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Geranium Homes invited homeowners to select plants and flowers and get gardening tips from experts at its Cardinal Point development in Stouffville.



Says homeowner Ken Mineault, "It's a great way to pull people together. Everyone around you, they're all your neighbours. And if you have the courage and the desire, you can extend your hand: 'Hi, I'm Ken. I'm at 15 over there.' All of a sudden, you have eight or nine different households sitting together on the grass and talking. It's a nice way to build that community spirit."

Empire Communities, a noted

builder of sustainable communities, put their own green spin on a similar affair. The garden experts they invited shared landscape plans employing drought-tolerant and native plantings with the residents. Empire has dubbed their eco-themed events "Meet and Greens" to reflect the builder's commitment to the environment and support their buyers' dedication to sustainable living.

Heathwood Homes gave home-

owner Sara Afonso and her family their first taste of community events before they even moved into the Traditions development in Milton: at AutumnFest, a barbecue and family day at the local park.

"That's where we actually met a lot of our neighbours for the first time. It was nice because we had a bit of a connection with them before we moved in," Afonso says.

She lists off just a handful of the dozens of events the builder has

hosted since then, from yoga classes and book clubs for adults to karate lessons, visits from Santa, family movie nights and Camp Heathwood - two weeks of fun-filled afternoons for the local children - and even a dog-grooming session. And all, she notes, at no charge.

The events take place in the sales centre activity room, says Bob Finnegan, Heathwood's COO of Housing. The space was created with these community-building

events in mind. "Bottom line - in a community like this, you've got construction, you've got no grass, the roads are still a mess. It's a great haven for people to get away from that. And they get to meet their neighbours - I'm sure friendships develop that otherwise might not have."

Afonso confirms it with a chuckle. "The kids all seem to know each other. My four-year-old, I'll take her to the park and she'll say, 'I'm going to go play with my friend' - and I don't even know that friend. But she knows everybody."

Even condominiums are jumping on the events bandwagon, says Richard Luciani, of the Ontario Home Builders Association. Some condos host wine tastings and invite in local chefs, he says. Others bring in squash pros or personal trainers to share workout tips.

"They're calling themselves communities, not just buildings," Luciani says.

It takes time to shape a neighbourhood, put a face on it, bring it to life. But when home builders concentrate on building community spirit as well as homes, the time flies.

