

It's not always easy to live the simple life, but for an Oakville couple with seven children, it's a dream coming true.

Vic and Jayne Kulikauskas and five of their seven children are spending the summer camped out in three small tents on the grounds of an eco-farm in Caledon called Whole Village.

This fall, the energy-efficient home they'll share with about 15 other members of the Whole Village community will be completed and they'll kiss suburban life goodbye to move permanently to this organic farm.

"For a long time, the idea of living in the country has appealed to me, not that I've ever done it, or know what it is really like, but it's been sort of a daydream of mine," says Vic, 49, a software engineer.

Turning his daydream into reality demanded dedication and diligence. Jayne, 47, a stay-at-home-mom with a Masters of Divinity from UoT remembers using *The More With Less Cookbook* when they were first married 25 years ago.

"We've always tried to be environmentally responsible, recycling and doing what we can to be energy efficient," she says.

Five years ago, when they were grappling with complex plans of retrofitting their 1,800-sq.-ft., five-bedroom house, Jayne mentioned that she'd heard about Whole Village. In October 2000, they attended a public orientation meeting at the 191-acre farm.

What they discovered was a tiny community of like-minded individuals who share a vision of living together self-sufficiently and sustainably. That is, responsibly using the resources of the land to meet their needs for food, shelter, clothing, energy, tools and even medicine.

She found they took a holistic approach to their goals.

"People were working not only on the land using 'green technology,' but on their interpersonal relationships and it appealed to us," she recalls.

They decided to join, a conscientious process they fast-tracked. Still, it took four months. Whole Village, a corporation with rotating leadership, is run by consensus and they had to understand exactly what living there entailed. They attended meetings and participated in as many activities at the farm as they could to be sure they were compatible with other members and shared their values.

It's an enormous financial, emotional, social and psychological commitment, like "group marriage without the sex," says longtime member Jeff Gold, 56.

Although individuals do not pool personal finances, they must pay initial full-membership fees of \$12,000, plus other fees, excluding housing in the new building.

All aspects of farm life -- legal, financial, farm and land stewardship, membership, education, communication and community dynamics -- must be decided by shareholders. Though consensus can be cumbersome and inefficient at times, it works, says Gold.

"It's a lot more efficient than what's going on in Ottawa these days," quips Vic.

For the youngest Kulikauskas children Whole Village life is filled with new adventures as well as small responsibilities.

Besides climbing trees, Robert, 10, says: "I'm looking forward to living here and getting to know all the interesting people."

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This week, his job was picking raspberries. Angela, 7, who's looking forward to a "pink room" in the new house, collected eggs from the 22 resident chickens, and Tomas, 4, who loves running around, unloaded groceries.

They're home-schooled so life in and out of books is their education. "Still, I have to get them used to a new set of safety rules around the pond, the construction site and the farm machinery," says Jayne.

Admittedly, she never enjoyed doing the family meal-planning and cooking in her Oakville home -- and she won't have to living in the futuristic new farmhouse.

"The need for privacy is central to living 'in a community'; the balance is crucial; the need to be able to escape at your own whim," says Denis Bowman, Whole Village member, "green" architect and designer of the \$2.2-million, 15,300-sq.-ft., single storey building, called Greenhaven.

It will house 11 families -- about 15 to 20 singles and couples, including the seven Kulikauskases. Each family suite features bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchenette, small living and dining rooms, plus its own patio and vista, so it won't feel like living in a fish bowl.

They'll share 6,500 sq. ft. of common space including a kitchen, dining room, laundry room and other recreational rooms. It has 59 skylights, a green roof and is heated, lit and run as much by solar power as was financially feasible to minimize energy consumption.

But it's not cheap. At \$250 per sq. ft., the Kulikauskas family suite measuring 1,832 sq. ft. costs \$458,000 excluding monthly maintenance fees that are still to be determined.

It's by far the largest suite, with the average two-bedroom unit costing \$180,000. Most Greenhaven residents are retired and have sold a home in order to move there.

But in order to ensure that residents are committed to Whole Village, plans are afoot to transform the corporation into a co-operative, so any member who wishes to leave and to sell his suite, must share profits with the community and members decide collectively who the new owner will be.

Right now, it's expensive because Whole Village is at the "toddler stage," says Gold, project manager of the new building. In our climate it's only possible to live 80% off the land and they're only about 30% of the way, he says.

This farm is far from a gated community, though it is somewhat geographically isolated. It operates as an educational entity and for \$10 per month, anyone interested in the project and its vision can become an associate member by attending an orientation meeting and accepting a community mentor. (Go to wholevillage.org for meeting dates.)

"What's important is that suburbia can also be isolating, too," says Bev Trounce, an original member of Whole Village, created by a coterie of parents at Toronto's Waldorf School in 1996. It bears some resemblance to Israel's early kibbutz movement.

"Here, we can be isolated together. We're alternative, not conventional. With consensus, there are always problems, but there always seem to be solutions, too. We're trying to live lightly on the land and we're certainly trying not to make our housing conform to the car."

A big problem facing Whole Village is its aging population -- one reason why the Kulikauskas, with all their kids, are so welcome.

"We don't want to be a retirement community," says Bowman