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Dr. Robert Fulmer, Ph.D., and his wife, Pat, fell in love with Santa Barbara in 1999.

Eleven years later, the honeymoon continues, according to Dr. Fulmer's recent self-published book, "Newcomers in Paradise: A Southern Couple Finds Their Perfect Retirement Home in Santa Barbara" (\$16.95).

The title is two-pronged, referring to the Fulmers themselves and to the Santa Barbara Newcomers Club to which they attribute their seamless and extremely happy assimilation into their new community.

"It's the most democratic — with a small "d" — group we have ever belonged to. Members range from former CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to people who live in mobile home parks. We have never met so many fascinating people in a community that is so accepting, and that is especially true of the Newcomers Club," said Dr. Fulmer during an interview with his wife in their Spanish Revival-style home on the Riviera.

"We looked at 72 houses and made offers on five of them before we bought this house in January 2000. Then we spent two years remodeling it," said Dr. Fulmer, who took the photo on the book cover, a view of the city and ocean from one of the home's balconies.

They share their abode with Miss Marple, a winsome 1-year-old Yorkshire terrier.

The couple, who are in their late 60s, moved here from Williamsburg, Va., where Dr. Fulmer was a business professor at College of William & Mary.

"I had been teaching at Columbia University in New York City, which was rather stressful. When we moved to Williamsburg, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. The second year, I thought I had died. It was too quiet," he said.

"Williamsburg had a population of 13,000, and the two interests were American history and genealogy," added his wife.

They stuck it out for nine years, and in 1999 began a concerted search for the perfect place to live — a place that was low cost with a great climate, beautiful scenery and interesting people.

On their list were Costa Rica, Cape Town in South Africa and Paros in the Greek Islands.

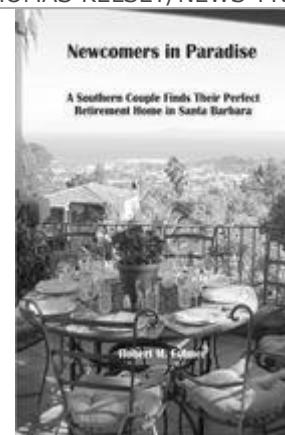
All were rejected for one reason or another.

During their quest, Dr. Fulmer received an offer to work in Palo Alto, only to have it fall through after they moved across the country.



Happily ensconced in their home on the Riviera are Dr. and Mrs. Robert Fulmer and Miss Marple, their Yorkshire terrier. Dr. Fulmer is the author of "Newcomers in Paradise: A Southern Couple Finds Their Perfect Retirement Home in Santa Barbara."

THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS



"I decided to take a sabbatical from my teaching in Williamsburg and explore the West Coast," said Dr. Fulmer, who grew up in Florence, Ala., and earned a doctorate at UCLA.

"I was familiar with Pacific Coast Highway and often stopped in Santa Barbara," he said. "Pat and I rented a place at East Beach. After several months, she told me I could (move) back to the South, but she was staying here."

One of the defining events early in their stay was attending the memorial service for a good friend, who had moved to Santa Barbara to retire.

"Even though he had lived here briefly, there were quite a few people at the ceremony, most of them from the Newcomers Club. They invited us to join the group, which we found out has about 40 to 50 events every month," said Mrs. Fulmer, who is from Dyersburg, Tenn., near Memphis.

When Dr. Fulmer received an offer to teach at Pepperdine University in Malibu, the couple decided to live here permanently.

"Santa Barbara had everything we were looking for — the scenery, the people and culture. We have never seen so much culture and so close," said Dr. Fulmer. "And the beauty is overwhelming. One of our friends said that the scenery is so beautiful it makes his eyes hurt."

"If there is a downside, it's that there are too many things to do — too many choices," said Mrs. Fulmer. "It's hard not to get over involved."

Her husband added with a laugh, "They say that the key to a long and healthy life is to simplify. We haven't learned that yet."

Currently, the couple are focusing on two movie discussion groups and another that gathers three mornings a week to walk along East Beach, and the jaunts end with coffee and conversation at East Beach Grill.

"It's a diverse group. Anyone who wants to walk just shows up on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays at 8 a.m.," said Dr. Fulmer, pointing out that he and his wife are members of The Graduates, approximately 250 former Newcomers.

He explained that membership in the Santa Barbara Newcomers Club is limited to the first two years after a person becomes a resident of Santa Barbara.

"After that time, the idea is that you have a whole group of new friends, and it is so true," Dr. Fulmer said.

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