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There's still no place like dome

UC Davis students enjoy living in 14 fiberglass igloos built on campus in 1972.

By Bill Lindelof - Bee Staff Writer

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Prayer flags labeled "Peace," "Wisdom," "Love," "Happiness," "Courage" and "Tranquility" hang on a line outside one dome. The 14 domes are occupied by 28 University of California, Davis, students and contain a kitchen, bathroom, heater and loft at a cost of \$208 a month per renter. Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams

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In 1972, 14 fiberglass igloos, part of a post-'60s alternative living experience, were placed on a plot of land on the University of California, Davis, campus.

The domes were supposed to last only five or 10 years.

Instead of fading like patchouli oil and trippy rock posters, "the Domes" are still around -- and still admired by students a

generation removed from the dome pioneers.



"The domes are unique in physical structure," said Jonathan Woolley, a graduate student in mechanical engineering. "After living here for a while I forgot about how odd it is that the houses are domes. The coolest part is that we live in a consensus community."

So, for Woolley, the community -- where decisions are made by consensus -- is the real attraction.

"It is communal," he said. "There are nearly 30 people who are your best friends with whom you work together to make daily and long-term decisions."

"Domies," as residents are called, will gather this coming school year for a 35th anniversary celebration of the domes on the west end of the campus.

Twenty-eight students live in the 14 domes, formally called Baggins End, a nod to J.R.R. Tolkien's book "The Hobbit."

The domes have a kitchen, bathroom, a heater and a loft. The shell has 4 inches of polyurethane foam encased by the fiberglass shell.

Grassy paths wind between the tree-shrouded domes and past organic gardens, clutter, a chicken enclosure, a greenhouse, a compost pile and a common green in the center.

Prayer flags labeled "Peace," "Wisdom," "Love," "Happiness," "Courage" and "Tranquility" hang on a line outside one dome.

A potluck dinner is enjoyed four days a week by students from a variety of disciplines, such as: landscape architecture, engineering and transportation studies.

Plans are being made to erect a yurt, typically a tent on a framework of poles, for dome community meetings.

The domes cost \$208 a month per renter, said Ramona Hernandez, a UC Davis student housing manager and Baggins End liaison.

"I think this community is very much representative of the residents of Davis: sustainability, growing your own food, minimizing footprints on Earth," said Hernandez.

Danielle Fodor, a resident of the Domes, has conducted oral history interviews with 50 former residents and others.

Fodor has studied the domes for two years and is creating an audio documentary, which will be played at the dome reunion.

"Everyone I interviewed about the domes had so much heart and love for the place and the community," she said. "When they looked at the arc of their lives, living at the domes for many was the greatest experience they had at college."

Baggins End was where they created or cemented their identity, she said, and the domes continue to be a nurturing place for

people who are a little different.

"Many I talked to said they would not have graduated, finished their master's or Ph.D. if not for the domes," she said. "They said if they stopped being a student, they couldn't live at the domes anymore -- so they stayed at school."

About the writer:

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Jonathan Woolley, a graduate student, says, "The coolest part is that we live in a consensus community." Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams



The commune includes a chicken enclosure, organic gardens and a greenhouse. Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams

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