

Colorado Daily.com

Silver Sage for golden years

By RICHARD VALENTY Colorado Daily Staff Writer

Youth, especially CU-Boulder students, might be the dominant group of people in the City of Boulder for the greater part of every year, but many senior citizens also recognize Boulder for its status as a regional cultural center or its natural beauty and choose to retire here.

Area seniors will soon have a unique opportunity to spend the golden years living in community with other seniors in the Silver Sage Village, to be located within the new Holiday Neighborhood at 17th Street and Yellow Pine Avenue.

Silver Sage, when completed, will be the first age-targeted cohousing community in Colorado. In cohousing, member/residents literally decide how their community will look and operate, as they participate in planning meetings before a project is completely designed or built. Also, members meet regularly after construction to plan gatherings or meals, create bylaws and manage financial affairs.

But there is an added consideration in a senior community -most residents are in the final chapters of their life, and Neshama Abraham of public relations group Abraham Paiss and Associates says seniors in a community can bond and help each other deal with the unique challenges of aging.

"You put aside the material considerations, like how much money you're earning," said Abraham. "Now you're in this place where you're asking, 'What is the remainder of my life work? What is the best service I can offer? Who can I mentor?' Aging is really about harvesting life value."

Boulder-based Wonderland Hill Development Company specializes in creating cohousing communities. Wonderland has completed 15 cohousing developments in the U.S., but Silver Sage will be their first senior community, and Abraham says Wonderland along with lead architect Bryan Bowen, has made structural plans for a development appropriate for the elderly.

"All the homes are on one level, so if someone winds up in a wheelchair, they'll still be able to be in their home," said Paiss. "Also, a lot of homes are being designed with a bedroom upstairs, so a home health care provider could live in the house if needed."

All cohousing communities have a "common house" where members gather for group meals, meetings or parties. Abraham said the Silver Sage common house would also be set up with office space availability for health care practitioners.

Abraham said there are currently no age-targeted cohousing communities completed in the U.S., but about seven developments are in the planning stage. She said a development in Davis, Calif., and the "ElderSpirit" project in Abingdon, Va., will probably be completed before Silver Sage.

However, Silver Sage is the only project of the seven to be located next to another cohousing community. Wild Sage Cohousing is right across Yellow Pine from where Silver Sage will be planted.

Abraham said pairing an age-specific community with an "intergenerational" development is common in Denmark, where cohousing originated about 35 years ago.

Jim Leach, president of Wonderland, is not simply a project developer this time -he and his wife Brownie are now Silver Sage members. Abraham said Leach will study the relationship between the neighboring Wild and Silver Sage communities to see if developing similar pairings elsewhere would be feasible.

There will be 16 housing units at Silver Sage when completed, with a mixture of market-rate and permanently affordable units. Abraham said there will be a March workshop in Boulder for seniors from across the country to learn more about setting up their own community.

"Senior cohousing has the potential in this country to take off, because it's filling a need that is not yet being filled by any other housing solution," said Abraham. "It allows people to be independent and in control of their physical environment, and it provides an enormously strong support system."