

Heading west for work, a new life in Wyoming

By David Fleet (https://lakeorionreview.com/author/david_fleet/) on November 22, 2006 · No Comment (<https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/#respond>)

f ([http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/&t=Heading west for work, a new life in Wyoming](http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/&t=Heading%20west%20for%20work%20a%20new%20life%20in%20Wyoming))

t ([http://twitter.com/home?status=Heading west for work, a new life in Wyoming => https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/](http://twitter.com/home?status=Heading%20west%20for%20work%20a%20new%20life%20in%20Wyoming%20=>https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/))

g+ (<https://plus.google.com/share?url=https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/>)

in ([http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/&title=Heading west for work, a new life in Wyoming&summary=&source=Lake Orion Review](http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=https://lakeorionreview.com/heading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming/&title=Heading%20west%20for%20work%20a%20new%20life%20in%20Wyoming&summary=&source=Lake%20Orion%20Review))

e (<mailto:?subject=Lake%20Orion%20Review%20%3A%20&body=I%20recommend%20this%20page%3A%20.%0AYou%20can%20read%20it%20on%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Flakeorionreview.com%2Fheading-west-for-work-a-new-life-in-wyoming%2F>)



Former Groveland Township resident Richard Adriaens says he misses family, pumpkins, and the orange leaves during the autumn months in Michigan.

Still, the former Royal Oak police officer says the decision to head west was the right one.

Budget cuts forced him to take an early retirement from the police department, but as he pursued numerous Michigan cities for law enforcement openings, he noticed an advertisement for Gillette, Wy., a city of 30,000 in the northeast section of the state. So in the summer of 2004, Adriaens and his wife packed up their four children and made the 1,300 mile trek west to visit Campbell County's largest town in the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains. 'If we moved an hour away from work to live in Groveland, why not move 20 hours away?? asks Adriaens, 45, who commuted to Royal Oak each day. 'We fell in love with the Gillette area, and so we moved here. It's a whole different workforce and life from Michigan.?

Adriaens was appointed Gillette Chief of Police in January 2005 and now leads a force of 48 officers, including three other transplants from Michigan. His family has adjusted, with Emiley, 15, Drew, 12, Hannah, 7 and Abbey, 7 all attending the Gillette School District which encompasses all 5,000 square miles of Campbell County. His wife, Kelly, stays at home with the children. The Adriaens' move to Gillette is part of a small migration to the

western United States from job-starved mid-Michigan. In a report from the Michigan Department of Economic Growth and Development, Michigan had the second-highest unemployment rate nationwide in September 2006 with 7.1 percent. Only Mississippi ranks higher in unemployment, with 7.2 percent. In comparison, Wyoming's unemployment rate is 1.3 percent. The labor deprivation in Wyoming is magnified by a major energy boom in coal, oil and natural gas business in the area. The worker shortage has prompted vigorous courting of workers, like Adriaens from the mid-Michigan area ? and the workers are responding, adjusting to a very different life in the western sections of the country.

'It's much different than Michigan, it's a different mentality out here,' said Adriaens. 'Growth has taken the state by storm. The locals have never had to deal with the change (in population). There's only about 500,000 people in the whole state? Oakland County has twice that many alone.'

'Housing was kind of different. When we moved here two years ago, we had only 11 houses to choose from,' said Adriaens, who purchased a four-bedroom home. 'I had to spend more money than I expected, with less to choose from.'

'When we first moved here, my son was the new kid in class for only about three weeks, until a kid from Alaska moved here,' said Adriaens. 'From June until October this year, just under 400 new kids moved into the district. It's a big district'about 8,000 students, but still there's been a big influx. About 75 percent of the people who live here are from somewhere else other than Wyoming.'

While the number of new residents is increasing, for some businesses it's not soon enough.

'They just closed Quiznos (subs) last week because there were not enough workers,' said Adriaens. 'The competition for the few workers here is fierce—they are paying \$13 per hour at Wendy's if you can work during the day shift.'

Despite the abundance of jobs and great outdoor activities with the nearby Big Horn Mountains, Adriaens says he misses some of the conveniences back in Michigan.

'It's nice here, the friendliness of the residents helps. But when we first moved here, there were only three food stores in a city of about 30,000. Now we have a Super Wal-Mart, so we have a little more choice. We also noticed the fresh fruit was not as fresh.'

'And I'd give anything for a Papa Bella's Pizza from Ortonville. It's still the best,' laughs Adriaens.

'Most people follow the Denver Broncos and a few watch the Minnesota Vikings out here, since the state has no professional sports teams,' said Adriaens. 'I won't admit to being a Detroit Lions fan, but I still keep an eye on them. Still, I can never follow the Colorado Avalanche after all that with the Red Wings a few years ago.'

'Our family does a lot of camping, Yellowstone National Park is only about six hours away.'

The Adriaens may not be the last mid-Michigan residents to head west for work.

Ruth Benson, executive director for the Campbell County Economic Development Corporation says Wyoming has began

targeting mid-Michigan over the past two years.

‘Last year was our first trip out to the mid-Michigan area, and just a few days before we were planning to arrive, General Motors announced huge layoffs,’ said Benson. ‘That was lucky for us.’ Benson has been conducting recruiting trips along with a host of job fairs in Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, and Saginaw, with decent results. Their efforts in Michigan also included a billboard promoting Wyoming along I-75 between Flint and Detroit ‘right in the heart of the auto industry, says Benson.

‘We focus on Michigan due to the large number of automobile related layoffs, and the climate in Wyoming is similar to Michigan,’ said Benson. The biggest issue we’re facing in northeastern Wyoming right now is a lack of housing. For those that come out here, don’t expect to drive into town and find a place to live. Contact your employer first and have them help you find something. However, several new building projects should be open within the next 12 to 18 months.’

While locals may be heading west in search of work, don’t expect a lot of empty spaces in the mid-Michigan area, say state officials.

Ken Darga, a State of Michigan demographer, says the loss of population has been overstated by the media through the years.

‘People see a high unemployment rate and assume there must be a population loss to match it,’ said Darga. ‘It’s just not the case.

Michigan has one of the lowest rates of out-migration and one of the lowest rates of in-migration in all the 50 states. People born here tend to stay here.’

‘Migration is highest for young adults in the 20 year-old range.

Many of those that do leave are going to either college or the military,’ added Darga. ‘With a state of 10 million people, you can find families that move to Wyoming, and also families that came here from Wyoming.’

Area economists suggest a slight increase in Michigan population, despite the move west by some residents.

‘Population growth is slower in Michigan than other states,’ said Bruce Weaver, economic analyst for the Michigan Department of Economic Growth and Development. ‘The labor force edged up just a little over the past few months.’

Compared to other states, the Michigan labor force, the sum of those employed and unemployed, is up only .03 percent or about 17,000 to a total of 5,110,000. Nationwide, the labor force grew 1.3 percent, says Weaver.



Heading west for work, a new life in Wyoming added by David Fleet
(https://lakeorionreview.com/author/david_fleet/) on November 22,

2006

View all posts by David Fleet → (https://lakeorionreview.com/author/david_fleet/)
