



*I moved here with my family 20 years ago, when my girls were still in hairbows and t-strap shoes. We didn't know anyone. We had no ties to the area. No new jobs awaited us. We had visited exactly twice, a couple of years between the two instances, for a weekend each time.*

After the first trip, we bought an undeveloped lot along the Eastern Marsh on our first full day back in New York. A year later, we sold it, thinking we were “too young” to leave the city. Another year on, a group of my college buddies planned a Kiawah golf trip. For some reason, we flew into SAV/HHI. Reminded why I liked the place so much the first weekend, when my wife and I played a round of golf with our (then only) baby in a car seat in our cart, I coaxed her to revisit this mysterious Southern gem. Like the first iteration, we went home, picked up the phone, negotiated a little, and suddenly owned a prime piece of Skidaway marsh-front scrub.

I reconsidered the too-young argument against uprooting. We had no interest in the New York-area suburbs. My oft-repeated thesis: They have all of the negatives of the city – crazy expensive, prevalent value systems antithetical to ours, winter, a bunch of New Yorkers (don't be offended; we considered ourselves dyed-in-the-wool for a long time and I remain, at times, brutally confrontational and unsympathetically abrupt), the Knicks, PLUS long commutes – without the benefits that make the place compelling – “culture” (even though most New Yorkers haven't been to a museum or a Broadway show in years), great food, anonymity, wide sidewalks. So, stay in the city (where we were paying \$25,000 a year per kid for preschool...in 1999) or make a drastic life-change. Convincing my wife to do the latter required my most dogged persuasion skills. But she got there, eventually, and I will never have the opportunity to thank her as ceremoniously as I should have when she was around.

We came for a third weekend; to interview “residential designers” (a new term, at the time, to me) and builders; and submit our kids to private school entrance exams. Eventually, we hired an architect who had never built a real-life house and builder whose name none of our local advisors seemed to know. Evidently, our children did fine on their entrance exams and in their interviews. They were admitted to the school from which they would both graduate and both my wife and I would serve (at different times) as trustees.

What remained? I was 36, and I didn't have enough money to retire (and keep living the way to which I had grown addicted...to say “accustomed” would be misleadingly benign)? Here's the crazy part of the story: I didn't have a reasonable plan. And I acted as if I didn't care. “I'll figure it out; I always do.” I repeated it incessantly, in my

head and, occasionally, out loud. When I told one of the partners in my firm with whom I worked most closely and lucratively that I was moving, he surprised me. “Cool. Why don't you just keep doing what you're doing from down there?” Why not, indeed? So, I did. And my wife did, too. Effectively, we both worked on Wall Street, camouflaged and quiet on Spring Marsh Lane.

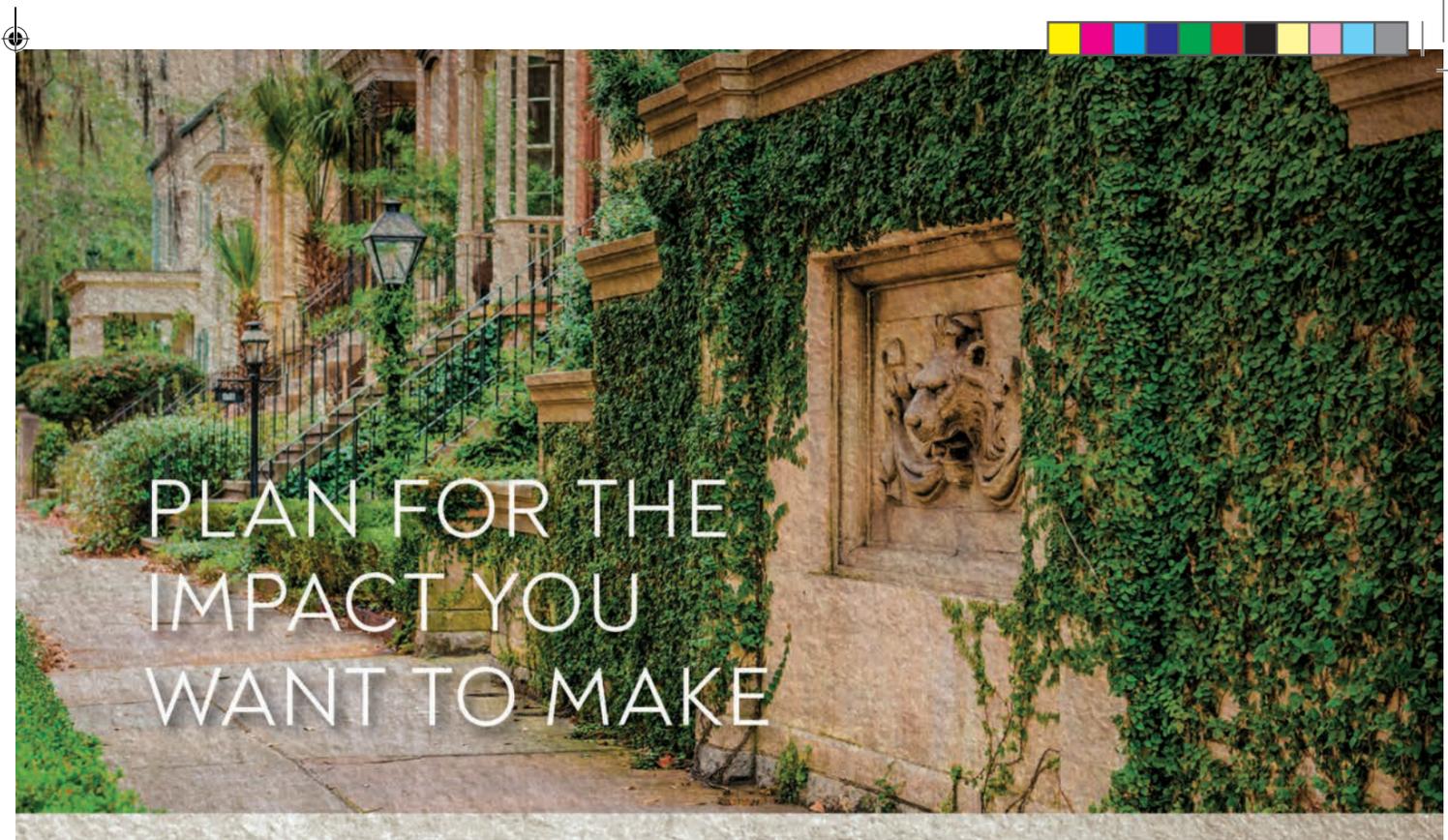
We made a bet on the increasing portability of work, and the impact it would have on real estate values: We sold an apartment, built our dream house, fully funded our girls' educations, joined a golf club for the first time, bought a brand-new boat and a fast golf cart, and put money in the bank. We're smart, but not uniquely so; why wouldn't lots of people do the same calculus and make the same move?

Twenty years later, they are. Last night, I had dinner with a really nice guy who, with no ties to the area, no professional reasons, nothing more than a brief trip in and out to whet his appetite, bought a really cool house in the heart of the Historic District. He remains CEO of a software company based on the West Coast – a job he has done successfully with several startups – and he has CHOSEN to live here. Like me, he has two daughters, each a few years younger than mine. Like me, he didn't have a precise plan; rather, a strong impulse and the courage and confidence to reimagine the range of life's potential paths. He is throwing himself into the deep end – literally – this summer he'll coach a swim team comprised of kids whose socioeconomic conditions are very different from his own.

Houses are selling like hotcakes in the region, from Palmetto Bluff to Perry Street to Peregrine Crossing, and everywhere in between. The (somewhat imaginary) stigma of being “not from here” is fading, as the town becomes a more fulsome mix of old and new. There's a spirit of innovation in the air that feels fresh and optimistic to me, but it's not all ill-conceived or pie-in-the-sky (remember the billion-dollar movie-making mini-city in Effingham County with monorails?).

And you...you can be thankful you're already here.

*Scott A. Lawrence*



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