

FOR THE QUAINT OF HEART

Meet the active retirees
who love carefree condo
living — the country
setting is a bonus

By Gary May

Paul and Patricia Lonergan spent most of their married lives in Toronto and area before moving seven years ago to the Northumberland Hills farmhouse where Paul was raised. They loved the quality of life in the picture-perfect Northumberland village of Warkworth. But as the 60-something couple contemplated retirement, the chore of maintaining that big 1870s country home didn't fit into their plans.

A two-hour drive east of Toronto, Warkworth features shopping, restaurants, a medical clinic and nearby hospital, golf, live entertainment and bucolic scenery. Like many such pretty country villages, all it lacked was the type of active adult lifestyle condominium housing that would allow people such as the Lonergans to stay and enjoy a carefree lifestyle into their retirement years.

Warkworth insurance broker Bryce Allen and partners — chartered financial analyst David Pollack and builder Don Clarke — have begun to oblige with a recently started 54-unit condo bungalow project they call Orchard Hill. With units from 1,300 square feet — expandable to up to 3,500 sq. ft. with the addition of a finished basement and optional loft — the condos will be built in pods of three and four units on the 20-acre site of





Only four
condos remain
at Jordan
Village. Bottom:
Orchard Hill's
charming
interiors.



an abandoned apple orchard. Prices begin at \$305,000.

Mr. Allen remembers picking apples on the property as a boy, so unit styles have been given the names of apples: McIntosh, Empire, Cortland, Russet and Aurora.

"We love this village and we didn't want to leave it," Patricia Lonerger explains. "Orchard Hill is just what we need to stay. We like the idea of being able to just close the door and go south for the winter, and not have to worry about grass cutting and snow removal."

Ms. Lonerger says they love the arts community feel of Warkworth, with its boutiques and resident craftspeople. Pointing to the annual Long Lunch festivities, during which tables are joined end-to-end down the main street for a big community party, she says the little village is the picture of neighbourliness.

"If it wasn't for Orchard Hill, we'd be forced to move away from all of this," she says.

Margaret and Murray Gemmell can hardly wait to join "all of this." They own a farm in the Rainy River district of northwestern Ontario. Ms. Gemmell is originally from Campbellford, a village near Warkworth, and as they approached retirement the couple bought a property nearby and planned to build a home.

But on second thought, "a house is a lot more upkeep than we wanted to bother with," she says. "When we heard about Orchard Hill, it was just the thing."

They love the quiet village environment. Ms. Gemmell was sold when she looked out the window of a unit and saw a barn and a couple of grazing cows. "It's the privacy and peace and quiet. And you can still walk to the centre of the village," she adds.

It used to be that farm couples would sever off a building lot from their property to erect a retirement home. Hec Macmillan, who is mayor of Trent Hills within which Warkworth and Campbellford are located, says that concept has been killed by tougher zoning and planning regulations. "Orchard Hill is a far better alternative," he says. And, he believes, it's an alternative that would likely be popular in many other farm communities if it was available.

Not only do local farmers want a place to retire to while remaining within the village near where they lived and worked, says Bryce Allen, many urban dwellers long for a quieter and simpler life.

That's been the case for many buyers in



Warkworth's main street is lined with shops. Top: Lemon meringue pie, anyone? Warkworth's annual Long Lunch each August.

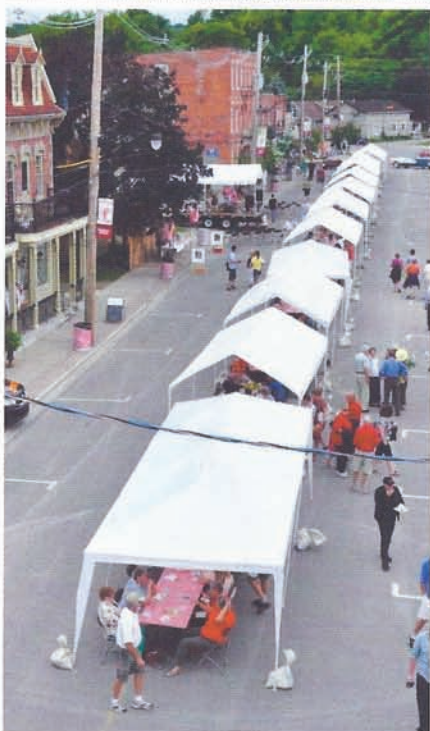


ana Peninsula. Darlene Fraser, director of client care for builder Phelps Homes, says they started construction four years ago and just four of 30 condos remain unsold.

“People are attracted by how quaint Jordan is,” she says. “It’s a touch of time gone by. People moved here because they don’t want the fast pace that’s all around them. Yet they can cross the street and walk to the Inn On the Twenty. Shopping is close by, and you can still jump in the car and drive out into the fields and the wine country. I believe it’s popular because we’ve avoided the suburban look.”

The village feel is so popular, in fact, that on the outskirts of the town of Cobourg, an hour east of Toronto, Max LeMarchant plans to create his own. Mr. LeMarchant is one of the creators of New Amherst, acclaimed for its “new urbanism” concept that turns its back on urban sprawl and opts instead for

WE LIKE JUST CLOSING THE DOOR AND NOT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT GRASS CUTTING OR SNOW REMOVAL



walkable, mixed-use communities.

He hopes to attract small retailers and commercial enterprises to service the new community and plans 80 condos — two-bedroom flats and lofts — to appeal to empty-nesters and retirees.

“It will be a village within a town,” Mr. LeMarchant says. “You could call it the renaissance of abandoned planning principles.”

Meanwhile other villages seem to be catching the “active adult lifestyle” bug. In Meaford on Georgian Bay, Pierre Boiron plans a condo community within a village environment. But still in the planning stage, Mr. Boiron has added a twist: He is asking prospective clients what features they’d like to see before finalizing plans. He set up a series of virtual focus groups through which those interested in the project, Meaford Haven, can have input on design and characteristics. “Join your future neighbours in the design process,” is Mr. Boiron’s motto. **PH**