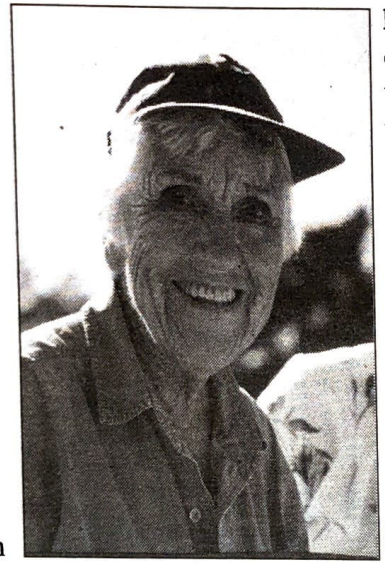
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The New Extended Family

by Neshama Abraham

What do Kay Tift, 83, of Oceano and Arthur Okner, 60, of Boulder, CO have in common? They are both active members of an innovative multi-age housing trend that encourages a strong sense of community. The concept is called cohousing and it's coming to Paso Robles.

Cohousing neighborhoods typically consist of 15-35 homes clustered around shared land and facilities. Each resident owns his or her home, complete with kitchen, dining room, living room, bedrooms, etc. In addition, each homeowner shares equal ownership in the common land, gardens and a Common House, the community building which is used for optional meals, overnight guests, meetings or community celebrations.



Kay Tift, resident of Tierra Nueva Cohousing in Oceano (above)

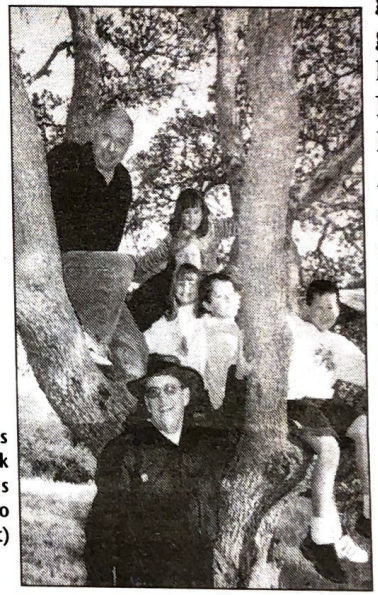
Cohousing is not new to San Luis Obispo County nor to California. In fact, California is the leading state for cohousing in the nation. There are 13 completed cohousing neighborhoods in California, including six in the Bay Area, as well as in both Santa Cruz and Oceano. Soon to begin construction is Oak Creek Commons, a 36-household neighborhood, that will be built on 14 wooded acres near downtown Paso Robles.

Future resident Sonja Eriksson, who lives in the Bay Area, will be retiring to the cohousing community and is looking forward to an intergenerational lifestyle. "I like the idea of cohousing because it combines community with privacy, and you can decide how much you want of each. Many people who retire choose retirement communities with people of the same age, but Paul and I are interested in living with people of all ages. It's more fun and rewarding and broadens your outlook to associate with young and old people alike and to have children around," says Eriksson.

As compared to a retirement home or an assisted living facility, seniors in a cohousing neighborhood are valued as community "elders" because of their accumulated life wisdom. In a cohousing setting, elders have the significant role of teaching the younger members of the neighborhood and passing on skills and knowledge gained during their life.

For example, Kay Tift, who has her PhD in organizational development, has been instrumental in guiding the Tierra Nueva Cohousing Community in Oceano in establishing close interpersonal relationships. She and her husband Floyd initially met with the embryonic community regularly for eight years as consultants. What impressed them and ultimately led to their becoming residents a year and a half ago was "the members willingness to invest in their own group process. They realized that how a group worked together is as important as the product or decisions the group makes," says Tift.

For elders in cohousing, it is especially fulfilling to become an adopted grandparent for a family whose birth grandparents live far away or are no longer alive. Such is the case in our Nomad Cohousing Community in Boulder, CO where our neighbor Arthur Okner has become a member of our family. He comes over every day between 8 and 8:30 a.m. to interact with our two girls. His daughters live out of state, and they don't have children. Arthur has become both the grandfather to our children and a senior advisor for us. We value his opinion and have discussed important life issues with him.



Future residents of Oak Creek Commons Cohousing in Paso Robles (right)

When I ask my three-year-old daughter Zipporah who is her favorite big person in our 11-household community, she quickly answers Grandfather Arthur. While these two are 57 years apart, they see each other several times a day, sharing jokes and stories.