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## Relaxed pace draws tourists and retirees to 'the county'

**Roberta Avery, National Post**

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Lyle Vanclief was born and raised in Prince Edward County near the hamlet of Ameliasburg, and even during his days as Canada's minister of agriculture, his heart has always been firmly in the six islands and the lakes that make up "the county."

"We had an apartment in Ottawa, but home has always been right here," says Mr. Vanclief, 64, who represented Prince Edward-Hastings in the House of Commons from 1988 to 2004 and was minister of agriculture from 1997 to 2003.

Mr. Vanclief and his wife, Sharon, live in the house his parents built in 1951 after their farmhouse was destroyed by fire. Once a 40-hectare mixed farm with pigs, chickens and dairy cattle, the property is now divided into a two-hectare parcel around the original farmhouse and 38 hectares of sod farm managed by their son, Kurt.

Small, mixed-farming operations, once a way of life in the county, have all but disappeared, but a wine industry found roots in the area's rich, fertile soil in 2000 and in less than eight years, the county has become the second-largest viticultural area in Ontario.

The county has long been famous for its quaint villages, rolling farmland and Sandbanks Provincial Park, but when you consider more than a dozen wineries, year-round festivals and more than 100 bed and breakfasts, you can expect tourists in droves.

"Things have changed; we've become a destination," Mrs. Vanclief says.

A destination, not just for tourists, but also as year-round living for Baby Boomers seeking a relaxed pace of life where they can enjoy a rural community that offers boating from several marinas and swimming from incredible white sand beaches.

It means that the rural roads that link with Highway 401, making the county easily accessible from Toronto (a two-hour drive), Kingston (less than one hour) and Ottawa (three hours), are busy. "But there are still a lot of quiet concession roads," Mrs. Vanclief says.

Once the realm of rum-runners during the Prohibition, the sheltered waterways of Prince Edward County offer

some of the best walleye and bass fishing in North America.

Property prices in Prince Edward County -- population 23,763 -- remain competitive with homes in projects such as Rosemary Lane by Port Picton Homes, 23 townhouse-style condominium bungalows in Picton aimed at empty nesters, starting at \$192,900.

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