

Senior Cohousing: Establishing a Healthy, Sustainable Lifestyle for an Aging Generation
by Chuck Durrett

Last year Americans drove 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, Telecare made 60,000 trips in massive, lumbering, polluting vans-buses – usually carrying only one senior at a time – schlepping a couple thousand seniors total over hill and dale 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 Telecare bus in the driveway. In cohousing it happens organically by caring neighbors: “Can I catch a ride with you?”; “Are you headed to the drug store?”, etc. And this alternative is much more fun and inexpensive for all involved, and much less damaging to the environment. Wolf Creek Lodge, a new senior cohousing community about to start construction, has 30 units to be built on 1 acre within walking distance of downtown Grass Valley, population 12,000. Top of mind, one future household will be moving from a 20 acre lot, 9 miles from town, another from 15 acres, also 9 miles out of town, and another from 13 acres, 7 miles from town. These are young seniors planning not only to live more sustainably, but more fulfilling as well.

Bill Thomas, M.D. and prominent author on issues affecting seniors, describes our currently predominant scenario of caring for seniors as the “\$3 trillion dollar dilemma.” The cost of care for the 78 million new senior/baby boomers “coming of age” in the next 20 years will be \$3 trillion dollars more per year than it is now (and that is in a nation with a \$13 trillion dollar GDP – so that’s a chunk of change). It goes without saying, that the current pattern is not sustainable from an environmental, cultural or financial point of view.

President Obama has announced that for us to arrest global warming, we will have to reduce carbon emissions by 2% per year until 2050. It seems doable, but last year, carbon emissions increased by 1.4% — we are headed in the wrong direction. Given this situation, we’ve got to do something. We need to think collectively about how to set seniors up for success and to help them achieve their full potential into their last 20-30 years. Cohousing is for seniors who want to be a part of the solution.

We can help seniors fulfill their desires for a more rewarding living arrangement that better supports their well being, **physically, socially and emotionally**. And the good news is that I haven’t witnessed anyone having more fun since the college dorms, than seniors living in cohousing — and I’ve never seen anyone live more sustainably (my electric bill last year was minus \$83.84). *Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living, second edition* published by New Society Publishers — and the type of communities it describes and helps to create — allows seniors to live lightly on the planet and to enhance their quality of life at the same time.

My speaking schedule is here: <http://www.cohousingco.com/senior-cohousing.cfm>

Thanks very much,

Chuck Durrett