

Active adult project underway in Northville

BY NANCY BARNES
News Editor

Construction has begun on the Park Glen active adult community in a valley between two ridges of a hill behind the Northville Market off Route 202 in northeastern New Milford.

The project, which began as a glimmer in developer John O'Bine's eye in 2001, is scheduled for completion in 2007.

The age-targeted condominium community will contain 14 duplex and three single, detached structures open to persons at least 55 years old, and it will be built on nine of the 23 acres in the tract.

The development, for which surveyor Jim Osborne of CJOJ LLC said he had generated "about 12 different layouts," will also include a butterfly garden and a gazebo, as well as more than 40 species of plantings and walking trails.

Mr. O'Bine and Robert Walker, a previous real estate partner, donated 20.7 acres adjacent to the tract to the Weantinog Heritage land trust in perpetuity.

Mr. O'Bine's partner in the Park Glen project is John Delay, a principal in ICS Inc. The architect for the project is Milton G. Grew. Mr. O'Bine, who over the course of his building career developed one of New Milford's first geothermal homes, said he got the idea for an age-targeted community after learning that zoning for active-adult communities had been approved by the town.

At present, there are 111 active adult developments with properties for sale in Connecticut, according to Jane O'Connor, president of the Hawley, Mass.-based

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—JOHN O'BINE, PARK GLEN DEVELOPER

55+ Marketing and publisher of the magazine *Mature Living Choices*.

Ms. O'Connor said that the concept of active adult communities, which began in the Sunbelt, took hold slowly in Connecticut, but that the number of active-adult developments has increased rapidly in recent years. Five years ago, she noted, demand for this kind of housing in New England did not exist.

"One area that became very populated with them is the Farmington River Valley," she said. "Yet, you cross the river, and the Windsors have about eight of them going up now."

One catalyst for the active adult community, according to Ms. O'Connor, is a healthy real estate market, which has given homeowners substantial equity. Another motivating factor is a desire among some adults for a change in lifestyle.

"Nationwide, about 80 percent of the population [with adult children] are not going to move. But there's 15 to 20 percent out there who are willing to embrace [a lifestyle change]," she said.

"They're active. They're mobile," said William E. Becker, principal in the Becker Organization, a market research firm in Teaneck, N.J., referring to population these communities target. "These are people who want new

neighbors and new friends," although, he added, they might want two bedrooms—one for themselves and one for guests—instead of four.

Ms. O'Connor said that the situation of a master bedroom suite on the first floor is a primary characteristic of the active-adult structure.

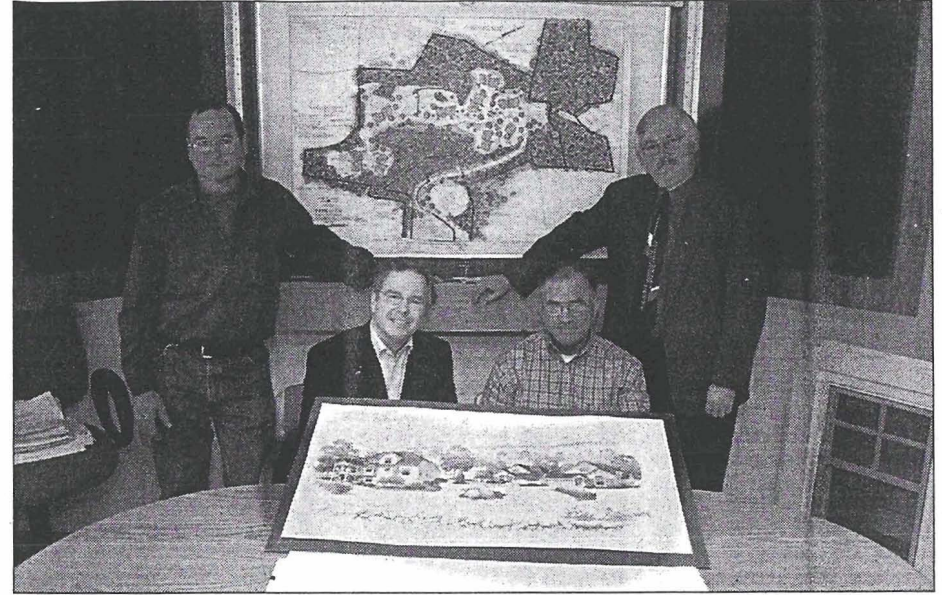
"This is not your grandfather's Oldsmobile," said Ms. O'Connor, referring to the amenities within these properties, many of whose price-points are at the upper end of housing market. "The [Baby] Boomers are re-inventing how they want to live in their active years."

In contrast to the independent or assisted living communities, whose amenities include meals in a common space and transportation, the active-adult community, Ms. O'Connor observed, includes external services as part of its homeowner association fee.

In addition, today's technology enables active adult communities to make these services "intuitive," Mr. O'Bine said.

He noted that in the Park Glen development, many of the active adult homeowners' day-to-day tasks—such as watering the lawn, adjusting room temperatures, closing the blinds or letting out the dog—can be performed automatically.

"Many of these systems have



Photograph by Laurie Gaborini

Standing, left and right, are Les Massey and John O'Bine. Seated, left and right, are John Delay and Greg Grew.

been in homes for years," Mr. O'Bine said. "We [now] have the ability to make them interact."

"They're buying [a residence] already souped-up," Mr. O'Bine continued. "[They] never had the granite countertop or the home theater."

"We're talking show business here," he added, referring to this new breed of a community. "If customers want to listen to music or to the news, we can pipe it into every room of the house."

Mr. Grew, the architect, added, "Active-adult structures not necessarily smaller." He said that, on average, active-adult living space amounts to 2,100 square feet. He said that the houses built in the

1970s, when many of today's active adults purchased their first homes, were in the low 2,000-square-foot size.

The developers of the Park Glen project said they have benefited from the input of town officials as they have sought town approvals, yet Mr. O'Bine termed the Inland Wetlands Commission "quite daunting, frankly." Ten to 15 percent of the tract involves regulated areas, he said.

"I've rarely seen a project that will die at the wetland stage," said Mr. Grew. "The hurdles are usually in the planning and zoning stages, where [the officials] are dealing with use."

The development process that

New Milford demands is "not arduous," Mr. O'Bine said. "It's time-consuming. You have so many meetings you have to go to."

The developers' research showed that 16 percent of the current population in New Milford is 50 to 64 years-old, and 9.5 percent of the population is over 65, Mr. O'Bine said. He added that New Milford and the surrounding towns have "all become quite upscale, and signs all point to this trend continuing."

"You get so involved in the process," Mr. O'Bine said, "because everything escalates expense-wise. There are no guarantees of sales, even after all approvals have been granted."