

# Co-Living—Rockwood woman brings a new retirement model to town

By: Harry Rudolfs

Janette Ledwith has just renovated a big, century-old house in downtown Rockwood that she wants to share with like-minded people. It's a concept called co-living or co-housing and it's a different way of approaching one's "golden years".

Ledwith got the idea for her Oak Hill Co-Living project after attending a meeting three years ago with some other women in a similar situation. She realized that her house and its location would be perfect for a co-living initiative. Major renovations and a large addition would have to be done, but Ledwith saw the potential of an elegant living space that would allow seniors to live independently while sharing resources, expenses and some meals.

Put simply, the idea is that she would sell five sixths of her house to five other people. They would each buy a share in Oak Hill Home and that share could eventually be sold when the co-owner has to move on.

"We were thinking this would be ideal for women who are often left alone with a big house," said Ledwith. "But we won't discriminate against men. Our main consideration was to keep it affordable."

Needless to say, the renovations have been extensive and taken one year to complete. The new wing has four large bed-sitting rooms which include an ensuite

bathroom and a self-contained gas fire place that work independently if the lights go out. "We have our share of power failures in Rockwood."

Two self-contained suites were also added to the second floor in the old part of the original house. But the focal point of the home is the enormous kitchen on the main floor with two sets of sinks and stoves and a very large refrigerator. "We thought of having little cooking appliances in the rooms but where's the community in that? We want to share at least one meal per week. It was also important to have one kitchen because we are considered a single family dwelling."

Everything in the house has been rebuilt to code or beyond. "We let the mayor know what we were doing early on and he liked the idea." She's also received great help with the legal issues from other groups that have tried co-housing. Ledwith cited the cases of the "Golden Girls" in Port Perry, Ont., who have established in law the principle that non-related people can legally share title to a single-family unit.

Ledwith realizes that there will be challenges in dividing up the bills and the chores. "Everything will be done by consensus." Legal agreements and mechanisms have to be in place should someone want to cash out, for instance.

She's also looking for partners that are independent, as Ledwith, herself, is a spry octo-

genarian. "We're not a care home, but one good thing about living in community is that people can check in on each other."

The remarkable thing is how quickly the Oak Hills project has come about, literally three years from concept to fruition. Ledwith is ready to move back in—she had to vacate during construction—and she has another woman who is also ready to do so. She's currently interviewing prospective partners. "Build it and they will come was our approach. We built this so it would last a long time and it will serve a lot of people."



Janette Ledwith standing in the renovated kitchen of her Oak Hill Co-Living



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