Sharing is name of the game at Greyrock Commons

CoHousing project is first in Choice City

By DIANA MURPHY COLES
The Coloradoan

On a sunny Saturday afternoon, neighbors Susie Lawton, Dan Gregory, Jim and Eliza Carney and Robin MacDonald share a chore common in many neighborhoods:

Planting flowers and shrubs in their front yards.

The difference here? These neighbors share a front yard; their landscaping efforts are for the common good.

"This is the first time we've had a chance to help out with the landscaping — we hadn't moved in yet last time they did it — so we really wanted to help with the planting today," explains Eliza Carney, 60. "It's very volunteer-oriented here. You kind of feel a commitment to each other."

Such is life at Greyrock Commons, a 16-acre development in northwest Fort Collins that marked its one-year anniversary in April; planning took more than four years.

In a country crawling with subdivisions dominated by driveways and two-car garages, Greyrock Commons is a refreshing change.

Here folks have committed to building a neighborhood in the old-fashioned sense of the word — a place where kids play together, where moms and dads take turns babysitting, where neighbors sit down to share a meal.

Greyrock Commons is the city's first-ever CoHousing community. (A second CoHousing community is planned for the Lee Martinez Park area.)

Created 30 years ago in Denmark, CoHousing is an alternative-housing concept in which neighbors not only know each other, but also help design and maintain the neighborhood.

Though relatively new to the United States, more than 165 such developments have been planned throughout the country. Other CoHousing developments in Colorado include those in Aspen, Lafayette and Littleton.

Says resident Laurie Bayless: "People are feeling more and more isolated in our society, and I think they're looking for something from a time they remember when neighborhood kids played with each other, and you knew who lived next door."

Houses at Greyrock Commons were built around a common greens, which feature a playground and the common house — the heart of the community. That's where neighbors hold meetings — and take turns cooking dinner.

The neighborhood also is environmentally sound and pedestrian-friendly; parking is minimal and restricted to the neighborhood's perimeter.

And for all its seemingly old-time touches, the community is definitely of the '90s — it has its own LAN, local area network, so that computer-equipped households can connect with each other and onto the Internet.

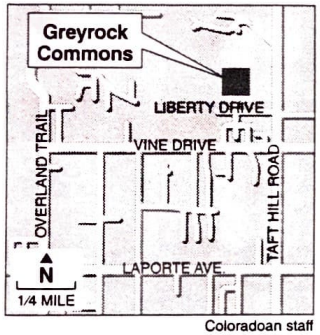
About 30 households have made Greyrock Commons their home, and they're a diverse lot: retirees such as the Carneys; single-parent families such as Lawton and her 12-year-old son; and folks such as the Gregorys, parents of 3-year-old daughter, Kate.

"We're all different people, of different ages, but there's an environment of trust here," MacDonald says. "We help each other a lot."

It helps that many of the families knew each other long before Greyrock Commons was built.

"We had meetings for three years before we ever moved in," Lawton says. "And that was great. I liked the idea of having community support and knowing ahead of time who our neighbors were, rather than hoping you lucked out."

Neighborhoods



Coloradoan staff

Interested?

To learn more about Greyrock Commons, a co-housing community in northwest Fort Collins, visit the Web site at www.greyrock.org

If you would like to know more about the Lee Martinez co-housing community, e-mail Laurie Bayless at laurieb@greyrock.org


Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

WORKING TOGETHER: Greyrock Commons residents Karen Spencer, left, and her daughter, Emily Swartz, 3, landscape the yard outside their home with neighbor Jim Carney. Residents of the CoHousing community share neighborhood maintenance work.