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## BEYOND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

### Building a community from the ground up

by Eric D. Williams

Nancy Conrad and Barbara Buckham knew what they wanted. The two close friends yearned for a return to the tight-knit, spiritual community they experienced in their younger years. That's where the two met their husbands.

Conrad, an accountant who manages accounting firm Clarke Whitney's Poulsbo office, met husband Walter at residential community called Shiloh Youth Revival Center in Corvallis, Oregon, part of the Jesus Movement in the late 1960s. Twenty-seven years and two grown children later the couple found themselves looking for the same type of environment. Buckham and her husband Rich, met in a residential community called L'Abri in Switzerland in 1971. Over three decades later, they too are empty nesters with two grown children, looking for a simple living arrangement.

"We had always talked about being each others neighbors," Conrad said. "We both had had tastes of this kind of community, we were good friends and that's kind of how it started." The curly-haired duo – one auburn, one blonde – planted the seed for a 25-unit residential cohousing development in Central Kitsap. Named Bartimaeus after a character in the Bible, the planned \$4 million housing development is a Christian-oriented residential community.

The two couples recruited potential residents at the Kitsap County Fair and through their web site, [www.bartcommunity.org](http://www.bartcommunity.org). They have enough members to fill about 38 percent of the proposed facility, according to Conrad.

Bartimaeus members are seeking a diverse living community. Kay Wilson, a former city planner for Bremerton, is agnostic. Her house husband, Pinky Fisk, is an atheist. The couple lived on a three-acre spread in Tracyton, but Fisk found that lifestyle too demanding. Wilson and Fisk had initial misgivings about living in the Christian-oriented community, but those concerns were alleviated once they learned more. "When I saw the Web site and read all the Christian creed stuff right at the top, I was pretty nervous about it," Wilson said. "But the project sounded so interesting that I decided to go to the meetings, and see what it was really all about. And I have found that I am comfortable."

Plans for Bartimaeus call for a clustered residential development on a 7-acre parcel off Fairgrounds Road. The spread is bordered by evergreens and the gurgling Steele Creek. Housing will be constructed on three buildable acres, including 24 new units and one remodeled house already on site. One of the units has been purchased by a non-profit that plans to use it as transitional housing for homeless people. The development also will include walking paths, gardens, a play area for children, and a large common house where community meals will be served.

Conrad said the group received help from Chris Scott-Hansen and wife Kelly, who started a cohousing development on Bainbridge Island. Bartimaeus and other cohousing communities could help alleviate the dearth of affordable housing in Kitsap County. Unlike standard housing developments, cohousing communities can be clustered, allowing construction on a parcel with limited buildable spaces. Cohousing also works as urban infill. "Clustering is a good method of accomplishing the required protections for critical areas, and also achieving the densities they are zoned for," said Rick Kimball, the environmental coordinator for the county's department of community development. The housing units at Bartimaeus range from 800-square-foot, one-bedroom apartments starting at \$140,000 to four-bedroom spreads topping out at \$250,000.

Paul Eberharter, architect for the project, said the living quarters will be in the center of the project to encourage social interaction. "The design guidelines are for having the units facing each other, fairly close together with porches, so people sitting out here can talk to people over there," he said.

After looking at the Bartimaeus Web site and receiving more information on the project, Guy Coe and wife



Nancy Conrad is one of the founders of the proposed Bartimaeus cohousing community. Conrad is holding a model of the planned unit development, which will include homes ranging from one to four bedrooms. (Staff photo by Carolyn J. Yaschur)

Christine moved their two children from Concord, California. He said living in a residential community like Bartimaueus provides more safety for his children than living in a typical suburban housing development. Conrad said the community works like a condominium, where housing areas are owned by individual homeowners, and amenities are owned in common. Rules, regulations and the direction of the development are decided by consensus; everyone who lives in the development must agree on each decision. "Instead of voting, one thing we say is are there any concerns?" Conrad said. "Then we continue to talk until everybody's comfortable."

Members were quick to distance themselves from comparisons to the communes of the 1960s. Even with all of the emphasis on community and social development, Coe said there's still room for individualism. "In this group you don't lose your identity," Coe said, "you just sort of share community activities."



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