

# The New York Times

## Southold, N.Y.: A Waterfront Hamlet on the Neighborly North Fork

In this quiet Long Island enclave, the tranquil beaches and vineyards are part of the draw. So are the friendly residents.

Jan Benzel | June 26, 2019

When Nancy Stellato and her husband, Robert, started thinking about retirement, they looked as far from their home in Westbury, N.Y., as North Carolina. But they wanted to be closer to their four grown daughters, so they also explored the North Fork of Long Island, where they had gone pumpkin-picking when the girls were small.

“We wanted a house that the kids would potentially come to,” Ms. Stellato said, in a real estate market “that we wouldn’t take a hit in.”

After searching for a year and a half, they found a three-bedroom, two-bathroom ranch house in the hamlet of Southold, N.Y., on a dead-end street. The house was bright and clean, with a wooded backyard, but it needed some updating. They bought it in December of 2018.



By The New York Times

The house is a 10-minute walk to South Harbor Beach, where the Stellatos — Nancy is a nurse, Robert works in construction management, both are in their late 50s — have a kayak slip, and the couple easily made new friends. “We share bikes and kayaks with our neighbors, we’ve met each other’s children, we admire each other’s dogs,” she said.

“Once I get out there, I mostly just stay put,” she continued. “I like to be outside, have family over, go to the thrift shop in Greenport.” She also crochets and frequents the knitting store in Southold.

As for Robert, she said, “He really likes to ride his bike. He’ll go for a 60-mile bike ride on a Sunday morning, or putter around the house fixing things.”

Every weekend, she said, “There’s a new little discovery of some beautiful spot, like a walk through a narrow, woody trail that goes from the woods into the beach.”

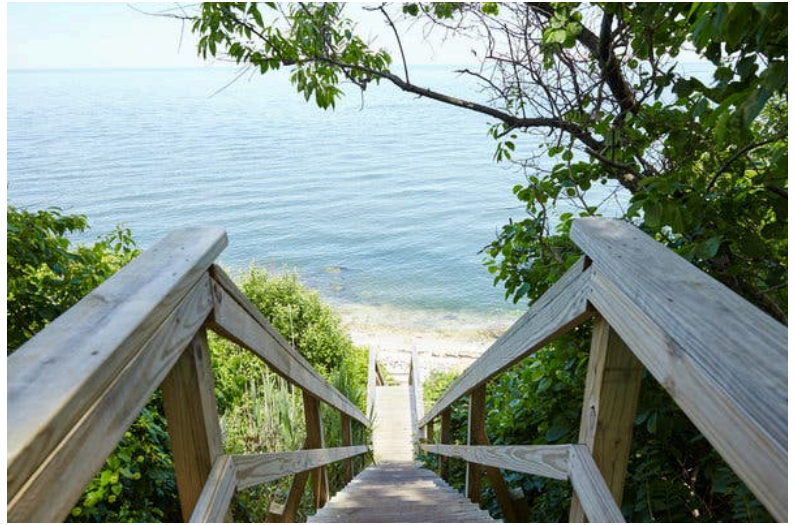
If you live on the North Fork or visit often, sooner or later you’re bound to make a stop in Southold: at the Southold Fish Market, where your dinner was swimming in nearby waters only hours before; at Ace Hardware, one of few national chain stores there,

where weekenders, residents and the many contractors refurbishing centuries-old houses intersect; at North Fork Table and Inn, a farmhouse restaurant of renown, with a food truck in the parking lot; or at KK's The Farm, known for its organically grown fruits and vegetables.

And wherever you go, you're likely to run into your neighbors.

The 10-and-a-half-square-mile hamlet of Southold — not to be confused with the town of Southold, which encompasses the hamlet but covers a larger swath, from Riverhead to Orient Point — has the feel of a long-established hometown, one with tranquil beaches, vineyards, harbors, mom-and-pop stores and its own opera house.

Randee Post Daddona, 56, a freelance photographer and videographer, and her husband, Lenny Daddona, 55, a landscape and irrigation specialist, moved to Southold from Lawrence, N.Y., 15 years ago, with their five children. They looked at 30 homes, and ended up buying the first one they saw: a four-bedroom, 1960s ranch-farmhouse on three-quarters of an acre, for \$705,000.



“We liked the smaller school district,” Ms. Post Daddona said. “We went from a place with 600 kids in a graduating class to 66. We looked at every town and this is what we chose. I wouldn't have changed a thing.”

Others have since discovered what drew the Daddona family to Southold.

“The market is incredibly robust, right now, with limited inventory,” said Nicholas J. Planamento, of Town and Country Real Estate, who lives in the hamlet. “City dwellers and suburbanites are all looking right now, in all demographics — ultrarich looking at waterfront properties and large farms, young couples from Brooklyn who want a weekend house and retirees from Nassau County.”

He added: “The magic of the community is proximity to the waterways — there are so many beautiful homes on the water. We have so many more access points to the water than the South Fork, just minutes away.”

## What You'll Find

Southold is built to take advantage of the light, the natural surroundings and the waterfront: Peconic Bay to the south and the Long Island Sound to the north, as well as coves, inlets and creeks.

Tidy cottages that start at around \$400,000 line streets on the way to the community beach at Founders Bay. Developments are anything but cookie-cutter, with spacious two-story houses on leafy, winding streets ending in cul-de-sacs. Several houses along a road near Jockey Creek are painted barn red, for some whimsical reason people seem to have forgotten.



Above Route 48, the second artery through the North Fork, the hamlet is more agricultural, with expansive fields and vineyards, as well as farms and bigger lots. A hand-painted road sign advertises aged manure for sale.

But as elsewhere on the North Fork, grander, newer, million-dollar-plus houses are popping up in neighborhoods all over the hamlet, some shielded by gates and Hamptons-like hedges, illuminated by security lights.

“Some of the changes are adverse to the quiet, dark-sky atmosphere in our community,” Mr. Planamento

said, though he noted that others have brought benefits. “There’s an increase in traffic, but also an increase in services. Young, creative people are able to start businesses; they’re tapping into local resources.”

The community is a mix of year-round residents and second-home owners, with many first-time buyers, said Nora Conant, an agent with Douglas Elliman.

Environmentally minded people, she added, are particularly drawn by the Suffolk County Marine Environmental Learning Center of the Cornell Cooperative Extension, which is working to regenerate the local oyster beds and scallop population, and offers educational programs and volunteer opportunities.

## What You’ll Pay

Sales have increased steadily in recent years on the North Fork, and in Southold, 36 homes were sold in the first quarter of 2019, up from 27 during the same period in 2018. The median sale price was \$602,000 in the first quarter of the year, down 2 percent from the same period in 2018, according to statistics compiled by Corcoran. And there is a premium for water views: A 1,500-square-foot house with beach access on the Sound is currently on the market for more than \$1.6 million.



In late June, the real estate website Trulia had a total of 93 homes listed for sale in Southold, from a seasonal cottage on one acre priced at \$399,000 to a six-bedroom waterfront property with a dock for \$3.25 million.

“If you’re looking for property on the direct bay or sound waterfront, in good condition, competition is fierce,” Ms. Conant said. “A pool makes it even harder. Buyers are coming in at or above asking prices and with all cash.”

If a buyer’s needs are more modest, “you’ll find much more inventory,” she said. “Price points are well under a million — more like \$700,000, \$800,000 — with a beach you can walk or bike to, some even with a pool.”

Ms. Conant gave an example of what she called the current “torrid” buying climate: A 1930s house in need of updating on three-quarters of an acre, on the bay with a waterside pool, was in contract 19 days after it was listed — for \$2 million, all cash.

Rental prices can range widely, particularly in the summer months, with prices as high as \$60,000 a month for an expansive waterfront dwelling, and a median monthly rent of \$10,000.

## The Vibe

With a population of about 5,700, according to the 2010 census, most everyone in Southold seems to know everyone else, said Diane M. Mollica, an agent with Daniel Gale Sotheby’s International Realty, who lives in Southold and raised her three children there.

Favorite hangouts include North Fork Roasting Co., with its motley collection of picnic tables and patio furniture, and Horton Point Lighthouse overlooking the Long Island Sound.

Many parents let their children walk to school or into town on their own, confident that friends and neighbors will look after them. “You know there are eyes on your kids,” said Claire Copersino, the owner of the North Fork Yoga Shala studio in Greenport, who has lived in Southold for 20 years. “You know if you need help, the people here have got you. It’s really home.”

The boom in Airbnb and HomeAway rentals a few years ago caused consternation, as noisy weekend parties disrupted the calm. But in 2015, the town of Southold passed a law prohibiting rentals of less than two weeks, which has relieved but not eliminated the situation. (Greenport, the village next door, was exempted from the rental restriction; it also has more restaurants and night life, and consequently draws more tourists.)

Main Street offers a mix of longtime establishments and newer entries. Besides the firehouse, the public library, a complex of historical buildings — Southold was founded in 1640 — and a cemetery where centuries have worn and softened the gravestones, you'll come across Ye Olde Party Shoppe, a hole-in-the-wall headquarters for red-white-and-blue bunting and Halloween décor. (Holidays are celebrated with small-town brio on the North Fork.) Just across the street is White Flower Farmhouse, a pretty, upscale store selling rustic furnishings, and About Food, a quirky purveyor of pasta, preserves and snacks.

Turn off Main Street, and you'll quickly find yourself in one of several neighborhoods where birdsong replaces traffic noise and bunnies hop along the paths.

### **The Schools**

In the 2017-18 academic year, there were 778 students enrolled in the public elementary school and the junior-senior high school in the Southold Union Free School District. On standardized tests, 38 percent of students in third through eighth grades demonstrated proficiency in English language arts, compared with 45 percent statewide; 24 percent tested as proficient in math, compared with 47 percent statewide.

Of the seniors in high school, 82.9 percent graduated, with 86 percent testing proficient on the English language arts Regents exam and 80 percent testing proficient on the algebra Regents exam, compared with 80 percent and 70 percent statewide.

### **The Commute**

Southold is about two hours and 15 minutes by car from New York City, although in summer traffic it can take much longer.

The Hampton Jitney from Manhattan to Southold takes about 2 hours and 20 minutes; standard fare is \$26, or \$21 prepaid. The trip on the Long Island Rail Road takes 2 hours and 46 minutes; the prepaid fare is \$22.25 off peak and \$30.50 during peak travel times.

### **The History**

Albert Einstein enjoyed the bucolic serenity of the North Fork during the summers of 1937, '38 and '39. One day, according to the Southold Historical Society, he wandered into Rothman's Department Store in Southold and asked for "sundials." The misunderstanding — he had actually said "sandals" — led to a friendship with the owner, David Rothman.

Music was among their shared enthusiasms, and Einstein participated in musical evenings in Southold, playing his violin and often drawing a crowd. The two corresponded for a few years, and Rothman sent Einstein a gift of sandals every year. The site of the department store, which opened in 1919, is currently undergoing redevelopment and will be called Einstein Square.

