

## ORONOQUE VILLAGE – A Brief History

When residents began moving into Oronoque Village in 1971, most of the 304-acre development was still on the drawing board. The concept was to combine the comforts of town with the convenience of country-club living. It was a \$60-million project. How did it begin?

The Oronoque area had begun changing from apple orchards and farms to suburban dwellings during the preceding twenty years. The new Sikorsky plant on Route 110 was built in 1955 and residential homes were appearing on Prayer Spring Road and Peace Acre Lane. In the late 1960s, Oronoque Hills, a corporate partnership headed by Chris Bargas of Bridgeport, began assembling acreage that would become our condominium development. Some of the land had originally belonged to families who had shaped the growth of the area since 1685.

Bargas and his partners adopted the new “cluster concept” -- “better living on less land.” Cluster houses, built on smaller lots than conventional housing, mean that more land may be turned into common open space. Bargas engaged the San Francisco architectural firm of Walz & McLeod to design the development, with the Stratford firm of Antinozzi Associates acting as local consulting architects. The developers and the architects agreed on a basic style that would mix the New England salt box, the Swiss chalet and San Francisco modern -- with gable roofs of various pitches and siding stained in a half dozen or more natural hues.

About 140 acres were given over to an 18-hole championship golf course which would encircle the Village. It's slopes, hollows and sand traps still-water hazards throughout the 6,850-yard course were designed by the renowned golf-course architect Desmond Muirhead of Newport Beach, California. The famed golfer Gene Sarazen, a Connecticut native, served as a consultant.

Preliminary plans were filed with the Stratford Planning Commission in December 1969, and approved a month later. Oronoque Hills began doing business in the “round house” at the corner of Surrey Lane, which was built by Bargas as the development office. The construction of the golf course began in March 1971. The first models and condominiums on Algonquin Lane started in June 1970 and were ready for inspection in November of that year. Over the next six years, 929 units were built on the north and south sides of Oronoque Lane. Originally 25 separate condominium communities were established and recorded in the land records of the Town of Stratford. These communities were merged into one Association in 1978, the Oronoque Village Condominium Association; however, the deeds as recorded in the Town of Stratford records still reflect 25 separate communities. In 1979, the Oronoque Village Tax District (OVTD) was established. The OVTD encompasses the same boundaries as Oronoque Village and was formed through the foresight of the unit owners at that time to take advantage of tax benefits and the special authority accorded to municipal governments by the State. Special tax districts have existed in Connecticut since the late 1800s. Today, there are approximately 1,500 people residing in 929 units in Oronoque Village. The streets bear American Indian names and there are 17 different styles of units, all of them named for American writers. These units are Alcott(8), Cooper(28), Dickinson(9), Emerson(154), Fenimore(4), Hawthorne(67), Longfellow(2), Lowell(2), Melville(6), Millay(2), Peabody(36), Revere (5), Thoreau (284), Whitman (6), Whittier (162), Winthrop (8), and Wolcott (146).

Oronoque Village is a self-managed condominium run by an elected Board of Directors, including Executive Officers and District Representatives, each representing one of 11 Districts. The Tax District operates independently, and has Officers and a Board separate from the OVCA board. In 1989, the community Declarations were amended to allow for a 55-plus community. A variety of appointed and volunteer committees makes recommendations to the Boards. The Association employs an Executive Director to perform the duties and services necessary to operate the Village. Reporting to the Executive Director is an administrative staff and a Maintenance Director who manages a maintenance staff.

From the early planning stages, the Village was designed for environmental conservation. The four-acre lake that now forms an integral part of the back nine was once a swamp. Several minor branches of the streams which crisscross the property were diverted into mainstream channels to make the best use of the land. Utilities were placed underground and original trees preserved as much as possible. Many oak, maple, beech, hemlock, tulip and dogwood trees were saved. In time, two community buildings, three swimming pools and five all-weather tennis courts were added to the development of 55+ year old residents.

Today, the central theme of Oronoque Village remains natural beauty. The surroundings of rolling hillocks, wooded glens, tranquil ponds and towering trees still provide a haven for wildlife. A quiet walk on a summer's evening will discover busy chipmunks, a family of cottontails foraging on clover, gray squirrels everywhere. Overhead there is a chorus of tree toads and the mimicry of mockingbirds or the songs of cardinals. Doves' coos and owls' hoots are common. Hawks find plenty to eat. Ponds have their own life, too -- the steady harrumph of the bullfrog and the graceful landings of mallards, wood ducks and Canada geese. From time to time, one catches a glimpse of deer, a passing red fox or a flock of wild turkeys making their way around Oronoque Village.