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TEXAS HILL COUNTRY RETREAT

Halfway between Austin and San Antonio, Kissing Tree boasts a small-town vibe with proximity to big-city excitement.

In July 1857, during his campaign for the Texas governorship, Sam Houston delivered a rousing speech to the citizens of San Marcos. Afterward, while standing beneath a massive live oak, he thanked several women for their support with a peck on the cheek. The live oak became known as the Kissing Tree — a symbol of the candidate's affection as well as the fellowship that brought everyone together that day.

That communal spirit lives on in Kissing Tree, a 55-plus development in San Marcos. This gated neighborhood, named after the legendary landmark and all it represents, welcomed its first residents in 2017.

The centerpiece of the community is its 20-acre amenity campus. "We call it The Mix because everything blends together so well," explains Scott Turner, Kissing Tree's general manager.

Friendly competitions take place on the

putting course, pickleball and bocce courts and at the horseshoe pits, while cooking classes and more are held in the social hub, Independence Hall. Outside the building is the development's own Kissing Tree.

Outdoor enthusiasts explore two recreational trails, and golfers test their games on a par-72 layout. Refreshments, from comfort cuisine to grab-and-go snacks, are served at the on-site food truck. "The great thing about the amenities is they are as diverse as the population in our community," Turner says. Still in the works are a restaurant, fitness complex, indoor and outdoor pools and tennis courts.

Among the neighborhood's most popular spots is the Biergarten. "It's a social gathering place during the day to grab a soft chair, some shade and a cold drink with friends," Turner says. "There's a fire pit for the evenings so you can hang out."

Kissing Tree's location gives boomers the best of all worlds. Two international airports and other big-city attractions are found in Austin (35 miles north) and San Antonio (45 miles southwest), while San Marcos' small-town charm awaits just

beyond the community's gates. Residents enjoy the culture of Texas State University, bargain-shopping at the outlet mall and outdoor adventures in the Hill Country. "Within 10 minutes of your front door, the whole world is opened up to you," Turner says.

More than 70 homes have been built of 3,200 planned. Brookfield Residential, the exclusive builder for Kissing Tree, offers 18 single-family floor plans in five elevations. "You're able to mix and match and select a home that offers the lifestyle you're seeking," Turner says.



The Clarkson floor plan at Kissing Tree

Homes range from 1,424 to 3,398 square feet, with pricing from \$284,990. For more information, visit KissingTree.com.

— BRENT STOLLER

MAIN STREET AWARDS

Cities in Michigan, Oregon and Wyoming receive special recognition for reviving their downtowns.

Every year the National Main Street Center, a subsidiary of the nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation, identifies exceptional communities that have made great strides toward instituting preservation-based revitalization in their downtowns. The organization has

singled out Howell, MI; Oregon City, OR; and Rock Springs, WY, for the 2018 Great American Main Street Award. For more information on these cities, visit MainStreet.org.

Howell, MI (pop. 9,524): What once was a downtown primarily dedicated to professional services now is an engaging area bustling with cultural opportunities thanks to the efforts of Howell Main Street Inc. Boasting more than 40 specialty retailers and a vacancy rate of just 1.2 percent, the city center is being beautified by an outdoor art gallery, courtesy of the Howell Art Project, as well as multiple murals.

Information: DowntownHowell.org.

Oregon City, OR (pop. 36,360): The Downtown Oregon City Association has helped transform the original end of the Oregon Trail from a former industrial town to an environment that

fosters entrepreneurial activity. Independent and family-owned businesses have flourished here, and in the past decade, the association has introduced annual festivals celebrating the city's history and brewery scene. **Information:** DowntownOregonCity.org.

Rock Springs, WY (pop. 23,350): The downtown area was all but abandoned in this historic coal-mining city before the Downtown Rock Springs Main Street-Urban Renewal Agency took over a century-old freight station, introduced facade improvement and painting grants and spearheaded projects like an underground art gallery. The renovated Broadway Theater and events like an annual classic car show are bringing back the crowds.

Information: DowntownRS.com. [W](#)

— LUCY SPICER