

From the Editor

## Conservers, not Consumers

*Diana Leafe Christian*

“I could live here,” I thought, as I strolled down the charming, narrow street in Cincinnati. I passed small, wooden-frame houses with clapboard exteriors and wide front porches not far from the sidewalk, reminding me of an earlier age. “Good evening,” and “hello” greeted me as I passed people walking in the opposite direction; one couple even said hello from their porch. I passed teenagers leaping in the street playing basketball. The neighbors were multi-racial and apparently friendly to strangers; the small houses ranged from cottage-like or remodeled to funky; flowers and vegetable gardens filled many front yards. As far as I could tell, every backyard on both sides of the street was adjacent to what looked like forest. It took me awhile to realize the street was primarily a pedestrian play and interaction zone, because while cars were parked along the curbs, I saw few cars actually driving down the street, and those that did so drove slowly.

Not too surprising, since this was Enright Ridge Eco-Village, a group of dedicated neighbors living on a half-mile dead-end street in an urban neighborhood a few minutes from downtown Cincinnati. Jim and Eileen Schenk, who operate Imago Earth Institute, a children’s nature center here, and their neighbors have been consciously creating community on this street for years. They set about to meet everyone in every house, hold social events and meetings, and “green” as much as their neighborhood as possible. (*See “A Home-Grown Ecovillage on Our Street”*) Enright Ridge Eco-Village illustrates a significant point—urban community can happen more easily where human vision and motivation meet an ideal physical layout: (1) a dead-end street, which results in relatively little traffic and forces everyone to pass their neighbors’ houses on the way in or out; (2) houses and front porches close to the sidewalk, which make for easy social interaction; (3) no cross-streets that cut across the focused-in sense of place; and (4) easy connection to the natural world. Sounds like the site plan for a cohousing community, doesn’t it? And it’s no wonder: the architects who originated cohousing in Denmark the 1960s based their vision on traditional built environments which foster, rather than impede, the innate human tendency to connect with others and create community. To use a socio-architectural concept, the Enright Avenue cul de sac fosters social capital through centripetal energy and forced proximity. To use a Chinese concept, it has great *fung shui*.

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