

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Spring 2021 • Issue #190 • Supplement

gen-us.net/190.1

The Queen, the Gardener, and Me
Community Events: The “We” of “Me”
Life Project 4 Youth
College-Based Senior Cohousing

Note from the Editor: To accompany our Faith in Community print edition of COMMUNITIES, we’ve created this separate digital supplement containing four articles, available free to anyone for online viewing and/or download and printing. These articles are less theme-specific than the rest of the issue’s articles. We welcome new readers who may be seeing only this digital supplement, and hope you’ll seek out the main issue (available in both print and digital versions) and consider subscribing at gen-us.net/communities. Thank you!

Photo by Richard Getler



The Queen, the Gardener, and Me: Reflections on Community-Forming Processes

By Elizabeth Barr



Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Barr

A few years ago I had the intriguing opportunity to study, observe, and “join” two very different communities at the same event site, while simultaneously going back and forth between them and the mainstream culture where I had been living for the previous few years. It was a fascinating exercise in watching groups form, or try to form, and highlighted important parts of the process.

The Queen (residential summer camp)

That spring and summer, I worked for a youth agency summer camp. My title there was Camp Director, but during our last session when we used a medieval theme, I reigned as the Queen. It’s the same camp where I spent every summer as a child, had been on staff in the past, and was even director once before, five years previous. With the gap between the first time and the more recent year, though, it was a lot like starting from scratch. We had almost all entirely new people on staff as camp counselors in the new season, and in many of the supporting

roles, too, such as cook and nurse. In order to provide a great summer camp experience for the children, it’s critical that camp staff be able to depend on one another and work together exceptionally well, so we were faced with trying to bring cohesion, interdependence, and trust to a group of complete strangers within the brief few days of pre-camp training we had available. At the same time, we also needed to teach the staff all the camp skills they would need, such as cooking meals over an open fire, organizing canoe trips, teaching arts and crafts and nature, and managing a group of children 24/7 in a small group similar to many families. There was a lot of transformational change to be done, both personal and systemic, and only a short amount of time to do it.

The Gardener (LARP group)

Live Action Role Play (LARP) was new to me that year and I was introduced to it when a LARP group arranged to rent the camp facility. In case you aren’t already familiar, imagine the



classic Dungeons & Dragons fantasy board game, but come to life. It's almost like Jumanji, only better. Throughout the spring and summer seasons, once a month, a weekend-only "small village" of warriors, tavern keepers, adventurers, bards, and various monsters would descend on the camp and play together in a storyline set up and managed by the King. My role in this group initially was as camp host during the summer, but as we entered the fall, I joined this village in the role of gardener.

And Me (my "normal" life in town)

Occasionally on weekends between sessions at camp or when the LARP group was not having an event, I would return to my regular life to check the mail, pay some bills, visit with my housemate, feed the cats, and read the newspaper. It was surreal and I began to wonder—what is the "real" world, anyway? This certainly didn't feel like it.

As the weeks turned into months, some common issues crystallized. The need for common values that lead to a shared core mission, a sense of place and naming, and defined roles and leadership—each of these manifested both individually and comparatively.

Need for Common Values that Lead to a Shared Core Mission

Even with a clearly identified leader to help organize the big picture, and people ready to work in all the individual roles, a group will still stumble if the reason for its existence is not clearly defined. A clear vision and measurable goals planned out in achievable smaller pieces provide the first key steps necessary to make progress towards realizing the big dream.

The organizational mission of our camp was in a transitional period, and had been for several years, and this was sadly all too apparent that summer. Some staff had the goal of "Let's party at camp!" and their work towards that goal often directly con-

flicted with those who had a primary objective of "help young children have a great experience while learning in the outdoors." The focus is different, inward or outward, and the outcome follows—either using up or building up. The year-round program was having a similar identity crisis, starting even from the basic question of should we try to rent the camp year-round, or not? The lack of an agreed goal resulted in awkward meetings, plans changing midstream and last-minute, ongoing gossip, undermining behaviors, low rate of camper enrollment and volunteer support, and general uncertainty about our finances and even our future as an organization.

The small city where I lived was facing a similar identity crisis, with the main question being: do we want to stay small and rural or focus on growth to become larger and more urban? There were vocal supporters for both sides, complete with protests in the streets and sternly worded editorials in the newspaper. Should we have more alcohol sold, or less? A new prison built, or not? A sporting complex or a farmers' market? The list goes on, but the lack of a shared vision for the city was clear.

The LARP group, in noticeable contrast, did not suffer from these same problems. The big group mission is clear: set up a LARP event every month and play ingame with friends. The smaller missions were equally clear: our small group will capture this monster or rescue that lost child or find the fabulous treasure. In nearly every interaction, everyone was clear on the goal and shared it. The general mood of the group was noticeably different, too, as they were upbeat and happy and friendly with each other. When faced with an issue, either ingame or out, they approached it together with a cooperative problem-solving mindset. They were not wasting any energy on "what should we do?" because they are already knew. Instead, they were focused entirely on "how shall we do it?" and they did it together.

Sense of Place and Naming

Names have power—and the act of naming, as well. From earliest times, people have drawn maps, identified people and places, and given names to all; the same was true in all three places I spent time that summer. Camp cabins and trails and buildings all had names, some with important meanings (The Director's Cabin) and others with simple identification (Hill Cabin 1). Somehow, magically, the place was transformed simply by changing a name during a weekend LARP event. While summer camp just had a Kitchen, the LARP group had a Tavern—certainly more fun and a whole new reality was created just by the name. No matter that the same kind of work was being done in the exact same location, using the same equipment and the same supplies—nonetheless, everything was different.

Likewise, at home, I was dismayed by how much energy our household put into the question of what to call the room with the computer stuff in it? Is it an Office? Perhaps not, since we don't have a business. Maybe the Library? Since we keep our books mostly in our bedrooms, probably not that either. Since we'd been homeschooling several years, maybe it was the School Room or the Study? Again, the actual equipment, supplies, and work being done would be the same—but we were spending an excessive amount of energy deciding what to call the place!

And that's the easy part, since buildings and trees and rooms don't care what you call them. When my son decided to join the LARP group, we spent many hours (many!) of careful research and numerous considerations before he developed a name that he wanted to use. I would soon learn that this is very common and some people take years before settling on a LARP name that sticks with them long-term. Many people have gone through a similar process when choosing a name for themselves as an adult in the "real world" or when selecting a name for a new baby. The urge to name and identify people and places, even down to very small details of spelling or name order and reasons for selection, was evident in all three groups, and no wonder, since naming is one part of addressing the big questions of "who am I?" and "why am I here?" that we all share.

Defined Roles and Leadership

At home, in the city life, it is fairly easy to completely separate roles internally, if you want to. You may go to work each day as a machinist or accountant, but you can leave that role at work, unless you deliberately choose to bring work home or tell people about your career. And, if you do eventually leave that job, your departure will be hardly noticed, or at most only briefly. Millions of people are actively seeking work today and a new person can soon be in your place. The business world is based on Positions, not people.

In the smaller communities of camp and LARP, though, it was not so easy. Each role was as well-defined as in any business, with a job description or character development sheet, but in many cases, only one specific person filling a position, with no back-up and no quick, easy replacement. If the Crafts Director were not hired or were absent one day, that entire activity area would suffer, with the rest of the camp soon to follow. If the Wizard did not come to the LARP event one weekend, all those adventurers who were counting on her spells for protection must adapt with other plans. In either case, the group was depending on the specific individual in an immediate way that I did not feel in my city life.

These differences led me to feel either too burdened or entirely inconsequential, depending on where I was. As Queen (or leader or boss), the weight of constant responsibility for many other people can begin to feel like a burden, even if you are well suited for the work and generally enjoy it. In stark contrast is the city, where my life as a cog-in-the-machine droned on, unnoticed and unremarkable. As the gardener in the LARP village, though, I found a perfect balance. My work was important, but not incessantly unending, and my days passed by easily, as other people in the village stopped by to pick up some herbs or leave a message for me to pass to someone else. I was involved, and mattered, but in a way that was balanced within the larger community. Of course I realize it was all pretend, "just a game," but yet the LARP group felt far more "real" to me than either of the others.

I look back tenderly at my younger self, who thought that everyone could (and should) help with everything, so that life would be "fair" and no one person would have an undue influence on the group. I have mostly given up on that type of imag-

ined equality and have come to a different understanding of and respect for how defined roles and different types of leadership can help a group work together well. I strongly believe that each person has an aptitude to excel at something...the trick is to figure out what, very precisely. Then, when each is doing their own work at a high level, everyone benefits together through interdependence.

Overall, the LARP group seemed to be "doing community" best. Their group size was small enough to be effective, but also large enough to be stable, and most people knew most of the other people, at least somewhat. Their mission was clear, their goals were defined and achievable, and everyone chose the work and role that suited them best, but helped the community at the same time. It's no wonder that of these three groups, I felt most at home with the LARPers, even though we had just recently met, because they reminded me the most of my years in intentional community. The LARP may be set up as a game in a temporary village once a month, but the group work and communication skills they used and the environment they were creating was the kind of real community that I craved.

Going back and forth between the summer camp life, the LARP environment, and the home life in town was thought-provoking and entertaining. After I noticed a few similarities here and there, I started actively looking for common themes and was delighted at how quickly they became so obvious. I think it's wonderful that ideas about group dynamics and cooperative living, and the skills for developing community, are so transferable to groups of all sizes, in different types of places, whether temporary or permanent, old or new, or any other variation. Even if fate brings us to leave the residential community that was our goal, we can continue working wherever we end up with real hope toward real community, even if it looks different than we expected. 🌸

Elizabeth Barr lived at Acorn Community (www.acorncommunity.org) in Louisa, Virginia during its early forming years and still misses both Acorn, specifically, and the dream of rural intentional community very much. For more information about her writing projects, please see www.BigThicketBooks.com.



Community Events: The “We” of “Me”

By Greg Sherwin



Boulder Creek Community meeting.

Photos courtesy of Greg Sherwin

What is the meaning of community? In the 14 years since I created Boulder Creek Community, I have wondered about and explored the answer to this question.

One thing that has become clearer to me is that community arises out of each community member’s willingness and intention to transform their relationship with other community members from “me” to “we.”

What do I mean by “me” and “we”?

In our busy American culture, we each are consumed with many daily choices and/or commitments and responsibilities to take care of, at least, “me.”

I am aware of three types of communities that draw us from the “me” to the “we”:

1. The Family Community: If we have taken on the responsibility of caring for our families, we have engaged in the “we” journey. If all goes well, it is a love-based community. Our active history of family participation together is a foundation for this community experience. It becomes a community based on necessity since we take on responsibilities of care for others whether we like it or not.

2. The Work Community: If we each have taken on the responsibility of working for others or employing others in our

own business venture, we enter into another “we” community. This community is often a money-based community where we each help each other to make money so that we can survive and, hopefully, thrive. In these communities, truly caring for others and being cared about by others is often a bonus. It is a community based on financial necessity.

3. The Volunteer Community: A third type of “we” community could be described as a “volunteer” community. It is based more on willingness and intention, because necessity is often lacking. Most cohousing and some other intentional communities fit into this category. Participation is optional and voluntary. These are often communities of friends who share proximity and/or, hopefully, a common larger service purpose and/or pleasure, such as meals, entertainment, discussion topics, and/or co-creating something of mutual interest such as a community garden. Boulder Creek Community falls into this category of community living.

I will focus below on this third “volunteer”-based community.

This willingness to volunteer begins with a growing personal commitment of each community member to take responsibility, and to be accountable, for the well-being of others (we) as well as for themselves (me).

While any individual can unilaterally begin this “we” journey

by bringing some attention also to the well-being of other community members, the experience of a collective community takes root when this responsibility and caring action is reciprocated by other community members. It is a give and receive process.

What is the evidence that this transformation from “me” to the community “we” is happening in a volunteer community?

The Invitation: I have learned that an early indicator that community is happening is when one or more members volunteer to create community events in service to the highest good of themselves and others in the community. Serving meals, sharing ideas, and working together on projects of common interest are some examples of community initiatives from one or more community members.

The Response: However, until other community members respond in a responsible, proactive, and caring way, the invitation initiative soon withers. Community is a function of participation. Participation is a function of responding and, when committed, showing up to the invited event or activity. Proactively responding, at least with gratitude for the invitation and the effort that the community member put in to create the community event is an important foundation for community creation. Taking responsibility to say “yes” or “no,” along with an expression of gratitude, such as “Thank you,” to an invitation encourages more community invitation initiatives by volunteer community members.

Saying “yes” is an implied promise and commitment to show up to the event commitment. Regardless of other subsequent, more attractive invitations or personal-interest preferences that may arise after saying yes to an invitation, each community member valuing their yes as a strong personal commitment to participate is another foundation to a successful volunteer community. It is supported by the integrity and intention of each person who says yes to show up to the event, regardless of other subsequent opportunities to do other things that may occur.

This “yes” commitment and promise has some implied or expressed flexibility to it. For example, emergencies and unfore-

seen circumstances, such as an auto breakdown or sickness, are usually reasonable pre-agreed exceptions to showing up after a “yes” response to an invitation. These exceptional emergencies rarely happen.

Taking Responsibility: The key discernment that distinguishes a joint (we) “changed agreement (to show up)” from a unilateral (me) “broken agreement” declaration to the host lies in willingness of the guest to ask the host for an agreement change, combined with a complete willingness to keep the commitment to show up IF the host is not willing, for any reason, to change the agreement that was previously entered into by saying “yes.” Any community that collectively agrees to this standard of commitment to their “yes” agreements is more likely to form closer community bonds of trust and caring as well as having more successful events.

A Proactive “We” Participation Option: The next optional level of community-building opportunity, for any community guest to an event, is to take personal responsibility for consciously looking for creative ways to support the success of the community event in service to the highest good of all of the participants. This level of individual commitment generally contributes to the success of the event. More importantly, it generally adds to the enjoyment and value of the community guest who is making such contributions. The attitude of these volunteer “we” event participants would be “How can I contribute to what is possible for this event?” both for myself and for the other participants.

This proactive “we” community event participation is beyond simply being willing to show up and waiting to be entertained by the event host or passively hoping that something personally meaningful will happen to make the time worthwhile for “me.” I can optionally show up with the commitment and intention to contribute to the event “we” possibility by actively looking for ways to help the community event be more meaningful to everyone as well as “me.” This is a “we” heart and a “we” mentality. It is an important ingredient for any volunteer community to survive and thrive.

Self-Awareness and Self-Management: Sometimes, this in-



tention to serve the “we” community puts each of us in the uncomfortable position of noticing and, hopefully, sharing with the group our emerging personal states of inner dissonance about being present in that event at that moment.

This inner dissonance may take the form of a mental state of resistance, confusion, or boredom about what is happening, or may happen, in the community event. It may be the result of a personal state of hunger, fatigue, or physical discomfort. It may trigger associated inner feelings of frustration, anxiety, or sadness. These inner dissonance states of being represent an inner demand for more “me” attention. When this inner experience arises, the more I resist my “me” needs, the more it persists and increases my discomfort and disconnect from the other community members attending the event.

What do we do when this inner dissonance shows up in any one or more of us before or during a community event?

The answer to this question may be the most important personal-growth and community-building opportunity that each of us can experience and share as individuals and as a community. It is an intimate, in-the-moment, truth-telling opportunity. It is a wonderful way of concurrently taking care of my inner “me” demands and contributing to my “we” intention of service to the event and the other participants.

The transformation from my inner “me” dissonant disturbances back to my intended “we” level of community engagement involves a personal and hopefully collective **practice** of self-awareness and communication with the community.

At any community event each of us has the opportunity, at any time, to engage in this practice of authentic, intimate “me” sharing as needed to help bring ourselves back to full engagement in the intended community event possibility.

However, if we are not used to proactively embracing and sharing our uncomfortable inner experience of “me” needs with self or others, it takes courage and practice for any one community member to initiate this uncomfortable “me”-focused conversation, especially when it seems to be an interruption to the intended focus and energy field of the community event.

A pre-agreed community commitment to interrupt any community event, at any time, to honor any community member’s expression of inner dissonance can set a safer stage of opportunity for a dissonant “me” communication to be stated at any time during the event.

This agreement to interrupt a “we” event with a “me” communication can include an understanding and established agreement within the community that this “me” communication can, with practice in responsible communication, be brief and not become a therapy session. It is not the responsibility of the community to fix any individual’s “me” dissonance issues which may have a prior history of trauma. Just listening, without judgment, and simply being with one person’s declaration of inner dissonance, with loving kindness and compassion, is often enough to be supportive, in service to the individual and the whole community.

All feelings, fully felt (and responsibly communicated), lead, with practice, to loving. It is here that the “me” and the “we” energies fully merge in service to the highest good of the community and the community event.

The Question Is... What standards of community engagement are we, as volunteer community members, willing to personally and collectively commit to? 🐦

Greg Sherwin is founder of Boulder Creek Community in Boulder, Colorado (see bouldercreekcommunity.com).

From “Me” to “We”

My awareness of the “me” to “we” community engagement possibilities arise out of my personal life journey from a life-long successful “me” focus to an emerging, sometimes struggling, “we” focus through my choosing to create and then participate in our volunteer Boulder Creek Community for the past 14 years.

In writing this article I became aware that I was describing my personal journey and my ongoing practice of learning how to not only honor my well-established “me” response to life but also explore and include more “we” focus in my life. As I often remind myself, “Suspensions of others arise from knowledge of oneself (me)”; or, “We teach what we most need to learn.” I personally live with the challenges stated in this article as I strive to become more of a “we” person. I often fail in my attempts. I know this when I become emotionally attached to having outcomes that satisfy “me,” such as receiving appreciation for my efforts and having people keep their agreements to show up to my events. Both the “me” and the “we” of me wrote this article.

My personal transformation started in 2006 with a vision quest that drew me toward commencing a personal exploration about the meaning of community living and sharing. That vision quest first led me to visit 55 cohousing and intentional communities, in

my VW Eurovan, with the wonderful help of my FIC Communities Directory. Failing to find a community-living fit for my life partner, Chrissy, and me in Boulder, Colorado, we decided to start a community in the existing Gold Run condominium project where we were living. I describe it as a cohousing community implant into a much larger, existing, well-located, urban, condo complex. We welcome both renters and owners. Most of our revolving-door members have been renters. A few became owners. We learned to collectively reinvent our community vision each summer after the new community renters arrive and begin to express their emerging community-living values with the existing members. Having an existing HOA to wrestle with the external “property” and “rules” decisions, we are free to explore our “we” and “me” relationship more fully in our limited volunteer time together. I and other BCC members have served on this five-member HOA board for the past 10 years to maintain a voice in those external decisions.

My vision statement is, “This being human is a playground for the unfoldment of the soul, for learning to lovingly accept what is, while adventuring toward what is possible, in community with others.”

I write this article in honor my life partner, Chrissy...the “we” of “me,” my love mentor.

—GS

Cultivating Community in the Neighborhood: Life Project 4 Youth

By Camille Bru

*All the Youth from the training program
in March 2020, Hlaing Thar Yar.*



Photos courtesy of Camille Bru

Hlaing Thar Yar, Yangon, Myanmar: one of the poorest neighborhoods in one of the poorest countries in the world. This is where I settled down for a year. When I arrived, I was a bit concerned about the possibility of connecting and feeling at home, so far away from everything I have ever known. To put things back in their context, in February 2020, I joined the international community of Life Project 4 Youth. LP4Y is an organization that sends professionals to volunteer all around Asia to support young adults from excluded backgrounds and guide them on their professional integration journey. When one joins the LP4Y's family, (s)he signs up for a challenge and a different experience, be it the youths who join the programs or the volunteers.

LP4Y aims to support excluded young adults (from slums or rural areas, with disabilities, orphans, etc.) aged 18 to 24 in their professional integration through a soft-skills training lasting three to nine months. Using a learning-by-doing method, the youth learn how to be reliable professionals, become profi-

cient in English, acquire basic computer skills, make a resume, and master a job interview. At the end, they exit the daily work-poverty spiral to enter the decent professional world, in which they will have a contract, some benefits, insurance, a decent salary, and more. We volunteers all have different backgrounds, but we have all looked for a job at some point and know how to behave professionally. We are not teachers; we are there to empower the youth and give them the tools they need to reach their full potential. We work together with them on their personal development and on their life project plan—they may need to start at the bottom of the ladder, but they set goals for themselves and imagine their lives in a different future where they can support their family in a better way. Some of them find work in hotels, international companies, shops, malls, places where they never before imagined to set foot.

As I walk through the crowded, colorful, and scented market, familiar faces smile as I greet them: "Mingalaba!" This always brightens the atmosphere and often engages lively discussions,



Family visit in a nearby village, for the recruitment of new youth.



A busy market street in Yangon, Myanmar.



Ei Ei Theint and her family.



Nan Lone Hlaing with her Aunt and her cousins.

most of which I have no clue about, but I feel included and part of a community—my neighborhood community.

As part of the experience and to connect with the excluded populations we work with, LP4Y made the choice to install all its training centers in the poorest areas of the big cities in Asia, close to the slums and where the living conditions are the most difficult. The volunteers (also known as catalysts) live close by and are encouraged to bond with the local population and to live as simply as possible. This enables them to understand the circumstances of the youth they work with and to gain the trust of the locals. It is true that if we were to live in a fancy flat in a high-end neighborhood, we would not be so credible in our job. So how do we create a sense of community in such conditions?

“Mingalaba, Cami!” shouts Ouma, the lady in the market from whom we volunteers buy our veggies. Since I arrived, we have gotten to know each other. She cannot read or write, but she is sharp and can communicate with me in highly creative ways. It took us about three weeks to learn each other’s names (we had

to agree on short nicknames to ease the process). With every Burmese lesson, I come to her with new questions and new vocabulary. She is a patient teacher even if I, most of the time, don’t understand her answers to my tentative questions. We laugh and share great moments. She teaches me the names of the various vegetables, she introduces me to all her friends and family members, and she always seems happy to see me, which makes me even more excited about going. This is one example, but the fruit seller, the coconut lady, the egg seller, the fabrics shopkeeper, the street food vendor, and all the familiar faces make this market feel like home. Because even though we don’t understand each other, “we all smile in the same language!” I thought that the language would be a barrier for my integration, but in such a different context, I feel less shy and more open to laugh at myself. People tend to laugh when they hear our French accent destroying their language, but laughing creates bonds and a bit of self-derision is always good! Using body language has become a second nature to make ourselves understood.

As part of our work, we visit the slums to create networks within the local communities. We mime our way around and invite young adults to consider a different future by joining the training program. We try to become mirrors for the people we meet, questioning them about their daily lives, their families, their work, their schooling, the things they like to do for fun. Although the communication is not always fluid, there are always many deep sharing moments that make the effort worthwhile. Most of these people have never seen anyone interested in their stories before and being there and listening to them is a first step to their integration. We also visit the families of the youth we work with. This creates a great link between the training center and the local community. We are called catalysts because as in a chemical reaction, one simple element can provoke a big reaction. We are like the stone thrown in the lake; we create the ripple effect. By creating a sense of community around our training centers, we create a general reaction. We try to be the extra push that the excluded community needs to spread its wings and become fully integrated in the decent professional world. It turns out that this youth knows that shopkeeper who knows this business, and that creates a chain reaction in the community. They teach and inspire each other to challenge themselves and fight for a better future.

This is what a neighborhood community can do in the slums

of Yangon, Manila, Delhi, or anywhere in the world really. We are shy to meet our neighbors in our own countries; we don't feel legitimate; we feel awkward because talking to strangers on the street can be seen as unusual, maybe offensive, and people are not ready to share their thoughts with us. But with some practice and a big open heart, there is no reason not to try. This may not change the whole world, but it may change one person's world, and that's why we catalysts love what we do and LP4Y has been doing it for the past 11 years! 🌈

Camille Bru writes: "After working for eight years in the pharmaceutical industry, I decided to follow my heart and my values to live a simpler life and bring meaning into my work. That's how I joined Life Project 4 Youth Myanmar (LP4Y—en.lp4y.org) in 2020 after two years of community permaculture and nature work at Richmond Vale Academy in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. I can hardly stay in one place; sitting still is not really my thing! From the South West Corner of France, a little place where my heart always returns known as 'Colleignes,' I have wandered to amazing places, met incredible people, learned different ways of life, different cultures, different languages. And with every trip, either to settle down or as a visitor, close or far, in the next remote village, a megalopolis, or on a farm in the middle of nowhere, I have been practicing creativity by taking hundreds, even thousands of photos, and writing some articles for my blog."



Community visit in a nearby village.

College-Based Senior Cohousing: An Idea Whose Time Has Come



Photos courtesy of Charles Durrett

You need to build strong healthy relationships in good times, so you are ready for times such as these. And preferably relationships in a community that is very proximate—like a village—with common dinners, common workdays, common problems to solve, tai chi, common gardening, book clubs, yoga, and just plain discussing the issues of the day...you know, old-fashioned village-making, so when the s#*t hits the fan, like COVID-19, community is in place! At Nevada City Cohousing, we get together each night at 7 pm to drum, even if it's on

the bottom of a five gallon plastic bucket, though we *do* have a great rhythm section with real drums!

We meet each other at the circle, drum, and then say good-night after we are done, which is particularly important to those who live alone. Social distancing, not social isolation!

While Nevada City Cohousing exercises extreme caution sheltering in place, in late summer we began having meetings in a 20 ft. round outdoor circle, about 7.5 ft. away from each other in the circumference, even sharing a few common meals in the

outdoor distancing circle. And thus we create some continuity in community, each day; to do yoga around the pool, harvest the gardens, and connect through group circle drumming just before dark at the “blue hour,” when moods can easily turn blue, and sometimes do. We do this to say hello one more time today, and to say goodnight.

• • •

Historically, “aging in place” meant that seniors spent their elder years in the home where they had lived and raised their children, and where extended family members could care for them. Families remained close by and often daughters or sons would stay at home to take care of their aging parents.

Back then—when we enjoyed close-knit ties with family, community, and place—nursing homes or caretaking facilities for the elderly were a foreign concept to most of the population. People would age in place within the community where they had built their lives and relationships; it was the natural thing to do.

In today’s world, few of us enjoy the luxury of that type of support network. Society is increasingly mobile, as a result of work and other pressures. As family members and friends move across the state, the country, or the globe, we find ourselves say-

ing goodbye more often, and those close, supportive relationships are not easily replaced.

These changes have led to a growing awareness of senior cohousing as an alternative housing model for active adults to successfully age in place. With over 150 cohousing projects built in the US, 20 of them for seniors, this form of community is well established as a custom high-functioning neighborhood. Senior cohousing is an ideal place for aging in place in community. For most seniors successful aging means maintaining control over their own lives, and Baby Boomers are redefining what it means to age successfully. As 70-plus million Baby Boomers reach their golden years, they are creating higher demand for affordable senior housing options that support an active lifestyle in a sustainable way.

College-Based Community Development is a future emerging trend among the retirement options available that allow for successful aging in place. College-Based Alumni Senior Cohousing is a trend in retirement communities for active adults that allows retiring alumni to engage in a lifelong exchange with their alma maters that significantly enhances the college community and the quality of life in higher learning institutions. This is a beneficial exchange for students, alumni, their families and friends, and ultimately for society at large. These retirees come to college towns with friends and family; some also bring



*Oakcreek Community:
dancing in the
Common House.*

their continuing business interests with them. They are looking for ways to continue to have purpose and meaning in their lives and tend to be good tutors.

The connection between campus improvement and retirees may not seem obvious, but in reality they have a lot in common. Just as matured salmon return to their place of origin, it makes sense for retirees to return to where they came of age—their college communities. In addition, many elders are interested in moving back to college towns because of the active lifestyle and amenities they provide. College-based alumni senior cohousing communities can provide seniors access to continuing education, college events, facilities, and in some cases hospitals and campus transportation.

Likewise, universities benefit from the presence of the retirees. Retiring alumni contribute to the campus by volunteering, offering their professional experience and perspectives in the academic arena, as well as advising and attending cultural and athletic programs. Financially, the development of senior cohousing opens opportunities for the university beyond those of real estate investment; it also facilitates the creation of jobs and college growth. In addition to building stronger relationships with alumni, it keeps them connected with current students and programs, and as an added benefit, their career accomplishments provide inspiration for the student body. It all feels a little more like a village rather than just another institution.

Universities across the country have embraced the idea of associating themselves with retirement communities and found that there is considerable demand for senior housing near campuses. By associating themselves with these projects they can derive great returns, especially in strengthening alumni relations, while also enhancing campus life.

College-based alumni senior cohousing is the perfect model for active adults seeking housing within college communities. It promotes an active lifestyle and encourages continuous learning. Unlike assisted care, or even independent living, senior cohousing puts elders in charge of their own lives and focuses on

making the second half of life fun and engaging, while providing for their specific changing needs. Residents are especially complementary for a college or university and their towns because they are lively people who want to be part of an intergenerational environment where they can contribute to their college's culture. Senior cohousing can be created in the communities of institutions of higher learning, providing the basis for more diversified, educational, healthy, active, and sustainable college culture.

This will most certainly broaden yet again the possibilities for people to reside in a village setting where they know each other, care about each other, support each other, and are much more connected to not only each other, but also to the earth and the broader townscape. There is no better way to make a village than the cohousing concept. See *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* and *Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living*. There is nothing like impatient future residents to make it happen, and there is nothing like future residents who need it to be affordable to keep it in fact of affordable. Stillwater, Oklahoma is a good hometown/university example. The university took over 20 years to develop a very mediocre senior “community.” The Oakcreek Senior Cohousing (Stillwater) group took three years to develop a state-of-the-art community, where the love for each other and the earth is palpable. 🐦

A version of this article originally appeared in College Planning & Management.

Charles Durrett is Principal at The Cohousing Company. He is architect emeritus, author, and advocate of affordable, socially responsible and sustainable design.

Bernice Gonzalez was a Planner at McCamant & Durrett Architects. She has a Master's degree in Urban Design from the Universitat de Barcelona, Spain where she is a Ph.D. candidate in Public Space and Urban Regeneration.



Quimper Village front porch.



Wolf Creek Lodge.

Subscribe to COMMUNITIES Magazine



Your source for the latest information, issues, and ideas about intentional communities and cooperative living today!

Each issue is focused around a theme:

- Social Permaculture • Service and Activism
 - Ecovillages around the World • Gender Issues
 - Finding or Starting a Community • Spirituality
 - Community and the Law • Food and Community
 - Community for Baby Boomers • Right Livelihood
 - Technology: Friend or Foe? • Business Ventures
 - Renewable Energy • Youth • Diversity ...
- Reach listings—helping community-seekers and communities looking for people

Now including complete back issue digital access (more than 185 issues), 1972-2021!

What Readers say about COMMUNITIES

I love COMMUNITIES magazine. Deciding to be communal is the best decision I've ever made in my life. COMMUNITIES has been there from the beginning.

—Patch Adams, M.D.,
author and founder of the Gesundheit Institute

COMMUNITIES has become one of our go-to sources for thought-provoking pieces about people opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms.

—Christian Williams, Editor, Utne Reader

Each issue is a refreshing antidote to the mainstream media's "me, me, me" culture. COMMUNITIES overflows with inspiring narratives from people who are making "we" central to their lives instead.

—Murphy Robinson,
Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along.

—Chuck Durrett,
The Cohousing Company, McCamant & Durrett Architects

For more than 40 years COMMUNITIES has done an outstanding job of promoting the communitarian spirit as well as serving intentional communities and other groups coming together for the common good.

—Timothy Miller,
Professor of Religious Studies, University of Kansas

For many years we've been associated with and have strongly supported COMMUNITIES because we're convinced of its unique contribution to the communities movement in the United States and the world.

—Lisa and Belden Paulson, Ph.D.,
cofounders of High Wind community

COMMUNITIES has been important to me ever since I began researching intentional communities back in 1980.... The Editors have always been willing to include critical articles which challenge accepted norms.

—Dr. Bill Metcalf,
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

COMMUNITIES is an invaluable resource.

—Professor Emeritus Yaacov Oved, Tel-Aviv University

PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS: • **First subscription:** \$30 per year in US, \$40 per year outside of US • **Additional (gift or "pay it forward") print subscriptions in US:** \$25 per year in US, \$35 per year outside of US • **Supporter subscription:** \$10 more per year • **Sustainer subscription:** \$20 more per year • Every print subscription also includes access to all digital back issues and a current digital subscription.

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS: • **First subscription:** \$20 per year (digital, anywhere in world) • **Additional (gift or "pay it forward") digital subscriptions:** \$15 per year • **Supporter/Sustainer subscriptions:** \$10/\$20 more per year • Every digital subscription also includes access to all digital back issues.

For more details or to purchase subscriptions online, please visit GEN-US.NET/COMMUNITIES; you can pay online or mail a check or money order (payable to GEN-US) to: **Attn.: Linda Joseph/Communities, 64001 County Road DD, Moffat, CO 81143.**

To subscribe online, visit GEN-US.NET/COMMUNITIES