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Condos drawing friends, families under same roof

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VANCOUVER - When brothers Steve and Ryan Dormer bought two condominiums last year in Surrey's Ocean Bay Villas, they became part of a growing trend -- friends or family members purchasing separate homes in the same housing complex so they can be near each other.

The brothers, who had lived together in their parents' basement suite in Langley, were both in the market for a condo.

Steve, 29, liked the idea of living in Vancouver, but Ryan, 26, preferred Langley. But when Steve went to check out Ocean Bay Villas, he decided that was the place for him.

He told Ryan and together they made parallel offers on two suites. If one of the offers was rejected, they'd look elsewhere.

"It was the first home I'd ever bought and I told my parents and brother," says Steve. "Well, he loved it too. So our offer was on condition that they sell both units to us or none at all."

He says the arrangement seems perfect. "We're on the same floor, but at opposite ends. It's nice to know you've got a family member in your building. It's also easy for my parents, because when they visit they can kill two birds with one stone. I went to Vegas and (Ryan) looked after my place."

The 163-unit Ocean Bay Villas is no stranger to friends and family buying separate units.

Mark **Belling**, president of Fifth Avenue Real Estate Marketing Ltd., says 23 per cent of their buyers were either related or friends before moving in. He cites one unlikely group of five separate buyers which included a man and woman who were previously married, as well as the woman's ex-boyfriend and her boyfriend's ex-wife.

"There's definitely a trend," says **Belling**. "It's become much more prevalent in the last five years or so."

There are several reasons, says **Belling**, including a growing preference for condominiums over single-family homes.

He says such things as spas, fitness clubs, home theatres and billiards rooms are available in condo projects and they appeal to younger buyers, who then tell their friends.

"If I were to speculate on which friends were most likely to buy like this, it's generally younger and older buyers. It (condo living) is a more accessible style of life and easier to buy into. And people tell their friends. There are also programs that provide incentives for purchasers to bring their friends."

Ocean Bay's sales manager Greg King says new buyers are excited about their purchase and it spills over. "It's contagious. It's absolutely a trend. Typically, we get 18 to 25 per cent referrals."

Belling says families of certain ethnic groups are more prone to buying additional suites in a building, citing Koreans who are buying in Surrey's Fleetwood area. "They make a point of buying two townhomes next to each other and they share the same backyard. Typically, the parents would live in one and their adult children and families in the other. There's a built-in babysitting service."

Belling says single-family developments are experiencing the trend, citing a buyer who recently bought five houses in a Surrey development for relatives and friends. "And it's not a speculative play. They're moving right in."

Debra Braid and longtime friend Doug Lazinski also bought separate suites at Ocean Bay.

"I really liked it here and I knew my friend Doug was looking," says Braid. "So he came in and bought next door."

Braid, 41, says it works out fine, especially since Lazinski and her boyfriend are good friends. "It's fantastic, because it's best to know your neighbour, someone you can trust and count on. If I have a few people over for dinner, I'll ask Doug if he wants to come over."

She says there are no negatives, but it's important friends respect each other's privacy. "You have to respect their personal space. If not, it would be like having a roommate."

Peter Simpson, chief executive officer of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association, says he's noticed the trend, citing one building with three or four cousins in adjacent condominiums.

Jason Craik, of McNeill and Craik Real Estate Solutions, says he often sees friends and family members buying separate condos in developments. In their Brava condo project in Yaletown, for example, three friends from Delta put offers on separate condos.

Partner Cameron McNeill says the practice is more common within the Asian community, although it's growing in the non-Asian community.

Illustration:

• Colour Photo: Vancouver Sun, Canwest News Service / Steve, left, and Ryan Dormer found what they wanted at Surrey's Ocean Bay Villas, where they have bought suites.

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