

# Cover Story

# CoHousing Partners

## developing sustainable neighborhoods

by Nan Mahon



Architects of the CoHousing Partners Projects, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett. Photo by Sirlin Photography

For **Kathryn McCamant** it's all about community. As an architect and developer, her focus is to create small, close-knit villages where the inhabitants forge a bond with each other and friendships are formed.

"A place where everyone knows the name of each of their neighbors," she said.

In something of a cross between a commune and condominium living, **McCamant** has established **CoHousing Partners, Inc.**, a company specializing in building partnerships as well as housing.

As young architectural students in Denmark, **McCamant** and her husband, **Charles Durrett**, found inspiration in the Danish concept of cohousing. Following that model, they returned to the United States

to implement the idea of people coming together in a kind of stone soup mentality in which everyone contributes to the pot.

"We were young and bold," **McCamant** said.

Since then, the architects have designed more than 30 cohousing communities in North America and have consulted on others around the world. Even more important, they take up residence in their own projects.

"We lived in our cohousing community in Emeryville for 13 years," said **McCamant**. "Now we live in the one in Nevada City."

Believing that senior cohousing is an approach to both independent living, a fuller lifestyle and extended life expectancy, the developers concentrate on devoting a majority of their communities to active adults. In the works now is **Wolf Creek Lodge** in **Grass Valley**.

The hillside site is situated along **Wolf Creek** with a green area between the water's edge and the buildings. The natural growth of a variety of indigenous trees provides a respite for nature lovers and environmentalists. Near the greenbelt, on almost eight acres of land, 32 single houses and townhouses are planned to accommodate families. The three story lodge, complete with an elevator and underground parking, will be home to 30 condominiums designed for seniors. All units will be one level. A common house for gatherings, parties, and dinners is a main attraction. Prices for the one bedroom, one bath unit begins at \$190,000 to meet affordable housing requirements, and goes up to \$390,000. Two bedrooms, one bath is \$390,000 to \$420,000. Two bedrooms, two baths are \$475,000 to \$495,000.

In the mode of a pedestrian village, shops, restaurants, and services are nearby in walking or biking distance in **Grass Valley**.

Overhangs, porches and balconies are standard for any village constructed by **McCamant**. Overhangs give shade so people can sit on porches and invite neighbors to join them.

"We found the site and a group of future residents came around it," said **McCamant**.

The building of the community begins long before construction. Those wishing to be part of a new development begin planning and organizing before the first sketch is drawn. There is no hierarchy, and every homeowner is an equal member of the board, deciding on what amenities should be a part of the construction and the establishing of the CC&Rs.

At **Wolf Creek Lodge**, the members are a range in age from 50 into the 80s. Most are retired professionals.

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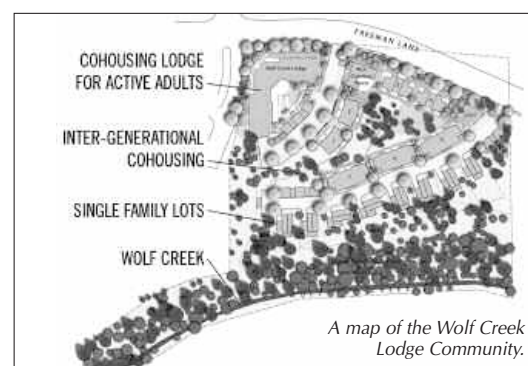
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A supportive community can help one age safely and with dignity. Shown above: Wolf Creek Lodge members on a visit to Nevada City Cohousing. Photo by Sirlin Photography

### More About Wolf Creek Lodge:

Wolf Creek is a lodge of 30 households within walking distance of shops. Some units are Individually owned, while some units are central common house. Wolf Creek lodge is designed for singles/couples seeking harmonious living. There is built-in accessibility and Wolf Creek has guest rooms. At Wolf Creek Lodge there is a security of a community of people. Residents save car and gas expenses while getting fit at the same time. They enjoy privacy balanced with social interaction. Wolf Creek is an extended family sharing dining, enjoyment and community. There is a universal design and a community support through aging in place.



A map of the Wolf Creek Lodge Community.

"We are independent, active adults who share common values," said Barbara **Kronmal**, a member of the resident committee.

Because he believes that cohousing can extend life as well as enrich it, **Durrett** has published several books on the advantages of cohousing. In 1988, he penned **Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves**. His more recent work is titled **Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living**.

In his books, **Durrett** puts forth six components of cohousing. Those are participatory process, deliberate neighborhood design, extensive common facilities, complete resident management, non-hierarchical structure, and separate income sources.

**Durrett** cites the years of increasing successful experience in **Denmark** as a model for his findings.

Without the social isolation that often happens when the aging live alone, cohousing offers companionships with the option of closing the door of your private home when desired. A supportive community can help one age safely and with dignity.

"Aging in community means support," **Durrett** says. "The key is starting to plan early enough that you have choices."

Construction on **Wolf Creek Lodge** will begin in the spring of 2008. Currently the developers are holding workshops for prospective buyers and working on city approval of their plans.

California based, **CoHousing Partners, Inc.** has offices in **Davis** and **Nevada City**. Plans are underway for communities in **Fresno, Truckee,** and **Orangevale** as well as **Grass Valley**.

"We are creating old fashion neighborhoods in a new way," said **McCament**. "My goal is to change the world, one neighborhood at a time."

Visit the website at [www.wolfcreeklodge.org](http://www.wolfcreeklodge.org) or [www.cohousingpartners.com](http://www.cohousingpartners.com).

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**Richard B. Meister, M.D.**, is a board-certified ophthalmologist and Fellow of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. He is a graduate of UC Davis Medical School and the prestigious Hermann Eye Center at the University of Texas, Houston Medical Center. Dr. Meister specializes in cataract and lens implants, corneal and laser microsurgery.

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