

Steve Gaarder's Bio

Steve Gaarder is an expert at creating sustainable communities, models for making the transition to a sustainable world. For the past 20 years, he has been a key player in the development of Ecovillage at Ithaca, a world-class example of earth-friendly living.

He grew up in the US and Austria, where he learned German and developed an interest in languages and cultures. He says, "Living one hour from the Iron Curtain gave me a passion for overcoming the barriers between peoples".

He participated in the first Earth Day, walking along Connecticut Avenue in Washington with a group carrying signs and wearing gas masks.

As a young man, Steve Gaarder realized that being part of a community was the right way to live. He and his family were part of a number of initiatives that, while they did not bear fruit, taught him many things that proved valuable later.

When the first residents' group for Ecovillage at Ithaca was formed, Steve got on board immediately. He drew on his previous experience and stepped into many leadership roles, committed to making this one succeed. He drafted the group's first charter, and was part of its steering committee for the entire process of developing and building the first cohousing neighborhood. This highly complex process increased his understanding hundredfold.

Settling into living in this new community, Steve worked hard to build it fabric, serving as the first president of the newly formed cooperative. Over his 15 years of residence, he has participated and led many teams essential to making the community work.

But one neighborhood of 30 houses was only the beginning of the project. As the second neighborhood was developed and built, and the third one planned, he took a leadership role in weaving the neighborhoods together into a cohesive village. Having acquired a Permaculture Design Certificate, he worked with the architects to design the site plan for an integrated village.

With the completion of the residential portion of the village in sight, Steve is already beginning to turn his attention to other ways of taking the village farther, concerning himself with developing a village economy, reducing energy and transportation footprints, and providing care for residents as they age.

With all this under his belt, Steve is inspired to share his expertise with others, as well as learn from them and their efforts in sustainability. Combining this with a yen for travel, he has visited communities and organizations around the world, speaking and discussing with them how we can live more lightly on the planet and have a better quality of life at the same time.