

Special Report - Real Estate & Construction - August 11, 2011  
**Apartment developer creates housing co-op near Gonzaga**  
**14-unit Gee House features shared living; owner seeks LEED platinum rating**

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**About half of the living units in the 14-unit Gee House are leased already. While the developer is targeting college students, some of the first residents don't attend school.**

—Staff photo by Chey Scott

A Spokane man has developed an apartment building near Gonzaga University that he set up as a sustainably designed coed housing cooperative targeted at GU students.

The developer, Buzz Price, says the building, which he has named The Gee Cooperative Residence, with the Gee pronounced like the letter G in a reference to Gonzaga, is located at 817 E. Nora, near the northwest corner of Nora Avenue and Hamilton Street. Construction of it was completed in early June.

The 5,600-square-foot, three-story building was designed to house 14 residents, Price says. He says he's submitted documentation to the U.S. Green Building Council to apply for platinum-level certification in the residential category of its Leadership in Engineering and Environmental Design program.

Activewest Builders LLC, of Coeur d'Alene, designed and constructed the structure, which is being referred to informally as the Gee House.

Dennis Cunningham, Activewest's president, says he believes the Gee House will be the first LEED platinum-rated residential structure in Spokane. A list of LEED-certified residential projects on the Green Building Council's website updated in late June doesn't show any Spokane-area homes or small apartment buildings that have received LEED certification at any level yet.

All of the materials and fixtures used in the structure either were sourced from Inland Northwest distributors, made from recycled materials, or meet high Energy Star criteria for energy efficiency, Cunningham says.

Price's goal for the building was to create an energy-efficient structure that would qualify for a high level of LEED certification. He says that in doing so, he wanted to keep the construction cost at a similar range to what a typical non-LEED residential project would be. He declines to disclose his investment to build the residence, but says the price per square foot is comparable to a custom residential project.

Price says the housing co-op includes 14 private bedrooms, a main floor living space and atrium, a large shared kitchen featuring commercial-size appliances, and shared laundry facilities on each floor. Private bathrooms are shared between each pair of bedrooms, he adds, and the second and third floors have small balconies. The main floor also features a motorized retractable glass wall that opens to a patio on the front side of the building facing Nora.

The Gee House is fully-furnished and rent is \$750 a month, Price says, adding that the fee includes all utilities as well as cable and wireless Internet service. Light janitorial services for the building's shared spaces also will be provided, he says.

Price says he had been planning a student-targeted housing co-op for about eight years, and spent the last three years of that time searching for a lot that was zoned for that type of structure.

The lot on which the Gee House is located formerly was occupied by an early 1900s-era home that had been turned into apartment units at one point and since had fallen into disrepair, Price says. That house was torn down to accommodate the new structure.

"I have had the idea for many years to do this, to come up with a concept that was profitable and that could be duplicated," he says.

Price says that at his alma mater, Stanford University, cooperative housing units remain popular and that he sought to recreate a similar model here with the Gee House concept.

He says he hopes to construct other cooperative housing facilities near private colleges and universities in the Inland Northwest, such as near Whitworth University and possibly others near Gonzaga.

The business model Price says he has for the housing facility is to provide an economical way of living for its residents that has many of the same amenities of a dormitory but is more flexible in terms of the cooperative lifestyle approach that he's using to market the space.

"When you live in a dorm, you don't break down the costs and split things," he says. "The price is \$750 a month and that includes a fully-furnished building down to the knife, fork, and spoon."

He already has leased about half of the building, and he says he expects the building to be full soon.

Because the Gee House isn't affiliated with Gonzaga's student housing system, Price says he can't rent space there only to students, and the first resident to move in to the Gee House doesn't attend school at Gonzaga.

He adds, however, that he's targeting students as the main tenants because some of the lifestyle characteristics of that demographic make living in a co-op environment more applicable.

Because a cooperative living space might not be for everyone, Price says he will allow tenants to sign a lease for any length of time, and if things don't work out, he'll let a tenant break a lease without penalty.

Tenants are required through a clause in the lease, however, to take responsibility for their actions and replace anything that is damaged or broken, and to report any issues of that nature to Price.

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