

# Cohousing new option for older people - Sidney Daily News

NEVADA CITY, Calif. — Charles Durrett is busy. He has been designing, teaching and building cohousing communities in the United States since he brought the concept here from Denmark with Kathryn McCamant some three decades ago, but this year things are different.

“Instead of working on demonstrating the value of cohousing, our firm is occupied keeping pace with a number of communities under development. I’m also just completing a new book to help others initiate their own cohousing community,” Durrett said.

Cohousing is just now really hitting its stride in the United States.

Cohousing is a planned community consisting of private homes clustered around shared space. While each attached or single family home has traditional amenities, including a private kitchen, there are shared spaces that reflect each community—often with a shared community kitchen, lodge house, gardens and outdoor spaces.

Writer Pamela Biery caught up with Durrett and quizzed him on the “hows and whys” of cohousing for people over 50.

Q: What are some of the unique characteristics of senior cohousing communities?

A: One word: proactive. These communities are filled with individuals who are choosing to take control of their destinies through planning, not leaving things up to chance. For instance, accommodations are made for shared caregivers to live on site and long-term mobility and access issues are examined. Just the process of thinking things through as a group changes cohousing participants, preparing them with realistic views of their future.

Q: What are some mature adult cohousing benefits?

A: Emotional well being, saving money through shared services and community and maintaining independence for much longer than is commonly possible. The biggest cohousing benefit for any community is living with kindred and having a number of close friendships. But it cannot be overlooked that cohousing costs are significantly less than other senior facilities and gives the longest possible independent lifestyle — good for living a full life and conserving financial resources.

Q: How does cohousing reduce an individual’s carbon footprint?

A: Cohousing takes an individual out of the single-home mindset. Americans drive some 5 billion miles caring for seniors in their homes (Meals on Wheels, Whistle Stop Nurses, and so on). In our small, semi-rural county in the Sierra foothills, on-demand buses alone have made 60,000 trips in vans-buses, usually carrying only one senior at a time, to doctor’s appointments, to pick up medicine or to see friends. In our cohousing community of 21 seniors, I have never seen a single on-demand bus in the driveway. In cohousing it happens organically by caring neighbors: “Can I catch a ride with you?” or “Are you headed to the drug store?”

Q: How would cohousing affect my retirement planning?

A: Cohousing is a proactive, realistic way of addressing issues. Everyone in the process is dealing with understanding that mortality is real and that aging successfully means examining the whole person benefits — economic, emotional and physical well being. The big thing here is that by living independently longer, money is saved at every juncture, so resources can go much further. Turns out that an independent, quality life costs less than facilitated retirement.

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