

People

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Personal relationships are what define our interactions with others, where we express and articulate our values, and how we connect to our families and friends. They are the very fiber of communities. During my interviews, people in the Northern Forest shared ideas surrounding the concepts and characteristics of community, usually referencing their own towns, but often branching out to describe a larger region. Many people reflected upon values and aspects of life which tie them personally to a community, including events and activities such as high school sports. For many, it is the qualities of small town life, a sense of knowing everybody, and a willingness to work together, combined with the friendliness and trustworthiness of their neighbors, that make Northern Forest towns good places to live, and safe, healthy places to raise children. Many residents I spoke with attributed a wisdom and resourcefulness to their neighbors that is invaluable to life in the North Country, where people must create their own niche to make a living. Some people talked about the health of their communities, and the struggle to make ends meet. Other relationship-based values that frequently emerged from conversations included accountability, personal responsibility, education, working together, neighborliness, families, and hard work.



Barry Dana & Family, Solon, Maine

TALKING ABOUT friendliness



Breakfast in town, Long Lake, New York

Many of the Northern Forest residents I spoke with described their communities as friendly and neighborly, traits I experienced first-hand as I met with people. My hosts welcomed me with cups of tea and other refreshment, and many took the time to show me around their homes, businesses and favorite places, or to flip through photo albums with me.

They described their small towns as places where people tend to help each other. Many said friendliness is evident in people's daily interactions, and in a common willingness to share or lend physical resources, to volunteer time in neighbors' and community projects, and to trade and barter informally.

Friendliness

Our neighbors are miles away but they're there for you. What's so attractive about the area is that people are all willing to help you. People are all doing their own thing, but they're intertwined.

—carpenter, Maine

People here are always ready to help each other out, you know. If there's something that goes wrong, they're always there to help. And when we have a funeral in the town, we have this great big meal after, to serve all the people that came to the funeral, we put up a big, big meal. So that's pretty neat about our little town here. And then when we have our parish supper, Thanksgiving supper in the fall, we always have a lot of donated food.

—potato farmer, Maine

My dad and his brothers and their friends, they really only hang out when they're helping each other build stuff. They spend most of their time together while working on something, like building someone's garage or shed. You won't find them just sitting around, watching sports or anything. This is true for a lot of families here.

—college student, Maine

I think it's the working together for the betterment of the community, that really impresses me about this town.

*—craft store owner,
New Hampshire*

Maine is traditionally a poor state, so you used to have to borrow tools from your neighbor because you couldn't afford everything for yourself. There was unspoken understanding that he could borrow what he needed from you. You'd help each other out by sharing what you had.

—photographer, Maine