



Great Falls Ranked Eighth

Residents have mixed feelings about community's latest recognition.

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By Aranya Tomseth

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When Victoria Stuppy moved to Great Falls three years ago, she noticed immediately that the prices for certain things seemed suddenly higher.

"We were hit with what my neighbors and I commonly refer to as the 'Great Falls Gouge Factor,'" said Stuppy. "Whether it's contractors, landscapers, cleaning crews, etc., the moment they cross the line into the community, there must be some bell that tolls 'cha-ching,' and the price of any service immediately goes up. In fact, a few have been so bold as to actually ask me how much we paid for our home and ... our renovations. The first few times I was in shock."

Originally from Miami – another affluent community – Stuppy said she was no stranger to dealing with contractors hiking up the prices according to their assessment of the clientele's financial status. However, she says that her experience in Great Falls has far surpassed what she has encountered in the past.

"At first we thought it was just us, but after several neighborhood barbecues, we're all in the same proverbial boat – though a lovely, lush green one," said Stuppy. "In fact, my next door neighbor and I are looking into bringing a crew in from western Pennsylvania to build garages on our respective properties – even with the cost of housing and feeding the crews, it will still be less than any estimates we have received."

So when Stuppy heard that Great Falls was recently ranked CNN's no. 8 "Top Earning Town," her initial reaction was cynical.

"My immediate thought was, 'oh great, wait until the contractors and service people see this one,'" she said. "While we fell in love with the rural quality of this community and the proximity to such a cosmopolitan center of activity, it's quite a price to pay to feel that there's always someone who's looking to take advantage. I realize this is what you call a high-class problem, but my husband and I have worked for every last dime and I feel as if our pockets are being picked every day. We love this community and feel blessed to have reached a place in our lives where we can afford to live in such an idyllic setting – I just wish services weren't based on what someone can afford to pay, but on the actual work. Integrity too has a price."

HOWEVER, some residents think the ranking is an indication of the many benefits of living in the Great Falls community.

"I think we are so lucky to live among such affluence," said local resident Maggie Parker. "It affords us the best of relationships and schools and libraries ... and no matter how much you may have, the person next to you at the grocery store can probably beat you by a thousand times – it's a very broad community."

Another local resident, who preferred not to be named, said they would prefer to see Fairfax County offer services equivalent to the taxes paid by the Great Falls community: "Wouldn't it be nice if each community reaped benefits proportionate to their own tax contribution?"

But other residents say that Great Falls should be measured by factors other than affluence.

"Great Falls the no. 8 Top Earning Town? When they rate friendship, nature, neighbors and lifestyle, we will get the no. 1 spot," said local resident Janet Jameson. "That's what really counts."



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