsh III, whose grandfather and father developed the community. “Then they rent a house and then they buy or build a house. There are a lot of great golf courses and a lot of great lakes, but this is one of the few places you have both in one location. When you add the inn, water activities, tennis, hiking and all the other things to do here, it’s the total package.”

An active community popular with baby boomers, Lake Toxaway offers a private marina and country club, an 18-hole golf course, a Tom Fazio practice facility, tennis, bridge clubs, Bible study groups, cultural activities and a wide range of social events.

Each month, “Music on the Mountain” features local performers in the community’s Meadow Ridge Pavilion high above the lake. Other concerts and classical performances are held on an island surrounded by anchored boats.

“We laugh and say in summer, it’s like being at camp,” says Bill.

The same spectacular natural beauty, cool

climate, clean water and relaxing, but active atmosphere that attract today’s homeowners are the very things that drew America’s industrial elite more than a century ago.

The original mastermind behind Lake Toxaway was E.H. Jennings, a Pittsburgh entrepreneur who first visited in 1890 and envisioned a pristine man-made mountain lake and top-notch hotel. Jennings didn’t let dense forest, unpaved roads and primitive equipment stop his dream of creating the first sizeable man-made lake in the Appalachians.

Ford, Firestone, Edison, Astor, Rockefeller

and other Gilded Age notables stayed at The Toxaway Inn, a lavish wooden structure that offered modern wonders including elevators, central heat, private indoor plumbing and long-distance telephones. Opened in 1903, the hotel sat in the middle of the Appalachian wilderness, but offered its wealthy guests ballroom dancing with live orchestra music, billiards, golf, tennis, horseback riding, hunting, bowling, boating and elaborate meals prepared by French chefs.

But in 1916, torrential summer rains caused a massive flood that broke Lake Toxaway’s

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dam. Overnight, the entire lake emptied, leaving the grand homes and The Toxaway Inn with a beautiful view of a muddy lakebed.

Only four or five original homes remain, including the Greystone Inn that was once the estate of Lucy Camp Armstrong Moltz.

Another visionary, Reg Heinitsh Sr., followed in Jennings's footsteps with the idea of restoring Lake Toxaway. In 1961, the Columbia, SC builder purchased about 6,000 acres and began re-creating the lake.

"He was vacationing in Brevard and wandered into the library of the B&B where he found information about Henry Ford, Rockefeller and Edison visiting this area in their day," Reg Heinitsh III says of his late grandfather. "But the trees had grown from 1916 to 1960, so you couldn't even see where the lake had been. When he went hiking through the woods here, he found pieces of what had been old boathouses and mahogany boats."

Reg Heinitsh Jr. was 15 when his



The home's architecture fits in with the area's hilly terrain.



The family says that living on Lake Toxaway is like going to adult camp – with all of the amenities.

dad took on the massive redevelopment project. As his father determined the original footprint of the lake and cut the trees, Heinitsh Jr. helped pull the timber out.

"It was the dirtiest, nastiest, toughest job you could have," he says. "We hooked them, pulled them onto a barge, cut them, stacked them, unloaded them and then burned them. It was 10 hours a day, six days a week. But I was thrilled to be a part of it. It was a great experience to watch the lake being created again."

Profits from timber were used to rebuild the dam. Then Heinitsh Sr. began selling lots and adding more amenities, including the country club and golf course where Heinitsh Jr. worked as a gardener and caddy.

Back in the 1960s when the lake was first redeveloped, lots started at \$5,000. Today they range from \$500,000 to \$1.6 million, and it's not unusual to see two '60s-era homes torn down to build lakeside mansions.

"We've seen so many changes," says Heinitsh Jr. "It used to be 80 percent of homeowners were from Florida, but now we get folks from Atlanta,

Charlotte, Greenville and Columbia. Originally, most people were fully retired, living here half the time and in Florida half the time. Now the boomers are phasing into retirement, spending long weekends and then more and more time here. You used to see regular ranch-style homes. Now those are being torn down to build 15,000-square-foot mansions. I've been surprised, but my dad would be a whole other generation surprised."

Heinitsh Jr. now lives in a 20-year-old lakefront home beside the house his father built. The two-story wooden home with a shake roof is cut into a bank and is a moderate size compared to newly built homes.

"It feels like home," he says. "I love having coffee on the deck in the morning. It reminds me of being on the lake when I was growing up. Even when cold weather comes, I go down swinging, wearing hats, gloves and two overcoats if I have to. There's just something about looking out over the water."

Heinitsh Jr. also enjoys cruising the lake in his pontoon and skiing behind his Cobalt.

His son, who everyone calls Reg III, lives in Asheville and keeps a small cottage on Lake Toxaway.

"There's so much going on in the summer and in the fall, when the leaves change, you won't find a prettier place," he says. "It's heaven on earth." 🌳

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