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Putting the  
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# 'All About the Front Porch'

## New pocket development emphasizes neighborliness

BY LISA MACKINDER

**I**n the spring of 2016, when Dave and Shari Groendyk visited Inglenook, a pocket neighborhood in Carmel, Indiana, one thing quickly became apparent: its neighborliness.

The Groendyks, owners of Dave's Glass in Texas Corners, were there on a scouting mission to see about building a pocket neighborhood on some land they owned near their shop. As the couple strolled Inglenook's sidewalks and Shari snapped photos of houses, a resident relaxing on his porch called out to them, "Hi, can I help you?"

"And the next thing we knew, we were taking a tour of his home," says Shari.

After the tour, the three stood outside chatting when a couple of women approached them, looking for the home of someone hosting a bridal shower.



*A row of custom-designed, colorful houses, each boasting a front porch, faces an open common area in Belle Meade.*





Brian Powers

*Clockwise from top: Shari and Dave Groendyk brought the pocket neighborhood concept to Kalamazoo; from left, homeowners Wayne Cavanaugh, Julie Raedy and Liz Thirtle talk with Dan Shugars on the porch of his Belle Meade home; each home's exterior is unique: interiors of homes in Belle Meade show owners' individuality.*

"Tell me their last name," the man asked the women, says Dave. "They said 'Smith' or whatever, and the man said, 'Oh, yeah, a street down. Second house on the left.'"

Residents of pocket neighborhoods know the surrounding houses by the families that live in them, Dave explains, not by their street addresses — and that's the point. Neighbors actually know each other.

"It's all about community," Dave says.

### **Porches are a must**

That visit was enough to compel the Groendyks and five other investors to develop Belle Meade, a new pocket neighborhood in Texas Corners.

The idea isn't necessarily new. A similar concept to the pocket neighborhood was used in the historic Radburn development in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The original concept there, "the Radburn design," was based on English "garden city" models and involved an entire town, but bankruptcy of the city housing corporation left the project incomplete, according to the website of the PBS station WTTW. The neighborhood that was developed, however, with homes facing shared common areas, was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2005, according to the Radburn Association's website.



Fast forward almost a century and the idea has been reborn, but is now called a pocket neighborhood. Ross Chapin, owner of Ross Chapin Architects in Langley, Washington, coined the term to describe a neighborhood where there are “nearby neighbors coming together around a shared space.”

“Pocket neighborhoods are set up in little pods,” Dave explains. “You have five houses facing five houses and common space in between.”

At Belle Meade, the occupants of a pod’s 10 houses decide collectively how to utilize their common space. They might, for example, decide to construct a gazebo or fire pit or plant a flower or vegetable garden. Another characteristic that distinguishes a pocket neighborhood from typical housing developments is design — it’s not a “cookie cutter” kind of place. The houses’ exterior designs, which highlight front porches, are throwbacks to the 1920s or 1930s, Shari says.

“It’s all about the front porch,” Dave says. “It’s all about being neighborly.”

As for the pocket neighborhood in Texas Township, another thing that distinguishes it is its colorfulness. “We encourage color — bright,

vivid colors,” Shari says. “There’s always a need for a white house and a gray house, but we love it when they (the homeowners) do things outside the box and choose a soft blue or yellow or red or something like that.”

### *An intriguing concept*

A decade ago, Shari first learned of pocket neighborhoods while reading a story about them in *Parade* magazine and was immediately intrigued. But other distractions kept her interest at bay.

“I had kind of stepped away from the business (Dave’s Glass) a little bit because our grandkids were starting to go into day care,” Shari explains. “So my job was to pick up whichever one of the four’s turn it was to get picked up.”

Shari says she anticipated being the only grandma picking up children, but in reality “it was mainly grandparents that were picking up the kids.” While talking with those other grandparents, Shari learned that many had relocated from Chicago or the east side of the state to help their children raise their grandchildren.

“I just thought, ‘What’s it like for them?’” Shari says. “How do they meet people?”

Pocket neighborhoods kept popping into her thoughts. “By having houses facing houses, with the sidewalk and everything in between — that’s how you get to know people,” she says.

### *From research to reality*

In 2015, the Groendyks began researching the idea of building a pocket neighborhood in Texas Township, on 10 acres of land they had purchased in the 1980s. They developed Texas Corners Plaza on the front of the property, and, Dave says, they could have built more businesses, but they believed a pocket neighborhood would better serve the community. Belle Meade is a 55-year-olds-and-up community, Shari says, although a HUD law requires that 20 percent of the development’s residents be under that age.

The Groendyks gathered a group of like-minded individuals as investors: Steve Bosch, owner of Bosch Architecture Engineering Interior Design; Larry Loeks, of DeLoof Construction Inc.; Jeff Scheffers, of Visser Construction; and two silent partners.

Texas Township is one of the fastest-growing townships in the state — its population has grown 17 percent since 2010, according



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Larry and Lorrie Loeks chat with Belle Meade neighbor Tony Truelove.

to U.S. Census Bureau data — and the community needs more housing, Dave says, especially for township residents who want to downsize but don't want to leave the area. The Groendyks themselves fit into this category.

"We are so intrinsically a part of this community," Shari says. "We're both on committees over at the township. I do the elections. He's on the DDA (Downtown Development Authority). We don't want to leave our community. This is our home."

### Like-minded neighbors

Wayne and Cheryl Cavanaugh, who moved into Belle Meade in August, formerly lived in a home on 12 wooded acres in the township. They loved the rural lifestyle, Wayne Cavanaugh says, but, upon becoming empty nesters, realized their "nest was way too big." The couple looked at condos and townhouses but didn't want to share walls with neighbors and weren't into the cookie-cutter appearances those developments tended to have.

"We wanted something that we could put our own stamp on," Cavanaugh says.

On a business trip to Portland, Oregon, Cavanaugh heard about pocket neighborhoods, drove through one and fell in love with it. The Cavanaugh's started researching pocket neighborhoods, he says, and were surprised to find one was under development only three miles from their house.

"The variety of house sizes, the old-time feeling of an active neighborhood, owning a custom home and small yard without the labor and time (the association handles this) and being nestled in our great little village of Texas Township was too intriguing to resist," Cavanaugh says.



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## From Dave's Glass to Belle Meade, the Groendyks are an enterprising family

In April 1978, when Dave Groendyk approached his wife, Shari, about starting their own glass business, he was met with a bit of resistance — Shari thoroughly enjoyed her occupation at the time as a reference librarian at the Kalamazoo Public Library.

"He dragged little Shari kicking and screaming out of the library," she jokes, laughing. "We started our business, and the rest is history."

Dave learned about the glass business working alongside his father, Henry Groendyk, who was a foreman at the former Koerts Paint & Glass, on Portage Street in downtown Kalamazoo. After working there for 10 years, Dave realized that they could operate their own glass business.

"We had nothing (monetarily)," Shari says. "But we both have work ethic and we know how to persevere. I mean we're just persistent, disciplined people."

The couple started Dave's Glass inside of a garage and, after that, rented a farmer's storage building. Their big business break came because of an act of nature.

"It's sad to say it," Shari says, "but it was the tornado of 1980."

To replace all of the broken glass in area buildings, the couple, along with Dave's dad, worked 20 hours a day seven days a week from May 14 until the end of November of that year, replacing glass damaged by the tornado. They also hired temporary workers to do some of the carrying and cleanup.

"The economy at that time was in a recession," Shari says, "and there were men in trucks driving around town asking if they could be hired."

On weekends, the Groendyks' children, then-6-year-old Derek and then-4-year-old Stephanie would tag along "to be helpful in small ways." "Maybe that's when they began to learn a work ethic," Shari jokes.

Eventually, Dave's Glass rented a building at Texas Corners that had housed a hardware store and needed much repair and renovation.



The Groendyks, clockwise from bottom left: Shari, Dave, Derek and Erica on the glass staircase in the showroom of Dave's Glass.

When Dave brought Shari to view the space, she was not pleased.

"He took me down there to that spot and I just thought, 'Is this what we've come to?'" she says, grimacing. "It was so depressing. It was horrible!"

But she pushed past her initial reluctance, and they "begged and borrowed" enough money to purchase the building and renovate, Dave says. Dave's Glass remained in that building for 30 years, until last January, when the company moved into a brand new building behind Texas Corners Plaza. Their son, Derek Groendyk, runs the business now with wife, Erica Groendyk, who helps in the showroom and handles the bookkeeping.

"It's been a great ride," Shari says, admitting that's why she and Dave haven't quite been able to fully retire yet. Then she chuckles and says of Derek and Erica, "Sometimes I'm sure they're also thinking, 'Why don't they go away now?'"

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The Cavanaughs say they like having so many businesses and recreational opportunities within walking distance, including restaurants, fitness centers, physician offices, dog grooming and the Al Sabo Preserve. "While we have all this access, we are tucked into our own private and quiet little enclave surrounded by tall evergreens," Cavanaugh says.

*An aerial view showing the Belle Meade development which includes a clubhouse with a pool, seen adjacent to the development on the bottom right.*

So far, 10 houses have been built in Belle Meade, with a total of 48 houses planned. House sizes range from 1,200 to 1,800 square feet of living space, and all of the houses have basements. The homes' *(continued on page 31)*

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