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Senior cohousing breaks ground

Developers say neighborhood is first of its kind in state

By Ryan Morgan, Camera Staff Writer

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Cohousing isn't just for youngsters any more.

Wonderland Hill Development Co. will hold a groundbreaking ceremony today for Silver Sage Village, which organizers call the first cohousing community in the state built for senior citizens.

People who live in cohousing have their own homes but share many facilities — such as gardens, activity rooms and kitchens — with their neighbors.

Sharon Tuck, a spokeswoman for Wonderland Hill, said the 16-home community at 17th Street and Yellow Pine Avenue in north Boulder is aimed at older people who like the idea of cohousing but don't think they'd necessarily fit into an "inter-generational" model.

"They want to be around people of their own age, and with people of like minds," she said.

Silver Sage will be geared toward retirees' needs, Tuck said.

"There's not a kids' room; there's a high-tech media room instead," Tuck said. "There's a crafts room that's more adult-oriented, rather than having fingerpaints everywhere."

The development, which is expected to open late next summer, also is different from assisted-living communities that cater to seniors, Tuck said.

"They're taking a proactive approach to how they live as they get older, instead of waiting until something happens and possibly someone else is making that decision for you," she said.

Patrice Morrow, a retired professor of ecology at the University of Minnesota, plans to move from Boulder's Holiday neighborhood into Silver Sage. She said that by their nature, people who agree to live in cohousing are going to be eager to form a community with their neighbors.

That's something that used to exist in her old Minneapolis neighborhood, but it doesn't any longer, she said. Over time, kids grow up, and older neighbors decamp to warmer climes.

"All the sudden, that support group, that group of fun people, is no longer there," she said.

Morrow said she has active, sociable neighbors now, but there's a demographic disconnect.

"Most of the people in Holiday are younger people with young families," she said. "They're working outside the home. I'm meeting my neighbors and I like them, but they're not available to do the kinds of things that I want to do."

Because Silver Sage caters to the elderly, Morrow said its residents will all be roughly in the same stage of their lives, which makes it easier to connect. That's something other neighborhoods, even tight-knit ones, can't really offer, she said.

Daniel Knifong, 65, and his wife, Margaret Porter, 59, a retired professional couple from College Park, Md., who are moving into Silver Sage next year, originally were skeptical about the cohousing concept.

"I wasn't a true believer," Knifong said.

But gradually, Porter said, they came to realize that they weren't going to find the kind of community they wanted in an apartment building, where next-door neighbors often are strangers.

"Not only are we retired, but we're growing older," Porter said. "We wanted a community where we felt like we had the opportunity to age gracefully, with other people, in friendship and support."

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