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By Dorothea Helms

**MAGICAL FOUR SEASONS**

The term "summer vacation" is inadequate anymore to describe the multitude of attitudes people have about spending their holiday time. Of course, summer remains a popular season for travelling and/or making use of a vacation home, because children are out of school. But many individuals, couples and even families prefer to take their holidays in fall, winter or spring - or for the lucky ones, in all four seasons. Many of today's fractional ownership vacation properties offer the opportunity to do just that. On assignment for fractions.ca, I came across some people who discovered the ideal vacation scenario at a fraction of the cost of a traditional second home.

Betty and Murray Walsh of Toronto look forward to getting away during the fall and winter the most. "We appreciate a good game of golf, and swimming and paddling in the lake, especially with the heat and humidity of Toronto," Betty says, "but we're more winter people than summer. At the fractional ownership cottage we bought into, we will be able to cross-country ski, skate and snowshoe this winter. We look forward to hiking, wildlife watching, feeding the chickadees and breathing in the cool, crisp air."

Murray and Betty used their first week at the cottage in June. They are delighted with their choice. "We spent last summer researching the fractional ownership vacation properties available in Ontario, and by the fall we had made our decision," Betty says. "One of the main reasons was the four-season aspect of this group of cottages. We passed up many three-season developments that were more secluded, because we look forward to winter so much. I'm from Winnipeg and Murray's from Quebec, so we are both used to the white stuff. In the winter, we enjoy pulling away from the concrete jungle and heading to a place with real snow, not slush. We love winter views."

Murray is a pilot with Air Canada, and Betty works as an administrative assistant at the City of Toronto. "We didn't want shared ownership in a resort," Betty says. "We wanted green space, a lake, golf and nature. We avoid crowds during our vacation time. This group of cottages has golfing nearby, and in fact, golf is part of the package."

The couple's share of the time during the year includes two weeks during golf season, plus one week in each of the other seasons. They plan to rent out one of their summer weeks in the heat of August on an ongoing basis, so they can enjoy the cooler seasons. "The flexibility of fractional ownership is attractive," Betty says. "We can also do an exchange with fractional owners elsewhere in the world, which opens up a whole new aspect of rentals and traveling. For now, we're enjoying the quaint and quality Muskoka experience we were promised."

Dr. Mary Zamora and her husband, Dr. Jim Kovacs, have owned a fraction of a cottage on a vacation property in Ontario since 1999. "We use it all year long," Dr. Zamora says. "In fact, we purchased two additional shares so we could enjoy more time there. We sometimes offer weeks to friends or trade through the exchange company. We've even rented out and used that money toward a vacation elsewhere."

The couple enjoys bringing their five-year-old daughter Kathleen along to take part in the fun. She's learning to ski and tube at a local slope, and Mary and Jim appreciate having golfing nearby, as well as a small town where they can access restaurants and amenities. "We boat into town for groceries or ice cream," Mary says. "We love the natural environment. We can take Kathleen for walks without worrying about busy road traffic. We have beach areas,

docks, hiking, cross-country skiing, tennis and in winter an ice-skating rink, all at our fingertips."

For Jim and Mary, the decision to go fractional had a lot to do with the initial financial investment. Mary is a physician at the Trafalgar Medical Clinic in Oakville, and Jim is a physician at Oakville Hospital. "Although we're professionals," Mary explains, "we're in a generation that can't afford to buy what we'd like. Prices had skyrocketed before we decided to get into the vacation real estate market. Because we're doctors, we have to plan well ahead for vacation time anyway, so fractional ownership was the answer."

And with the couple being so busy, the no-maintenance aspect was just as appealing. "Last year during the tornado," Mary says, "there was a lot of damage in the area, with trees down. It's a real community there. People checked on each other to be sure everyone was safe, and the maintenance people were there with chain saws. When we came back next time, everything had been taken care of."

Tony and Grace Paluzzi are also fractional owners. They spent part of their summer with three children in their vacation home in the Kawarthas. "It was great," said Tony. "Grace and I had a wonderful time, and the kids liked the pool and ready access to the lake with its water sports."

As for value, Tony, who is CFO of York Marble and Tile, and who supplies more condos with kitchen product than most, should know a thing or two. "We bought it because it was easy to get to from Toronto and was priced right. We see Kawartha values now doing what Muskoka land has already done, and we are very content we made a solid investment in our family lifestyle for this and the next generation."

Whether your idea of heaven-on-earth involves plunging into brisk lake water in the July sun, schussing through a spray of powder to chase away the January doldrums, putting on manicured golf greens in the fresh spring air, or just watching the deer go by as the leaves turn brilliant colours in the fall, there's a fractional ownership opportunity waiting for you somewhere in Ontario. Happy hunting!

Dorothea Helms is a real estate writer and editor.