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Special points of interest:

- Public Officials in St. Albans and North Clarendon go to bat for park residents. See pages 1 and 2
- Derby woman escapes Greentree, the Interest Rate Monster. Check out page 3 for her story
- The MHP gives out its first Sleaze Award. Go to page 4 to learn his identity

CVOEO Mobile Home Project

THE MOBILIZER

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All Victories Big and Small *-A Note from the Director*

All victories big and small deserve celebrating. That's the goal of this issue of the MHP newsletter – to let you know about some of the good work happening all over the state. As you'll see, there's much to cheer about.

But of course, there's still much to be done. Too many parks are not safe, healthy places to live. Too many residents are locked into sky-high interest rates. Too few residents are connected to the growing statewide network of park residents. And most important of all, too few residents speak out when their rights are being abused.

It is my belief that this is a time of great hope for the mobile home community. Park issues are being discussed in the media (see link below) and amongst elected officials. The increased visibility is an opportunity to fight for improvements that make mobile home parks more livable and sustainable.

Please get in touch with us to share your ideas or views.

--- Tim Ashe

P.S. For some recent media coverage, go to:
http://www.sevendaysvt.com/features/2005/a_place_to_call_mobile_home/
or:
<http://www.equaltimeradio.com/mp3/823mobile.mp3>

Applying (Water) Pressure in St. Albans

ST. ALBANS—When their water pressure slowed to a trickle, residents of Brierwood MHP in St. Albans knew something had to be done. Several residents contacted the Mobile Home Project and together we developed a strategy to force the park owners into compliance with the law.

Our intervention with St. Albans city officials was successful, and they ultimately ordered the park owners to repair the water lines in order to restore adequate pressure. Great improvement has been noticed in the affected portion of the park, and the park owners are on notice for the future that the residents have rights that must be honored.

Special thanks from the park's thirty households go to Director of Public Works Al Robtoy, Town Health Officer Jim Fitzgerald, and City Manager Mary Garceau. They really came through for park residents. As a team, they win the MHP Public Official of the Month Award for October 2005.

Shelburnewood Residents Make a Deal

SHELBURNE—The Shelburnewood Residents Association announced in October that an initial contract has been signed to preserve their housing in the Shelburnewood Mobile Home Park in Shelburne. The agreement, signed by Housing Foundation, Inc. (HFI) and park owners Marvin and Sue Thomas, details the goals that must be met to reach a closing on the park.

"We are thrilled that both sides have reached an agreement," said Vicki Carleton, the residents' Board President. "We've worked very hard to get to this milestone, and appreciate all the support we've received so far from community members. But we still have a long road ahead as we try to get the funding in place to close on the deal."



The LaPlatte River winds through Shelburnewood

Shelburnewood residents learned this past February that the Thomases wished to sell the mobile home park, and quickly became organized to consider purchasing the park themselves. When a mobile home park goes on the market, Vermont law gives park residents the first opportunity to buy the park directly or to select a non-profit organization to purchase the park on their behalf. Residents elected to work with HFI at an association meeting in the spring.

"We live in a great neighborhood and hope to keep it that way for a long time to come," resident Board Secretary Dimitry Krementsov added. "I look forward to the day we close so we can all celebrate a win-win for this community."

If You Live in a Non-Profit Park ... READ THIS!!!

USDA Rural Development has *one percent loans* available for mobile home repairs. Only homes in non-profit parks or on private land are eligible. Residents in eligible parks may receive a loan up to \$7,500, while homeowners on their own land can receive up to \$20,000.

If you are performing needed repairs and need to borrow money, **you will not find a better deal than this**. Contact the Mobile Home Project to see if you are eligible, or with any questions.

Vermont's Own Erin Brockovich?

NORTH CLARENDON—Whispering Pines MHP has had a tough decade. Water quality, septic trouble, blasting from the adjacent quarry. Current residents have endured many hardships to stay in their homes.

Quotable

“Would you drink this water?”

- Roxanne Phelps, to park owner's lawyer, while holding jar of murky Whispering Pines tap water

New hope has emerged for park inhabitants in the form of Town Health Officer Roxanne Phelps. Town Health Officers are often the first line of defense for park residents, investigating complaints equipped with authority to demand health and safety improvements. Residents know, though, that the quality of health officers varies from town to town.

Roxanne, with her assistant Chuck Davis, has brought optimism back to Whispering Pines. Committed to ensuring adequate quality of life, Roxanne has aggressively pushed the park owners into compliance. This has resulted in regular water tests, rapid-response to septic complaints, identifying dangerous trees, and urging town officials to consider the link between the quarry blasting and foundation problems.

For too long, Whispering Pines drifted along, slowly decaying. While the future is still unknown, with Roxanne's help it will certainly be an improvement on the recent past. She is the recipient of the MHP Public Official of the Month Award for September 2005.

Um...Yes...The Park Sale Law Applies to You Too

FAIR HAVEN—When the Mobile Home Project learned that the Bletz MHP in Fair Haven was for sale, we were a bit surprised. That’s because the owner failed to notify the state (as they are required to) and to give the residents the opportunity to consider purchasing the park themselves. We intervened, and the DHCA put Mr. Bletz on notice that he was disobeying the law.

Undeterred, the park owner scoffed at the law, continued to try to sell the park and went so far as to threaten with eviction the tenant who brought the shady dealings to light. We are happy to report that the collaborative efforts of the MHP, DHCA, and residents at last pressured the park owner into compliance with state laws.

This small victory isn’t going to single-handedly change the landscape for mobile home park residents, but it is an example of the need for residents to speak up when they think their rights are being violated. We can all work together to make sure **no one gets away with breaking the law.**

To read Vermont’s Mobile Home Park law, go to:
<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/sections.cfm?Title=10&Chapter=153>

Resident Escapes Greentree, Saves Many Hundreds a Year

DERBY—The Mobile Home Project helps hundreds of individuals each year address challenges relating to their mobile homes. The most frequent problem for mobile home park residents is sky-high interest rates. Just the mention of Conseco or Greentree sends people running for cover.



Greentree/Conseco spits high interest rates at VT mobile home owners

Residents in non-profit parks, however, have a possible escape route. The Vermont Housing Finance Agency has a refinancing program for people living in non-profit parks or on “owned land.” For those eligible, this program saves a great deal of money and is very easy to apply for.

What does this look like in real life? We recently received a call from a single woman living in the Derby MHP, which is owned by HFI, a non-profit. The resident (we’ll call her Jane) was locked into an agreement with Greentree at a 12.25% interest rate. After discussing Jane’s situation, MHP staffer Dorothy Liftig concluded that Jane should be eligible to refinance with VHFA. With our help, Jane successfully refinanced and lowered her interest rate to 7.5%.

In these times of high gas and heating costs, the hundreds of dollars Jane is saving each year with her new interest rate will come in handy.

Moss and Mold Threaten Roof, Local Vets Come to Rescue

BENNINGTON—A senior citizen at the 100 Mountain View Rd MHP in Bennington (we’ll call her Mary) had a little problem that was becoming a big problem. Roughly half of Mary’s roof was in constant shade because of the tree canopy. As a result, the roof was nearly always damp and in time moss and mold took over, slowly spreading across the roof. The roof of a mobile home is essential to the well-being of the rest of the home, so it was critical to clean the roof before the real damage began.

Mary is on a fixed income. Rising prescription and fuel costs left her without the money to hire a roofing company. When Mary called the Mobile Home Project, we promised to find a solution. But when we started calling Bennington-area agencies who might have resources, we heard the same refrain: “We’re out of funds for the year.”

Then MHP staff remembered that Mary’s deceased husband was a WWII veteran, and a light bulb went off in our heads. We got in touch with Michael Krizan, Commander of American Legion Post #13, and asked if one of the Legion members would be willing to volunteer to help Mary out. Shortly thereafter, a vet from Post #13 was up a ladder cleaning Mary’s roof, which is now free of muck. Many thanks, and the August 2005 MHP Public Official Award, goes to Mr. Krizan and his “veteran volunteers” for aiding the MHP in finding a creative solution to Mary’s mossy mess.

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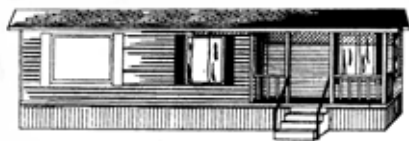
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And The Sleaze Award Goes To.....

MILTON—...Richard Mathieu, owner of Mathieu Enterprises in Westford. His company provides bus services for the Milton school district. Two weeks ago, several Birchwood Manor MHP residents tried to speak with a Mathieu driver because they felt their kids were being teased on their bus route. They were forced to leave, and have since been forbidden to escort their children on to the bus. Asked by the Burlington Free Press to comment on the situation, Richard Mathieu had the nerve to say: *"Whenever you get into a trailer park, you have discipline problems."*

This is a direct insult to the tens of thousands of Vermonters living in the state's 250 mobile home parks. Ignorant remarks like Mr. Mathieu's do no one any good.

If you are angered by his comments, do something about it. Call Richard Mathieu at 802-849-2800 and let him know that you don't like being called a "discipline problem." Or write Mr. Mathieu at Mathieu Enterprises, Route 128, PO Box 22, Westford, VT 05494.



MHP Recommendations on the Table at Governor's Commission on Mobile Homes

MONTPELIER—For the last year, the Governor's Commission on Mobile Homes has been meeting to discuss ways the state could improve life in Vermont mobile home parks. With the Commission's work nearing its end, it is developing a list of recommendations to be taken up by legislators in the upcoming legislative session.

The Mobile Home Project made ten recommendations to the Commission, and we've received mostly positive feedback from commission members. Our recommendations included:

- Giving the Department of Housing and Community Affairs meaningful enforcement powers, so residents can expect swift action when park owners violate mobile home park law
- Creating a relocation fund so residents aren't left high and dry when if/when their park closes
- Requiring park owners to have a copy of the current lease on file with DHCA to reduce the number of illegal lease terms floating around the state
- Prohibiting lot rent increases during park closures so residents aren't kicked when they're down

The MHP wishes to recognize and thank Dick Highter of Tall Timbers MHP for his excellent work representing park residents as a member of the Governor's Commission. Dick serves as a representative from the Vermont Mobile Home Owners Association, and has consistently advocated for residents from day one. It is somewhat distressing that only one resident is on the Commission. That said, Dick has really stepped up and made his and your voice heard. For more information, or to be involved when we take our recommendations to legislators, please call Tim at 802-660-3451 x107.