

INDUSTRY FOCUS

Zero commuters save priceless time

BY H.M. CAULEY
Contributing Writer

With jam-packed interstates, clogged surface streets and limited public transit options, getting to work in Atlanta continues to be a horrific headache. Last year, **Forbes** magazine ranked the city seventh on its top 10 list of terrible towns for commutes, noting that the average one-way time is 34.3 minutes, but survivors of January's Snowpocalypse will attest that at any moment, that half-hour-plus can turn into days.

In response, some Atlantans are crying uncle and tossing the car keys in favor of moving closer to work so getting there doesn't even require wheels. They're opting to relocate to intown homes where the commute can be a brief bike ride, a leisurely stroll or, in the case of Robin Hensley, a matter of pushing an elevator button.

"Depending on what's going on in the building, my commute is the time it takes to go from the eighth floor to the lobby," said Hensley, an attorney and owner of **Raising the Bar**, a firm that helps lawyers develop their businesses.

Part of Hensley's decision to relocate from Atlantic Station to Plaza Tower on Peachtree Road in June was influenced by her desire to shorten what was already a 2-mile commute. But her need for office space where she could meet clients was a critical factor.

"My commute wasn't all that bad," she admits. "I was at Twelve at Atlantic Station, but I had to move my office, and when that happened, I thought I could do even better."

The Plaza offered the best of both: Hensley bought a commercial space off the lobby that came with free parking for her clients, then she moved into a two-bedroom unit eight floors above it.

"I had to find the perfect residential space to put the deal together; the one was dependent on the other," she said. "One closing is dicey, but two were really difficult. But I got this unit with two baths, two balconies and a Peachtree Road address, which is very convenient since most of my clients are in Buckhead or Midtown."

Hensley's eight-story commute also translates to a more profitable use of time.

"Being a solo consultant, the time spent on the highway or commuting is not billable time, and for attorneys, that's what it's all about," she said. "It was quite a feat to move my home and office, but it's paid off in so many ways."

During the search for the right work-live space, Hensley's agent, Al Floda with **Keller Williams Realty**, discovered not only are more buyers looking for that arrangement, but also a little leg work can uncover a variety of spaces.

"There aren't tons, but there are some places where getting to work means you're in an elevator, not outside getting wet," he said. "Some of them are in communities like Colony Square or Terminus with condos and offices in the same



Robin Hensley's commute consists of pushing an elevator button.



Al Floda

building. There are some live-work townhouses in Brookhaven, Candler Park and Castleberry Hill that are zoned so you can live upstairs and work downstairs. That was Robin's dream for a long time, to find a place where she could have people come every hour and still be close to where she lives. But there are a lot of places where having people constantly coming to the door will make an HOA suspect."

Other options for those who want to kiss off commuting can be found at the Brookwood, 1820 Peachtree Road, and the Aramore, 2255 Peachtree Road, where commercial and restaurant spaces sit on the first level. A similar design exists in Inman Park, where residential units have been built atop storefronts. At Villa Sonoma on Perimeter Summit Boulevard, only a driveway separates the residential and commercial towers.

Atlanta also has several hotel properties where residential units bring more perks than just the ability to walk across the street to work. At the 42-story **Mandarin Oriental**, 3376 Peachtree Road, 35 units with 3,000 to 5,000 square feet fill up the hotel's top 23 floors. Karen Rodriguez, director of sales, recently worked with a couple from Johns Creek who traded their suburban commute for one of the hotel's residences.

"He's with a law firm right across the street and was tired of dealing with the traffic," she said. "I think urban living is regaining popularity again because people perceive the traffic as only getting worse as the population is growing."

It's also more appealing to have the option of strolling home after an evening of socializing or

networking, which is what people would rather be doing than sitting in traffic, said Erik Dowdy, an associate broker with **The Marketing Directors LLC**, who has sold residential units in the **W Atlanta Downtown**, where prices start in the high \$500,000s and go to almost \$2 million.

"The intown condo is the new destination spot, the place where people can live and be active and social and not have to worry about driving home," he said.

MOVIN' ON IN

City of Atlanta population growth:

- ▶ 2013: **447,841**
- ▶ 2012: **443,505**
- ▶ 2010: **420,279**
- ▶ Percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013: **+6.6%**
- ▶ Percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012: **+5.5%**

SOURCE: CENSUS.GOV

MOVIN' AROUND

- ▶ Percentage U.S. workers with commutes of 60 minutes or longer: **8.1**
- ▶ Percentage working from home: **4.3**
- ▶ National average for one-way, daily commute: **25.5 minutes**

SOURCE: CENSUS.GOV

Justine Story, a **Dorsey Alston, Realtors** agent, said more of her clients are single professionals who want to live in Midtown. "Younger buyers will pay a little more for a one-bedroom condo that's within walking distance of their job rather than a two- or three-bedroom condo they have to drive from. They want an easier lifestyle."

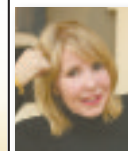
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