

## Escape the Lake Effect:

### Four Things Clevelanders Need to Know Before Buying a Vacation Home

By Mary Frances LaGanke

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Ah, Cleveland winters—a delightful mix of snow, slush and gray skies that linger like a guest who just won't leave. If you've ever dreamed of escaping to sunnier pastures, you're not alone. Many Clevelanders are trading in their snow boots for flip-flops by purchasing a second home or vacation property. But before you jump into the second-home market, here are four essential things to consider:

**1. Know Your "Why" and "Where"**

Are you looking for a sunny getaway to escape the winters, or are you thinking about an investment property that can double as a rental income generator? Knowing your primary goal will guide your decisions on location, financing and amenities.

Location plays a huge role in achieving your "why." While oceanfront properties are a classic choice, lake houses, mountain cabins, and even urban pied-à-terres can be equally rewarding. Consider your hobbies and lifestyle. Are you a golfer? Of course you'll look for homes near top-notch courses. A foodie? Explore areas with a vibrant dining scene. Accessibility is also key. If you're planning frequent trips, a property within a day's drive or a direct flight from Cleveland might be more practical.

**Pro Tip:** Check out popular "feeder markets" for Clevelanders. Destinations like Naples, Florida, and Hilton Head, South Carolina, are hot spots for Midwest snowbirds.

**2. Budget Beyond the Purchase Price**

Buying a second home isn't just about the mortgage. There's also property and floor insurance, maintenance costs, HOA fees and taxes to consider. And let's not forget travel costs—the flight or drive back and forth. If you plan to rent out your property part-time, you'll need to factor in property management fees which can be significant.

According to the National Association of Realtors®, many vacation homeowners underestimate the cost of upkeep on vacation homes. From pool maintenance to unexpected repairs, the bills can add up quickly.

**Pro Tip:** Research the cost of living in your chosen area. A dollar goes a lot further in Gulfport, Mississippi, than in Maui, Hawaii.

**3. Financing: A Whole Different Ball Game**

Financing a second home is vastly different than a primary residence. Lenders often require higher down payments—think 20-30%. Interest rates can also be higher because second homes are considered riskier investments.

If you're planning to rent the property, be upfront with your lender. Many financing options for second homes come with restrictions against rental use. On the flip side, investment property loans may have stricter terms but offer more flexibility for rental income.

**Pro Tip:** Explore tax benefits, such as deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes. But beware of the IRS's 14-day rental rule—if you rent out your home for more than 14 days a year, it's considered a rental property for tax purposes.

**4. Ownership Options: Timeshare, Fractional or Full Ownership?**

When it comes to ownership, you have a range of options to fit your needs and budget. Besides buying your own place, explore timeshares and fractional ownership which may better suit your needs and budget.

- Timeshares allow you to buy a share of a property, typically giving you access for a set period each year. While they can be cost-effective, they often come with strict usage schedules and maintenance fees.
- Fractional Ownership gives you a larger stake in the property, often with more flexible usage rights. It's a middle ground between a timeshare and full ownership, making it ideal for those who want more control without the full financial commitment.
- Full Ownership offers the most freedom but comes with all the responsibilities of maintenance and management.

If you're planning to use the property frequently or rent it out, this option might make the most sense.

**Pro Tip:** Carefully review contracts and consult a real estate attorney and tax accountant to understand the terms of your ownership, especially for timeshares and fractional properties.

*This article has been provided for Spirit readers by Mary Frances LaGanke, Howard Hanna, Chagrin Falls. 216-470-6799. ISellClevelandHomes.com*



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## Ode to the Larch Tree

Oh, the twists and turns  
this unusual tree offers  
thrill us in each season.

In spring, the bright green  
needles herald re-birth in its essence!  
Summer days, we continue to savor  
the lushness of its branches.

Late autumn, the needles turn rustic brown,  
until winter robs us of color but  
the ornamental, covered in snow, still excites.

This deciduous evergreen is such a joy  
we created a patio around it!  
Stone by stone, encircled by love.

The tiny pine cones are a delight, and  
never will we use them in a craft project  
for their beauty must stay in nature.

Bask in nature today and  
evermore!

Anne E. North  
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## Veneer Tree Service: A Legacy of Excellence in Tree Removal

For nearly four decades, Veneer Tree Service has been a trusted name in expert tree removal, disaster relief, and community service.

Founded in 1985 by Mark Gamiere, the company is built on a commitment to professionalism, safety, and precision in every job. With an unwavering dedication to serving communities across the country, Mark and his team have become known for their swift, expert tree removal services in both routine and emergency situations.

With over 20 years of experience in disaster relief, Mark has been at the forefront of some of the nation's most challenging recovery efforts. From the raging wildfires of California to the devastation of major hurricanes on the East Coast and Midwest, Veneer Tree Service has provided essential support in removing hazardous trees and restoring damaged landscapes. His expertise in these high-pressure environments speaks to his skill, efficiency, and deep understanding of tree removal under extreme conditions.

A proud Ohio native, Mark brings a strong work ethic and a passion for perfection to every project. Whether it's clearing storm-damaged trees, providing routine maintenance, or ensuring a property's safety, his team operates with precision, professionalism, and attention to detail. Customers can count on Veneer Tree Service to handle tree removal with the highest level of care, ensuring each job is completed efficiently and expertly.

With decades of experience and a reputation built on excellence, Veneer Tree Service continues to provide top-tier tree care, disaster relief, and unmatched expertise to communities in need. When you need trusted professionals for tree removal, you can depend on Mark and his team to get the job done right—every time.

## Geauga Master Gardener Classes

**Herb Gardening in Pots** - May 15 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. \$10. MGV Kate Zittere will present the many opportunities to enjoy potted herbs. Small spaces, unruly herbs, fresh, winter herbs or herbal house plants are all great to plant in pots. We'll discuss the planting, care and enjoyment of herbs that thrive in pots. You will plant an herb during class to take with you to get your potted herbal garden started! Registration and payment required by May 8th. Call 440-834-4656 for registration and information.

**Gardening 101 Series Part 4: Harvesting and Preserving Your Bounty** - May 22 from 6:30-8 p.m. Free. While your garden is growing, when is it time to harvest your bounty and preserve it for the long winter months? The when and how of determining when your vegetable or fruit is at optimum ripeness, how you preserve its flavor qualities, and nutritious value for both short- and long-term storage will be covered by MGVs Mirko Antloga and Deb Miller. Registration required. Call 440-834-4656.

Each class will be held at the Geauga County Extension Office, Patterson Center (at the northwest end of the Burton Fairgrounds), 14269 Claridon-Troy Rd., Burton, OH, 44021. Registration required. Call 440-834-4656 for registration and information.

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Have gardening questions? Ask a Geauga Master Gardener Volunteer. Our office, in-person and phone help line hours are Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 9 am - 3 pm. from May through September. Email your questions anytime at [mggeauga@yahoo.com](mailto:mggeauga@yahoo.com). Include as much information as you can provide. Photos are always helpful.

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Planning a garden-related event and need a speaker? Contact our Speakers Bureau at 440-834-4656.

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Interested in our Scholarships? - <https://geauga.osu.edu/program-areas/master-gardener-volunteers/scholarships>.



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## Geauga & Portage SWCDs Offer Summer Educator Workshop

For 16 years, the Geauga and Portage Soil and Water Conservation Districts have offered the Advanced Wonders of Watersheds (WOW) workshops as valuable, affordable, and rewarding teacher trainings.

This summer's educator workshop will take an in-depth look at freshwater studies with a special focus on empowering students with knowledge and hope in our changing climate. Through outdoor investigations, field exploration, and curriculum resources, teachers will learn about natural resource and climate change challenges, impacts, and behavioral solutions such as composting. With assistance from a Go Green Community Grant through the Geauga-Trumbull Solid Waste Management District, we will dig into how backyard and schoolyard composting reduces greenhouse gas emissions, improves soil health, and increases carbon sequestration.

Participants will receive resources, lessons, and a compost bin to help them begin composting at home or even at school! Join us Tuesday, June 24-Thursday, June 26 for learning adventures throughout the Lake Erie basin while lodging at Old Woman Creek, one of Ohio's best remaining natural estuaries.

Open to educators of all grades and disciplines with optional graduate credit hours available through Ashland University. Register soon! For more information visit [geaugaswcd.com/education/](http://geaugaswcd.com/education/) or contact Gail Prunty at [gprunty@geauga.oh.gov](mailto:gprunty@geauga.oh.gov) or 440-834-1122.

### Summer Stream Monitoring Opportunity Join the Geauga Stream Team!

Interested in exploring Geauga County streams and learning about their water chemistry and biology this summer? What about investigating water quality by searching for aquatic critters such as crayfish, dragonflies, water pennies, and caddisflies which live in our local streams? Then grab your water shoes and join Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District's Geauga Stream Team!

Formerly known as the Millennium Youth Conservationists, we work in collaboration with the Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources Scenic Rivers Program. By collecting official stream data utilizing kick seines, sediment sticks, water chemistry test kits, and more, we will explore the health of area streams and rivers. All ages are welcome. Join us for one outing or for all. The Geauga Stream Team is free and only twice a month.

Check out our website for more information at [geaugaswcd.com/education/youth/](http://geaugaswcd.com/education/youth/) or contact Colleen Sharp at 440-834-1122 ext. 1766 or [csharp@geauga.oh.gov](mailto:csharp@geauga.oh.gov) to begin your adventure!

## In Search of Geauga County's Biggest Sassafras!

The Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is excited to announce the 2025 Geauga County BIG TREE Contest and is currently seeking nominations! This voluntary contest promotes the beauty and benefits provided by our county's biggest and oldest trees, along with their contributions to clean water and healthy soil. The 2025 featured tree species is the Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). Small but mighty, the Sassafras tree will likely not break records for its size — often growing 20-40 feet tall and only one-two feet in diameter. But its benefits are undeniably big! The "surefire identifier" of this native tree is three distinct leaf shapes, usually all present on the same tree. These include egg-shaped, mitten-like with one lobe, or ghost-like with two lobes. In the autumn, these leaved turn beautiful hues of yellow, orange or crimson. Considered a native gem of North America, the roots, twigs, leaves and bark of Sassafras have a pleasant, spicy scent and contain oil that have been used by Indigenous cultures and throughout time in teas, medicine, soaps, and stews. Sassafras trees prefer moist, well-drained, acidic soils and grow on a variety of sites, but are best known as pioneering species, found on disturbed sites and able to survive fire. Its bark is thick, red-brown, and deeply furrowed, and the twigs are a noteworthy bright green. A member of the Laurel family, the Sassafras is a host plant to the spicebush swallowtail butterfly and its fruit feeds deer, turkey, bear, and many species of birds in early fall.

Participants will submit a nomination for a Sassafras which they believe might be the largest in the county. After all nominations are submitted, qualified personnel will verify the measurements using the ODNR Division of Forestry's Champion Trees Program procedures. Each tree will receive a score based on trunk circumference, crown spread, and total height to determine the winner. In addition, the District will consider each tree's ability to capture stormwater along with other economic benefits. For example, one Sassafras with a diameter of 20 inches can intercept as much as 1,990 gallons of rainfall and prevent 180 gallons of stormwater runoff each year.

#### BIG TREE Contest Guidelines:

Nominated trees must be Sassafras trees located in Geauga County. (Visit <https://ohiodnr.gov/discover-and-learn/plants-trees/broad-leaf-trees/sassafras-sassafras-albidum>). Only one nomination per individual tree. The first nomination received will be the official entry. The tree does not have to be on the property of the nominator; however, permission from the landowner must be obtained prior to nomination.

Nominations must be submitted to Geauga SWCD no later than Friday, Aug. 1. Please email to [gprunty@geauga.oh.gov](mailto:gprunty@geauga.oh.gov) or submit in person or through the mail to the Geauga SWCD, 12611 Ravenwood Drive Suite 240, Chardon, OH 44024.

Qualified District personnel will verify all nominated tree measurements and use the i-Tree MyTree Tool (<https://mytree.itreetools.org/>) to provide the rainfall interception and stormwater runoff reduction capability. The decision of the District will be final.

Gauga County's Biggest Tree will be recognized and awarded at the District's Annual Meeting in the fall. If on public land, the biggest tree on private land will also be recognized.

Questions? Contact [geaugaswcd.com](http://geaugaswcd.com), 440-834-1122, or [gprunty@geauga.oh.gov](mailto:gprunty@geauga.oh.gov).

## Spring at Observatory Park

Gauga Park District's Observatory Park in Montville Township is open daily 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. now through Memorial Day, then 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. through Labor Day, and naturalists including "Astro-Nat" Chris Mentrek are eager to show you around your International Dark Sky Park this spring!

To kick off warmer weather, outdoor movie nights return to Observatory Park beginning with "Finding Nemo" (rated G) on Saturday, June 14, then "Men in Black" (rated PG-13) on Saturday, July 26. Showtimes are earlier in the evening this year thanks to the use of a bright LED screen, so please be in your place by 7 p.m. with your blankets, chairs and refreshments to start watching.

Want to try a variety of park telescopes to view the night sky? Walk-up guided night sky viewing will be held these Fridays and Saturdays from dark until 11 p.m.: May 9, 10, 23 and 24, and June 13, 14, 27 and 28. If cloudy, enjoy a planetarium show instead! Additionally, members of the Chagrin Valley Astronomical Society will host walk-up night sky viewing at Nassau Astronomical Station (accessed by a different entrance to the park) these Saturdays from dark until 11 p.m.: May 17 and June 21. Nassau nights are cancelled by cloudy weather, though, so please watch our website and social media before coming out.

Friday evening astronomy programs this season will be focused on the topics of The Zodiac on May 9 (or virtually May 23), and Navigate By the Stars on June 13 (or virtually June 27). Those interested in virtual versions of the programs must register to receive a link to join.

Springtime Full Moon Hikes will be held Monday, May 12 (The Whippoorwill Moon); and Wednesday, June 11 (The Strawberry Moon), no registration required.

Birding for Beginners will be held here Sunday, May 4, from 9 to 11 a.m., for anyone who wishes to learn the basics of bird identification along a slow-paced bird walk, no registration required. An experienced leader will assist participants with observation and identification, with binoculars available to borrow. Naturalist Renell will lead her quarterly Nature Journaling course here on Sunday, May 4; supply fees vary depending on experience with her series, with more details available at registration. Naturalist Karie will lead a Hound Hike for dogs and their humans here on Sunday, June 29, no registration required.

And finally, now on Saturday afternoons, "Astro-Nat" Chris presents his famous Sky Tonight Planetarium Shows in the Robert McCullough Science Center on May 24 and June 28 at 3 p.m., no registration required.

Our website is your best source for program registration (when required) and to check for updates or cancellations before you come out. And don't forget that our mobile-friendly website is also available 24/7 to learn more about Observatory Park, its features and its trails totaling almost four miles. Enjoy!

For more on Geauga Park District offerings, please call 440-286-9516 between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. or visit Geauga Park District online via [www.geaugaparkdistrict.org](http://www.geaugaparkdistrict.org), Facebook, X, Instagram or YouTube.

**Celebrate 75 Years Perennial Gardeners of Chesterland's Annual Plant Sale!**

Mark your calendars! The Perennial Gardeners of Chesterland ("PGC"), who are celebrating 75 years, will host their annual plant sale the day before Mother's Day, Saturday, May 10, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. The sale is held rain or shine in the Chester Township Town Hall parking lot, 12701 Chillicothe Road, where admission and parking is free. The club encourages everyone to arrive early to explore its diverse plant offerings and have the first choice of its finest selections! Cash and checks are preferred, but credit cards are also accepted.

As the club enters its 75th year, its purpose remains the same- to continue to educate, enhance and connect with the community through flowers. The plant sale showcases this commitment as the PGC members dig up, pot and share nearly 1,000 plants from their own gardens with the local community. There will be a large assortment of hanging baskets, perennials, natives, house plants, herbs and annuals available for purchase. Club members will be available to answer any plant and/or gardening related questions. You can also shop the "Garden Shed" and "Boutique" for unique home and garden items – some new, some gently used.

Have an interest in gardening, giving back to the community and making new friends? Join the Perennial Gardeners of Chesterland! Membership is open to all Geauga County residents. The group meets once a month, usually at the Metzenbaum Center. For membership information or to attend a meeting or event, contact Cindy (440-313-8018) or email perennialgardenerschesterland@gmail.com. Stay connected and inspired by following the Perennial Gardeners of Chesterland Facebook page, which features gardening tips, event updates, and photos. Hope to see you May 10th at the sale, rain or shine!

**VSAP Is Here to Help**

The 2025 Have A Heart low cost spay/neuter program sponsored by Valley Save-A-Pet is in full swing. This program offers cat and dog sterilizations at a discounted rate to pet owners. Volunteers are available to answer calls on Monday and Wednesday between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Calls will also be answered on the first Saturday of the month. Call (440) 232-2287 (PETS) for more information or to apply for a spay/neuter certificate. Modest additional charges are required for any pet not current on vaccinations and for large dogs whose weight might require additional fees.

With the cooperation of local veterinarians Valley Save-A-Pet has been able to offer this vital service to pet owners for over 48 years. The support of the veterinarians in Cuyahoga, Geauga, and Portage Counties has been vital to the success of the Have A Heart program and has helped reduce cat and dog overpopulation in Northeast Ohio. Pet owners and feral cat caregivers are encouraged to take advantage of this program.

To learn more about Valley Save-A-Pet's programs and events, visit [www.valleysaveapet.org](http://www.valleysaveapet.org).

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**GS&WCD 2025 Equine Environmental Stewardship Workshop: Manure and Facility Management**

Horse ownership has become an appealing and significant attribute of Geauga County's rural landscapes, but all too often the essential management of horse manure is undervalued and overlooked. The Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District, along with Geauga County Farm Bureau, are pleased to present "2025 Equine Environmental Stewardship Workshop: Manure Happens! Manure and Facility Management on Horse Properties" on Thursday, May 29 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Join us at the Geauga County Office Building – Room A333, 12611 Ravenwood Dr., Chardon, OH 44024, to discuss the importance of manure and facility management for the betterment of your horses, your farm, and your community. Gain knowledge and resources to help reduce mud, manage manure, increase chore efficiency, improve horse health and property aesthetics, and conserve money and resources! Don't miss this unique opportunity featuring local natural resource professionals from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio State University Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District. Lunch will be provided by Geauga County Farm Bureau. Equine Environmental Stewardship recognition signs will be distributed to farms upon completion of this workshop.

Though the workshop is free, registration is required by May 21 to reserve your seat. To register visit [geaugaswcd.com](http://geaugaswcd.com) or <https://fs12.formsite.com/GeaugaSWCD/equine/index>. Questions? Contact 440-834-1122.

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