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## A model way to live

### Ecovillage exhibit to debut at Akron Home and Flower Show

By Mary Beth Breckenridge  
Beacon Journal staff writer

POSTED: 12:30 p.m. EST, Feb 19, 2010



Larry Parker looks over the squash plants he is growing in his home. Creating a garden at home will be one of the topics addressed in the Ecovillage display at the upcoming Akron Home & Flower Show. The display will provide information on energy-efficient housing and sustainable living. (Ed Suba Jr./Akron Beacon Journal)

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A group of local environmentalists believes that to raise awareness, it takes a village.

They're advocates of a community model called an ecovillage, a neighborhood designed to minimize its inhabitants' impact on the earth. They'll introduce others to the concept through an exhibit at the Akron Home and Flower Show next weekend at the John S. Knight Center.

The display will show visitors what goes into an ideal ecovillage — elements such as energy-efficient home construction, eco-friendly landscaping, small-scale agriculture and shared transportation. It will

also introduce them to environmentally sustainable products and practices that are available now.

But the exhibit's creators intend to go beyond education. Their ultimate goal is to build an ecovillage in Akron, an urban neighborhood that would strive to be socially, economically and ecologically sustainability.

"We're trying to sell a lifestyle," said Lawrence Parker, executive director of the Akron Cooperative and a community gardening specialist. He is among the team that's overseeing the ecovillage exhibit at the home and flower show.

The plans for an ecovillage are still in the early stages, but the goal is to build it within two years, according to the group's literature. A site has not been identified.

An ecovillage is a type of intentional community, meaning its creators share the desire to live a particular lifestyle and design their neighborhood to support that purpose, said Daniel Greenberg, a spokesperson for the Ecovillage Network of the Americas and a resident of the Sirius Community, an ecovillage in Shutesbury, Mass.

In the case of ecovillages, that shared purpose is sustainability. "It's a group of people who are trying to live well and lightly," he said.

Although Greenberg said ecovillages can differ greatly, they typically put a

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Ecovillage residents typically support one another and form an intimate social structure, he said. The neighbors might tend a community garden together, share transportation and maybe participate in group meals and activities in shared spaces.

That's not to say an ecovillage is a commune, said Tom Crain, a spokesman for the Akron group. "It's not this wild, pie-in-the-sky thing for eccentric yuppies and hippies. It's for normal people," said Crain, a media relations representative who calls himself the Goin' Green Guy.

Cleveland already has an ecovillage in its Detroit Shoreway area. The neighborhood showcases green construction in its mix of older and newer homes, has resources including public transportation and a recreation center within walking distance and emphasizes educational and social opportunities for its residents.

The ecovillage envisioned for Akron would offer an affordable living option, said Lisa Bostwick, founder of the Greater Akron Partnership for Sustainability and another member of the ecovillage display's project team.

The neighborhood would be in an urban area, close to stores, services and public transportation, she said. Residents would have much of what they need close to home, reducing the need for cars and the cost of fueling and maintaining them.

The ecovillage would feature passive homes, houses built or retrofitted to be so highly efficient that they greatly reduce the need for heating fuel.

They're the passion of home builder Lance Schmidt of F.D Ayers Inc., president of the Home Builders Association of Portage & Summit Counties. He's overseeing the construction of sample walls for the home show exhibit that will exemplify passive-home building techniques.

In addition, some foods would be produced on site in the ecovillage, eliminating the costs and fuel involved in shipping them. A small demonstration garden in the home-show exhibit will promote community gardening, which would be one local source of healthful foods. Other small-scale agricultural enterprises might be a chicken coop, a beekeeping operation or a dairy goat herd.

The exhibit will also include information and displays on other features that could be part of an Akron ecovillage. Among them are solar and wind power generation; use of efficient transportation such as ride sharing, bikes and electric cars; and sustainable landscaping features such as green roofs, rain barrels, drought-tolerant plants and permeable pavers that reduce rainwater runoff.

The home show exhibit is intended to be interactive and even spontaneous, Crain said. Workshops and entertainment are planned, and informal presentations could spring up if visitors are interested in a particular topic.

The display is almost a microcosm of the ecovillage idea. Crain and Bostwick said vendors are being asked to push the whole ecovillage concept and even promote one another's goods and services rather than just selling their own.

"Even with competitors, there's a new paradigm happening," Bostwick said. "It's not competition, it's collaboration."

The organizers said that sort of collaboration will be key to moving an ecovillage from concept to reality. Many entities in the public and private sectors would need to be involved and work cooperatively, Crain said.

The organizers hope the exhibit will help lay the groundwork by educating visitors about the ecovillage concept and piquing interest among people who might like to live in that kind of community.

An ecovillage isn't for everyone, they acknowledged. Nor is it a utopia, Greenberg of the Ecovillage Network was quick to point out.

It's just one way for like-minded people to make a difference and perhaps serve as a model for others, the organizers said.

"They don't want to change the world," Bostwick said. "They want to change *their* world."

**About the show**

The Akron Home and Flower Show opens Friday and continues through Feb. 28 at the John S. Knight Center, 77 E. Mill St., Akron.

In addition to the ecovillage, the show will feature gardens, presentations and displays.

at Hoover High

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Headliners are DIY Network host Ahmed Hassan and remodeling guru Steven Katkowsky. Hassan, of *Yard Crashers*, *Blog Cabin* and the upcoming *Turf Wars*, will speak at 1 and 4 p.m. Feb. 27 and noon and 3 p.m. Feb. 28. Katkowsky will speak at 2 and 4 p.m. Friday, 2 and 5 p.m. Feb. 27 and 1 and 4 p.m. Feb. 28.

Friday is Family Day. Activities that day will include crafts with Radio Disney, photos with local mascots and costumed characters, a meet-and-greet with Akron Zoo animals, a vendor scavenger hunt and an appearance by Akron musical group Zobapago at 6 p.m.

Hours for the home and garden show are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Feb. 27, and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Feb. 28. Tickets are \$8 at the door or \$7 in advance at [www.akronhomeandflowershow.com](http://www.akronhomeandflowershow.com).

On Friday, those 17 or younger will be admitted free. On Saturday and Sunday, those 12 or younger will be admitted free when accompanied by an adult.

Free parking is available in all city lots after 6 p.m. Friday. No shuttle service will be provided.

Mary Beth Breckenridge can be reached at 330-996-3756 or [mbrecken@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:mbrecken@thebeaconjournal.com). You can also become a fan on Facebook.

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## Comments

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### Pegleg Sump

*Muggles, Oh*



Posted 02:11 PM,  
02/19/2010

Hee hee! If you were once a hippie or you're a yuppie, you are not normal. What a sweet way to get away with a nasty insult in the paper.

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### Traditionalist

*Tallmadge, Oh*



Posted 02:16 PM,  
02/19/2010

Does anybody know where I can buy a pair of eco-friendly Birkenstock sandals and a hemp satchel in which to carry my granola?

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### Traditionalist

*Tallmadge, Oh*



Posted 02:18 PM,  
02/19/2010

I've found Gandalf the Grey....he's at the Ecovillage exhibit at the Knight Center.

This story is just too ripe with humor to leave it alone.

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### Pegleg Sump

Muggles, Oh

Posted 03:14 PM,  
02/19/2010

I would think that this Crain fella would be encouraging hippies and yups to come to this gizmo. Instead, he's calling them abnormal. Go figure.

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**Barneys Frank**

Akron, Oh



Posted 03:43 PM,  
02/19/2010

Not a commune? Yeah right.

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**Ignorance Kills**

Tepplin, DC



Posted 10:05 PM,  
02/19/2010

Laugh now, but I have a feeling these guys are better prepared for the next few years than most of us.

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**sixpantsmaloney**

Akron, OH



Posted 11:52 PM,  
02/19/2010

Funny... we did the community garden program this summer. It was my wife and I (teachers), a nice lady up the road, and a Korean family as well as others.

I never saw the "hippie" types you disparage. Just normal folks looking to better themselves and their community.

Cast your stones, but ask yourself, "What the f--- have you done for anyone other than yourself lately?"

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**Dilidali**

Barberton, OH



Posted 03:08 AM,  
02/20/2010

Eco this, and green that. Give me a break! It's a fad. I truly wish those who sit on their recycled high horses would realize this is marketing propaganda meant only to line the pockets of corporations. Ten years from now, new words will come into play, leading the general public to believe we all must hop on the trend train or else perish from shame. This Eco Green happy stuff almost wants to make me grab a recycled tire door mat and whack some tree hugger across the bottom.

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**Ignorance Kills**

Tepplin, DC



Posted 05:08 AM,  
02/20/2010

The Highland Square area would make a good site.

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**HighlandSq Truth**

Akron, Oh



Sounds like the way Akron neighborhoods used to

Posted 04:07 PM,  
02/20/2010

be, just more affordable.

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