



Silver Sage delivers co-housing lifestyle for seniors

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BOULDER — Brownie Leach first came to the Silver Sage Village informational meetings to help her developer husband, Jim Leach, fill seats. It didn't take long, however, before she was sold on the concept of senior co-housing.

Most identify "the aging of America" with the chronological sequence of getting older and becoming more dependent on caregivers to maintain an acceptable quality of life. Independent living gives way to retirement communities, assisted-living facilities and, eventually, nursing homes.

But there's a strong senior movement that wants to maintain an active lifestyle and share in spiritual community. And Jim Leach is turning that movement into reality with Silver Sage Village, a senior co-housing community in North Boulder that is the first of its kind in the nation.

Leach has been a pioneer in co-housing projects since 1990 through his Boulder-based Wonderland Hill Development Company. He developed the first intergenerational community in Colorado with the 42-unit Nyland Cohousing community in Lafayette 13 years ago. At the time, Nyland was only the fourth co-housing project of its kind in the United States.

Co-housing got its roots in Denmark where, in the 1960s, people turned to each other to develop a community of spiritual growth and support. Co-housing incorporates the concept of individual living units with full amenities, similar to condominiums, linked to a common house where residents can share meals, cultural growth and common interests. Co-housing offers the benefits of home ownership as well as the communal lifestyle of shared duties for maintenance and project development.

Leach emphasizes another difference between co-housing villages and other housing developments. In contrast to a developer's plan that produces predesigned homes and condos, members of Leach's co-housing projects have input into the design, appearance and amenities of their community. Once completed, co-housing communities are a reflection of their member residents.

Intergenerational co-housing, where people of all ages live and share in the community, has become more popular over the past 10 years with several developments throughout the country.

Based on figures from the Cohousing Association of the United States, there are more than 75 such communities in 30 states, with nearly 100 more projects in various stages of development.

According to Leach, however, there has been some resistance to the concept of senior-only co-housing as a viable alternative to conventional elderly housing options.

Silver Sage Village, scheduled to start construction in early 2005, is located in the new Holiday Neighborhood on 17th Street and Yellow Pine Avenue. Holiday, a new urban residential neighborhood, includes community gardens, a one-acre park, bike trails, artists' studios, pedestrian walkways and a projected Boulder Public Library branch.

Silver Sage will include 16 duplex and attached homes ranging in size from 860-square-foot one-level models up to two-story houses with full basements offering nearly 2,800 square feet of living space. All floor plans include a minimum of two bedrooms, full bath and kitchen, along with amenities like outside decks, porches or sitting areas.

The wide range of designs also offers residents price benefits to meet their individual financial situation. Permanently affordable models start around \$110,000, and buyers may qualify for subsidies through Boulder's Division of Housing. Market rate models range from \$300,000 to \$700,000.



The 5,000-square-foot common house is the physical hub of Silver Sage. In addition to a gourmet kitchen facility, the common house offers a spacious dining area, health-care services room, wood shop, guest rooms for visitors and several activity rooms for cultural events, films, house concerts and fitness classes.

Silver Sage presents different opportunities to different people. The community targets the market of culturally creative seniors who are like-minded and want to continue to grow both spiritually and physically.

Gene Junk, a Nyland resident since its inception, is considering a move to Silver Sage because it allows him to "age in place." This philosophy of physically aging while still maintaining an active lifestyle is echoed by other seniors who are seriously considering or have committed to buying homes at the new community.

Susan Brooks, another Nyland pioneer, sees Silver Sage as another adventure to enhance her life and likes the location of Silver Sage in relationship to Wild Sage, an intergenerational co-housing development across the street.

For many members of co-housing communities, like Nyland's Donna Duckman, their friends are their family. Duckman has lived at Nyland for 10 years with no close family nearby.

Stewart Farnell likes the opportunity to do things and work with others who have similar interests. Farnell's wife, Silvine, embraces the idea of being part of a group that is working to make a community.

Arthur Okner, a three-year resident of Nomad Cohousing in North Boulder, feels that co-housing gives him more time with people his own age and opportunities to be productive.

Margaret Arnett sees co-housing as a community of like-minded people, regardless of financial status.

Maureen Cassulo views elders as being an isolated segment of our population and feels that co-housing brings seniors back together. Others, like Marie Thorsen, are new to the area and are intrigued by the Silver Sage concept and affordability of co-housing.

But they all agree that co-housing presents challenges as well. Concerns include long-term member compatibility, the ability to care for each other as they get older and the amount of work required to maintain a successful co-housing community. Junk added, however, that all these challenges are worked out between members.

And, among like-minded people with a common goal, those challenges only become opportunities.