



Roger Sideman/Sentinel

Residents of Santa Cruz's first cohousing community, built in 1998 on Western Drive, still enjoy each other's company.

21st century 'cohousing' comes to Aptos

Collective Living 5-13-07

By ROGER SIDEMAN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

APTOS — This is not your father's hippie commune.

A renovated apartment building just off Soquel Drive is part of a kind of social experiment that brings '60s-style clan-like living to the suburbs. It's called cohousing.

The three-building, 11-unit apartment complex will be purchased and managed by 25 people who have come together to form a collective. The residents will make up the rules for the property, share the chores and come to view each other as extended family.

The residents insist the cohousing model is different from the '60s commune — homes are private; there is no income-sharing — but some of the values are similar: a desire for a simpler life, an emphasis on green practices, a priority on communal activities and responsibilities.

"Ever since the '60s, I thought about living in a commune, but we never made it happen," said Howard Schneider, a Happy Valley resident who is joining the new community with his wife. "And now that I'm older, I've realized that I want more privacy than a commune offers."

The deal between the residents and the current property owner to buy the apartment buildings, along with an adjacent house, is set to close this month, ending a search launched six years ago by the collective's founding members.

Renters still reside in most of

**'Now that I'm older,
I've realized that I want
more privacy than
a commune offers.'**

HOWARD SCHNEIDER

the apartments.

Each of the new residents will pay in roughly \$300,000 for a two-bedroom apartment, and about \$60,000 for renovations, an incredibly affordable price by Santa Cruz standards, Schneider said.

The price includes joint-ownership of a three-bedroom house on the property, to be used for community meals, guest rooms, meetings and social events, a children's play area and a garden space. People take turns cooking dinner, probably responsible for cooking twice a week.

The apartments and house will be clustered around a common open space, with parking along one side of the project.

Privacy isn't a problem, Schneider adds: "To see the neighbors, you can sit on a front deck that faces out into the courtyard; then there's a fenced-in backyard where you can find more privacy."

The group includes members who are social workers, teachers, an urban planner, singles, people both young and old, gay and straight. Some have known each other for years; others like Schneider, 62, just hopped aboard. Randa Johnson, 39, of Felton helped organize the search for



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Cohousing members Randa Johnson, Howie Schneider and Roanne Wilson tour the Soquel Drive complex purchased by the group. The site includes 11 townhomes and a common house on just less than one acre near Park Avenue.

Cohousing

Continued from Page A9

a suitable site six years ago. She was yearning for a greater sense of community closer to home.

"I just find that the norm of life here is very isolating," said Johnson, a health practitioner. "You have to get in a car to see friends, to get to work or to the store ... and I want to feel more connected than that."

Cohousing originated in the 1970s in Denmark, where it is now common, according to Neshama Abraham Paiss of Boulder, Colo., the co-founder of Elder Cohousing Network, which is assisting the Santa Cruz group and other start-up cohousing efforts around the country.

The concept stemmed from a

belief that housing needs changed from those developed in the 20th century, when families were larger and women tended to stay at home.

In the United States, the first cohousing community opened in 1991 in Davis, followed by communities in Bainbridge, Wash., Emeryville and Lafayette, Colo. Currently, there are nearly 100 cohousing neighborhoods in the United States with more in California than anywhere else, Paiss said.

Santa Cruz's first and only existing community, the 16-home development on Western Drive called Coyote Crossing, opened in 1998, Paiss said.

For all the harmony and consensus, cohousing communities do have the occasional scuffle. At the outset, the residents at Coyote Crossing struggled with each other at length while trying

to accomplish one basic task — agreeing on the name.

Residents say that after nine years, while they share fewer meals, the original spirit of the community is in tact. There is little turnover in the community and almost everyone participates in annual retreats.

Each apartment in the new Aptos community is already spoken for, but people are expected to drop out, Paiss said. A waiting list is open to the public, she said.

Their next public orientation meeting will be held May 20 at 1:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Aptos, 6401 Soquel Drive. For information, call 425-3994 or e-mail info@sc-cohousing.org. More at www.sc-cohousing.org.

Contact Roger Sideman at rsideman@santacruzsentinel.com.