

From In the Hills Magazine Volume 12 #4 November 2005

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

AN ECO-VILLAGE RISES IN CALEDON

When you get her talking about Whole Village, Brenda Dolling, one of the earliest members of this eco-village, you almost expect her to break out into song. Brenda's that enthusiastic about the initiative and she is, after all, a member of the irreverent songsters, the Raging Grannies. But if you expected Whole Village to be a crunchy granola, rustic kind of place, think again.

As the eleven suites and common area (15,000 square feet in total), along with a one-and-a-half acre biodynamic garden that compose Whole Village, take shape, the effect is anything but backwoods. Even draped in tarpaulins, as the building was when I dropped by for a visit, there was a warm rhythm about the place. But it's been a long, hard-fought battle to get Whole Village off the ground.

Whole Village is one of only a handful of eco-villages in Canada. Whole Villagers refer to it as an "intentional community." It is built with the best ecological materials and technology members could find and its communal form of living addresses growing concerns about loss of community and, in Whole Village's case, the increasing urbanization of rural areas. Through a co-operative arrangement, residents living in Whole Village on Shaw's Creek Road, south of the Dufferin-Caledon Townline, will own their individual suites and have use of a common area.

Each of the suites at Whole Village has bedrooms, a sitting room, bathroom and kitchenette (no hard-wired appliances are allowed in the suites). Suites come in varying sizes, ranging from a 500-square-foot bachelor to a 1,900square-foot, six-bedroom unit designed for a large family.

All suite owners also have access to the 6,500-square-foot common space with its kitchen, dining and sitting areas and library. And covering the entire complex is a 'green roof' (planted with vegetation) that will, one day soon, insulate the place.

In order to purchase a suite (the going rate for the two, two-bedroom suites that remain is between \$175,000 and

\$185,000), you must first go through a rigorous process to become a Whole Village member. Membership involves a series of meetings, a reference check, agreeing with Whole Village's principles on sustainable living and buying a \$10,000 share.

If all goes well, all of the suites will be occupied by the end of 2005, some eighteen months after construction began. But it's a long six years since Jeff Gold, one of the project's earliest proponents, presented the idea to the Town of Caledon with the innocent misconception that the town would embrace his vision of communal living.

And town staff seemed to at first, but objections from concerned neighbours eventually forced Whole Village to turn to the courts to get a building permit. Though it fails to tell the entire story, the case came down to the definition of a single-family dwelling. Whole Village members argued they were one happy family, each with their own bedroom suite. The Town of Caledon questioned this definition and denied them a building permit. But the courts supported Whole Village's claim and, much to members' delight, the town granted the permit, paving the way for Caledon to have one of Canada's first eco-villages.

Two years later, Brenda can hardly contain her excitement. Finally, she's going to be at home with her family this Christmas.