

Sacramento Bee/

r Virginia Thigpen, left, joins future residents Stan Dawson and Ellen Coppock in a toast to celebrate the new community they're building in Davis.

# Old friends, new neighbors

**A dozen seniors build own cluster of homes so they can look out for each other**

By Nancy Weaver Teichert
BEE STAFF WRITER

A dozen seniors in Davis will break ground today on their own dream retirement community, where they will care for each other as they grow older.

Leaving the large, rambling homes where they raised their children, they will move to smaller homes clustered around a shared commons house for meals and activities.

"Most of us hate to leave our big houses," said Ellen Coppock, 78, who came up with the idea of building the eight-unit Glacier Circle Senior Community. "It's more for the companionship and the feeling that we can watch out for each other."

The plan is to own homes close enough for the good friends to aid each other through the inconveniences or illnesses of old age and jointly hire whatever help they may need.

Above the commons room will be a studio apartment for a couple or individual who will be hired to cook, chauffeur, run errands or do whatever chore is needed in exchange for rent.

The eight homes, to be built at the intersection of West Covell Boulevard and Denali Drive near Sutter Davis Hospital, will range in size from 1,000 to 1,400 square feet.

Five on one side will face three on the other side, with garages and driveways behind the units so only landscaped walkways will separate them.

The commons house will have a large dining room, an exercise room, a large kitchen with a pantry and a big television and music system.

When they first started to look at retirement homes, the seniors realized they didn't want to be isolated in an adults-only retirement village; they wanted to remain in the diverse Davis community they've enjoyed for years.

"We were thinking down the road, but we have come down the road," said Sue Saum, 73, who has been in her Davis home for 34 years and realized it was time to downsize. "It seemed it would be more efficient for us as we grow older."

Most of the four couples and four individuals have been friends for many years, having met through the Unitarian Church.

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# **Retire:** 12 formed their own corporation

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Richard Morrison, 77, of Gold River has known his Davis friends for years and was pleased to be included. In an urbanized region, he said, they all share "a longing for community."

During the past two years, they formed their own corporation, made the difficult search for a suitable property, developed plans with an architect and contractor, and decided on landscaping.

"We really haven't had any serious disagreements. We've been able to make our decisions by consensus. We've gotten to know each other better," said Coppock. "Mostly, it's fun."

The corporation of 12 people had to jump through a lot of hoops, such as getting a zoning change and city approval – tasks that bigger developers are more accustomed to handling.

President Stan Dawson said they've had great professionals working with them on their dream. "The trick is to coordinate them," he said.

All of the residents will own their own home, plus one-eighth interest in the Commons House. It's an investment of $3 million altogether or about $400,000 per unit.

Associate planner Ike Njoku said it's unique how the group met the city's requirement for an affordable housing unit by exchanging rent for services.

"It's good for everyone. There wasn't any negative we could point to," he said. "Everyone felt good about it."

Virginia Thigpen, a partner with West Davis Associates, which developed the nearby Aspen subdivision, volunteered her time to help them.

When the baby boomers start to retire, she said, they may want to use this as a model for other small retirement communities that can be affiliated together to share staff.

"I would love to see there be more of these," she said.

With much of the hard work done, the retirees spend more time these days imagining what their new life will be like when the homes are finished in August.

Coppock, who moved to her home in Davis in 1956, has already had one garage sale and plans to free herself of more of a lifetime's accumulations. She likes to think of the group of friends watching ballgames together or checking in frequently when one falls ill.

Saum said some are looking forward to cooking big meals for the group, while others swear never to cook again.

All agree their retirement community will be more than just new homes. At every one of their meetings, they repeat their own drafted covenant about working together in loving kindness while respecting the privacy of individuals.

"This is not just a construction project," said Saum. "It's very much a soul-based thing. It's how we hope to live together."

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Dear Ones:

These cheery looking people are our future neighbors in the senior community that is finally under construction. Hooray!

After three years of planning and all sorts of setbacks, we finally completed the land purchase on December 8 and had a ground-breaking celebration on the 10th. Our builder has begun his work and we should be moved in by August. Our new address will be 2368 Glacier Place, Davis, CA 95616.

Here's our statement of purpose: The mission of Glacier Circle Senior Community is to create and maintain a small cooperative-style housing community of seniors who share some expenses, skills and friendship. We are committed to being a welcoming community of independent outlooks and shared values.

*Peace Be With You*