

AFFORDABLE HOUSING INNOVATIONS



MOVE IT AND THEY WILL COME: SASKATCHEWAN TURNS VACANT SEMI-DETACHED HOMES INTO POPULAR SENIORS APARTMENTS

If you've ever spent a winter in Saskatchewan, you know what cold is. And if you're a senior living alone, the temperatures and snow can hold you hostage for months.

Not surprisingly, many Saskatchewan seniors would prefer to live in apartment-type complexes rather than in single or semi-detached houses. In apartments, seniors can easily visit with neighbours and friends, even in January when the cold outside is turning car tires into blocks.

Consequently, many Saskatchewan Housing Authorities, the local organizations that look after community social housing, were finding an increasing number of vacant semi-detached homes on their hands. In 1993, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC), which administers the province's social housing program, commissioned David W. Edwards Architect Ltd. of Regina, Saskatchewan, to come up with an economical solution to the rising vacancy rates. With SHC's help, the firm came up with an idea that turned more than a few heads.

"We proposed to pick up the houses, move them to a community that needs housing, and then integrate the units into one-story apartment complexes," says David Edwards, Principal of the firm. "No one had done this before, but we felt that we could move the houses and re-use them to create apartment units for 25 to 30 per cent less than it would cost to build new units. That's a substantial savings that can be passed on to tenants in lower rents."

The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation agreed to fund the moves and the foundations. The federal, provincial, and municipal governments shared the renovation and building costs according to a long-standing formula. To date, this collaboration has produced more than 100 apartment units in Regina, Canora, Melville, Hudson Bay, Bruno, and Watson.

These reincarnated apartment complexes offer seniors the best of two worlds: they can live independently in their own units and pay rents geared to income, yet they're close to neighbours, friends, a lounge, and basic medical services. This communal living concept appeals to people who may have some trouble getting around yet not require full-time nursing care. And tenants don't have to brave Saskatchewan's winter to visit one another.

"Socialization is the biggest benefit," says Mr. Edwards. "Many of the seniors are single women. They like to get out and go for coffee in the mornings and play cards in the afternoon. They do jigsaw puzzles together and hold sing-songs. In other situations, they live alone in their 600 square foot semi-detached homes, and that's it; they step out the front door and they're on the street."

Thanks to some innovative thinking on part of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and David Edwards, seniors in six Saskatchewan communities can now look upon winter's first flurries with far less trepidation than in the past.

David W. Edwards Architect Ltd. is a finalist in the Concept and Design category of the 2002 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Housing Awards Program, **Affordable Housing Innovations**. The Housing Awards recognize individuals, companies and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving housing affordability in Canada.

For more information about David W. Edwards Architect Ltd.'s Relocation Project for Seniors Housing, please contact:

Name: David Edwards
Tel.: (306) 359-1485
Fax: (306) 525-5002
E-mail: dedwards.mews@sk.sympatico.ca



HOME TO CANADIANS
Canada