

Village Hearth: An innovation in LGBTQA senior living

Cohousing project provides LGBTQ seniors with retirement housing option

BY STAN KIMER ON SEPTEMBER 7, 2018



The Village Hearth is situated on 15 beautiful acres of land just 7.5 miles north of downtown Durham, North Carolina.

A few years ago, I wrote a series of blogs about issues around diversity and housing, and included a [discussion around the intersection of housing issues and LGBTQ aging adults](#). Since that time, there has been a significant increase in senior housing options that are more affirming of LGBTQ people as we age.

But now I want to write about a real innovation and a “first-of-its-kind” community for LGBTQ and allied people. Village Hearth in Durham, N.C. is the first “cohousing” community for LGBTQ people and their allies.

What is “cohousing?” It is a concept that started in Denmark a few decades ago, and now there are about 130-150 cohousing communities in the U.S. Cohousing is an intentional neighborhood of private homes clustered around shared space. Households have independent incomes and private lives, but neighbors collaboratively plan and manage community activities and shared spaces. Village Hearth, which is about to start the construction stage, is the first cohousing development in the U.S. specifically geared toward LGBTQ people and their allies.



Village Hearth future residents
Gary Ross-Reynolds and Tami Ike

Recently I met with two future Village Hearth residents, Tami Ike and Gary Ross-Reynolds, out at their 15-acre location.

STAN: Do tell me more about Village Hearth. When will building start?

TAMI: We will be a community of 28 homes on this 15 acre piece of property, and we still have two units remaining for sale! Construction will start in the Fall of this year, and we hope to start moving in by the end of 2019.

STAN: What is the mix of future residents? Are they all gay and lesbian?

TAMI: Actually it is quite a diverse mixed community of men and women, half are LGBTQ, and half are straight folks who enjoy living in diverse communities. We also have a good mixture of couples and single people, and several of our members are still working, and some are retired.

STAN: So Gary, I understand you’re from Asheville. Could you tell me a little more about yourself?

GARY: Yes, I had an interesting career, starting as a psychologist and later moving into ICU nursing. My partner Steve, who is nine years older than I, is a retired Episcopal priest.

STAN: What led you to wanting to move into the Village Hearth?

GARY: My partner Steve and I have been wanting to move to Durham for various community groups here we want to get involved in. But I didn’t simply want to move from one house to

another house in a typical neighborhood — I wanted to move into a place that was both LGBTQ affirming and would offer a built-in set of friends and community activities.

STAN: How important was the LGBTQ aspect of the Village Hearth to you?



This sign reflects the sentiment of the Village Hearth community.

GARY: That was an extremely important part of our decision. In doing research, I found that many of the traditional senior living communities either are not welcoming to LGBTQ people, or don't know what to do with us. I have heard of situations where same-gender older couples are even separated and not allowed to live together. They virtually have to go back in the closet again. And even if the community was open and welcoming, I really do not want to be their "token gay."

STAN: Finally, what are you looking forward to most in moving into the Village Hearth?

GARY: I am looking forward to getting involved in all that Durham has to offer, and I look forward to having a wonderful group of friends and activities here in the Village Hearth to enjoy.

STAN: And where can people find more information, especially if they may be interested in the two remaining homes for sale?

TAMI and GARY: Certainly explore our website, villagehearthcohousing.com. And feel free to call Gary at 828-545-9900 or via email at grrvhc@gmail.com.

STAN: Thank you for taking this time with me, and I wish you both and all your other future Village Hearth residents a wonderful joy-filled future.