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**More Americans are abandoning the commuting rat race for working at home.**

**By Les Christie, CNNMoney.com staff writer**

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) - High gas prices, traffic tie-ups, expensive housing - who needs it? Most Americans, if they want a good paying job.

But an increasing number of people are opting out by telecommuting, giving them access to companies in high-paycheck areas while at the same time being able to live in areas with more reasonably priced real estate.

"You can now earn a New York salary and live in a much less expensive place," says Chris Miller, executive director of the Creative Coast Initiative, a non-profit organization that promotes the advantages of Savannah, Georgia, which attracts many telecommuters with Atlanta-based companies.

More than 12 million Americans now telecommute full-time, according to the Dieringer Research Group, which recently surveyed the trend for the International Telework Association & Council. Another 10 million telecommute at least one day a week.

Combined, the ranks of these telecommuters has risen 10 percent since 2004.

Though many people may like the idea of telecommuting, employers ultimately need to see the advantage in providing that option.

The American Telecommuting Association claims several benefits to businesses, including the need for less infrastructure (offices, desks and such). The organization also cites surveys showing telecommuters are more productive and stay on the job longer.

The run-up in real estate prices also shifted the equation. The home prices in Silicon Valley have caused problems for employers trying to recruit workers, according to business consultant Gil Gordon, who has spent the past two decades urging companies to rethink the traditional office space. "They couldn't get workers because nobody could afford to live close to the office," he says.

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Rural communities are especially interested in promoting telecommuting. These areas have hemorrhaged population in the past few decades as agricultural jobs dried up and the best and the brightest of the young pursued



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opportunities elsewhere.

Some of those migrants eventually return when they get older and begin to raise families. But often they can't find suitable work.

As a result, small towns are taking action.

In Minnesota, a project spearheaded by the Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education, with the U.S. Department of Labor, places disabled Iraq vets in call-center jobs.

Midwest Institute spokeswoman, Jane Anderson, says, "Telework is especially good for people with disabilities. It's not for everyone. Some people miss the social aspects of working in an office, but the ones who like it make very loyal employees."

One of the companies Anderson has recruited is [Willow CSN.](#), a call-center firm that handles sales and service requests for such companies as Sears, AAA and Carnival Cruises. Willow's entire labor force is made up of virtual workers, 3,200 strong in 37 states and growing. CEO Angela Selden says Willow will double its force this year.

In Lodi, Wisconsin, a town of 2,000 inhabitants, Gayle Buske founded a company called [Team Double-Click](#), which matches administrative assistants and graphic designers with small businesses.

Buske's virtual workers are often hired by small, home-based enterprises. "People like small real estate brokers, who work out of their own homes," says Buske. "They can hire a one-person staff without renting office space or opening up their home office to a worker. And, they can tap a much wider area for the talent they need. I live in a town of 2,000 but I can choose from among 5,000 virtual assistants."

Dave Wilson, a small businessman in Searcy, Kansas, makes recruiting trips to Kansas City, a three hour drive, and Wichita, 65 miles away. Some of the companies in those cities, amenable to telecommuting, have allowed him to set up a table in their lunch rooms with information about the Searcy area. He hopes to attract 15 or 20 people to settle there while they telecommute for their KC or Wichita company

"People who telecommute, live and work here, are the best of both worlds," he says. "They're big earners and they spend the money in town."

[How to convince your boss to allow you to telecommute.](#)

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