

FOCUS ON HOUSING



A Secure Future

Mobile Home Co-op Gets the Management It Needs

El Rio Mobile Home Park began in 1916 as a campground along the San Lorenzo River at the northern tip of Pacific Avenue. Over the years it evolved into a more conventional mobile home park for adults that provided relatively affordable housing close to the heart of the city.

"It's a little old and funky," said longtime resident Mik Hennessy, but it's clearly a place where people feel at home. One woman, for instance, spent ten years cultivating a set of vines to frame her small, older unit.

When the owner of the park put it up for sale in 1987, the 90-plus tenants were understandably

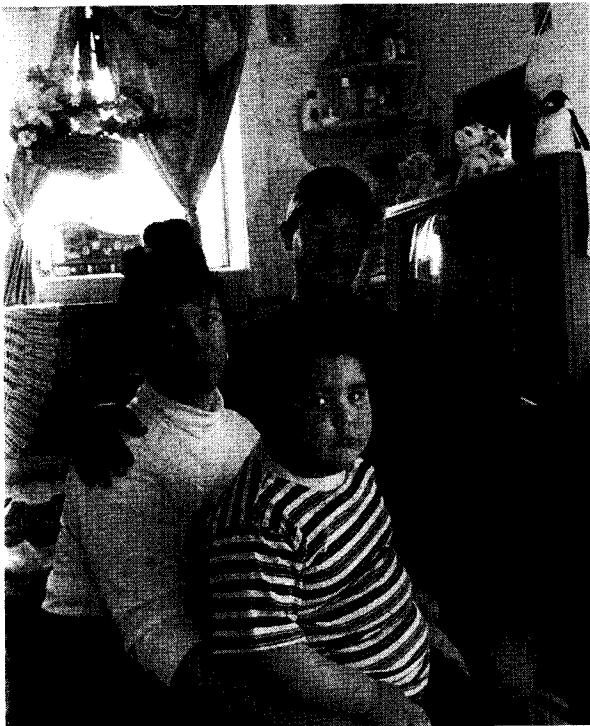
concerned about their future. They decided to form a co-op to buy and run the park themselves under common ownership.

Concerned about preserving affordable housing, the Santa Cruz City Council worked with the nonprofit Community Housing Corporation to arrange a bank loan. The loan was ob-

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A Change in Attitude

Housing Authority Makes a Difference at Labor Camp



THEY CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE: The Rochas, Jose, Maria and Jose, Jr., have noticed a change for the better since the Housing Authority took over management of San Andreas Labor Camp.

Jose and Maria Rocha, who work in the strawberry fields around Watsonville, moved to San Andreas Labor Camp in November 1995 for two reasons. The rent was less than they had been paying in the city, and Maria's mother, who lives at the camp, could help with the care of their son, Jose, now 3.

The three of them wound up sharing a small two-bedroom apartment with another family of four. At the time, the camp had management problems that ultimately led to its being placed in receivership by a superior court judge, and the tenants were aware of the shortcomings.

"Before, if you made a complaint about the maintenance, it

was either ignored or they came out and did something that made the problem worse," Jose recalled.

After the Housing Authority agreed to take over interim management of the camp last fall, things began to change.

"It's cleaner and more organized now," Jose said, sitting in the cheerfully decorated living quarters at his family's apartment. "They're making people aware that they can't leave dismantled cars and debris around. Everyone's better informed about what we have to do."

Tom Pohle, Housing Authority Technical Services Director, has been working with court-appointed receiver John W.

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New Migrant Housing

Modern Units Replace the Old at Buena Vista

Twelve more migrant farm worker families will have decent housing in the summer of 1998, following construction of a dozen new units at the Housing Authority's Buena Vista migrant housing complex

outside Watsonville.

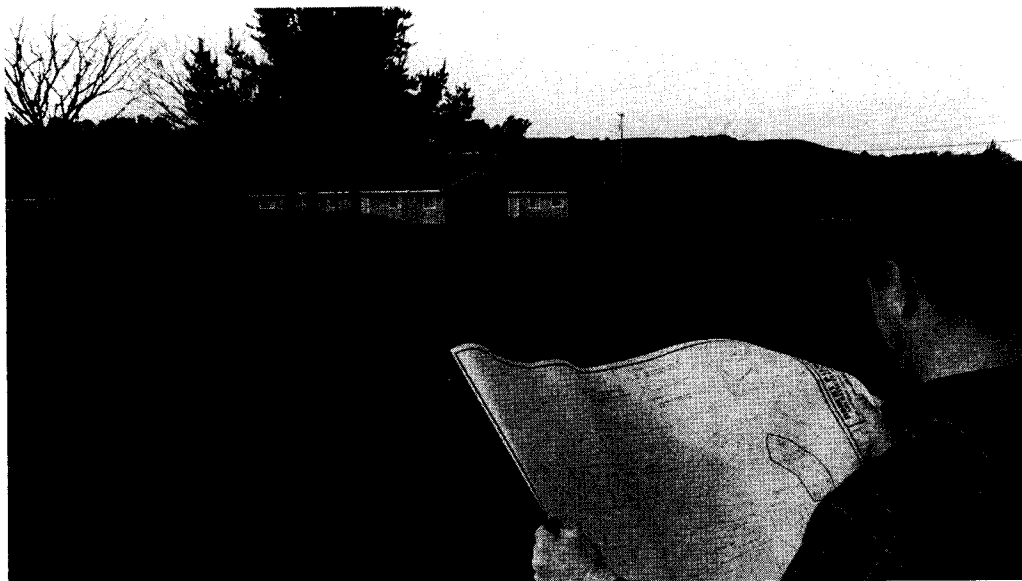
Buena Vista is open from the first weekday in May to Oct. 31 each year. In the 1970s, when units were rented to the first qualified tenants, it was common for long lines to form along

Harkins Slough Road outside the gate in late April. Now, tenants from the previous year get first claim on the units, so the number available to new renters each year is fairly small.

"There are only four or five vacancies every year, and we have 135 to 140 people applying for them," said Ruth DeRollo, Housing Management Director. "That gives you an idea of the extent of the need."

The six two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units will be built by Watsonville Construction, with construction expected to begin in late February and take six months.

Funding for the new units was provided by the Office of Migrant Services, an agency of the state's Department of Housing and Community Development.



PLANS TO EXPAND: Project Manager Jon Sisk stands near where 12 new migrant housing units will be built at Buena Vista Camp, bringing the total available to 103.

High Performer

Housing Authority Operations Get Top Grade

The Housing Authority of the County of Santa Cruz has been rated a "high performer" by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The San Francisco HUD office, which monitors 33 different housing authorities in its region, rated Santa Cruz County among the top seven. The ratings are based on a comprehensive review of operations, ranging from maintenance to rent collection to finance and budget controls.

In essence, this means that the Housing Authority has been maintaining its properties well and responding promptly to problems; that its screening process has resulted in responsible tenants who pay their rent on time; and that the operation as a whole is well-run and in good shape.

HUD developed the rating categories as a way of better managing its own resources. Based on the rankings, HUD can devote more time to housing authorities with evident problems and less

to those, such as Santa Cruz County, with a proven track record of good management.

For instance, the "high performer" designation means the Housing Authority will be able to let contracts and make changes in them more quickly, and will have to file some reports annually, rather than quarterly.

"This means we can spend more time doing direct services to people," as opposed to filling out reports for HUD," said Development Director Sue Hoge.

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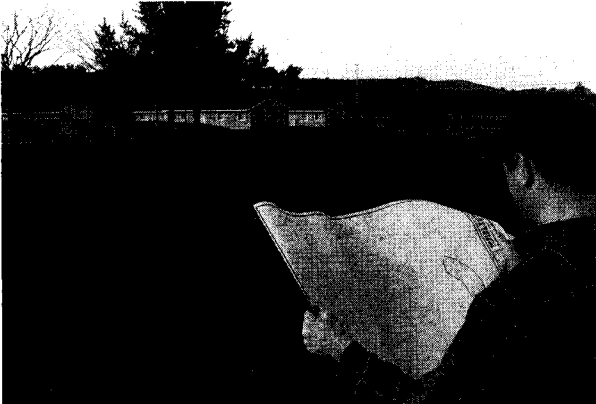
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PLANES PARA CONSTRUIR: El administrador del proyecto, Jon Sisk, cerca de donde 12 nuevas unidades de vivienda para trabajadores migratorios serán construidas en el Campamento Buena Vista, completando un total de 103 viviendas disponibles.

Nuevas viviendas para trabajadores

Modernas unidades reemplazan las viejas en Buena Vista

Otras doce familias de trabajadores migratorios tendrán vivienda decente en el verano de 1998, después de la construcción de doce nuevas unidades en el com-

plejo de viviendas para trabajadores migratorios Buena Vista de la Autoridad de Viviendas a las afueras de Watsonville.

Buena Vista está abierto desde la primera semana de mayo al 31 de octubre cada año. En la década de los 70, cuando las unidades se alquilaban a los primeros inquilinos calificados, era normal ver largas colas a lo largo de Harkins Slough Road a las puertas del complejo a finales de abril. Ahora, los inquilinos del año anterior tienen prioridad para ocupar las unidades, por lo que el número de ellas disponible para nuevos inquilinos es muy bajo.

"Sólo hay cuatro o cinco vacancias por año y tenemos de

135 a 140 personas solicitándolas", dijo Ruth DeRollo, Directora de Administración de Viviendas. "Eso nos da una idea de la necesidad que hay."

Las doce unidades, seis de dos recámaras y seis de tres, serán construidas por Watsonville Construction; se espera que la construcción comience a fines de febrero y que lleve seis meses.

Los fondos para las nuevas unidades fueron provistos por la Oficina de Servicios Migratorios, una agencia estatal del Departamento de Viviendas y Desarrollo de la Comunidad.

Un cambio de actitud

La Autoridad de Viviendas hace sentir la diferencia en el campamento laboral

José y María Rocha, que trabajan en los campos de fresas en los alrededores de Watsonville, se mudaron al Campamento Laboral San Andreas en noviembre de 1995 por dos razones. El alquiler era más bajo que el que pagaban en la ciudad y la madre de María, que vive en el campamento, podía ayudarles a cuidar a su hijo, José, que tiene ahora 3 años.

Los tres terminaron compartiendo un pequeño apartamento con otra familia de cuatro. En ese momento el campamento tenía problemas de administración, que últimamente llevaron a que

la corte superior lo pusiera bajo administración judicial y los inquilinos estaban al tanto de los problemas que existían.

Antes, si uno presentaba una queja sobre el mantenimiento, o la ignoraban o venían a arreglar lo que fuera y lo empeoraban," recuerda José.

Después que la Autoridad de Viviendas consintió a hacerse cargo de la administración interina del campamento el otoño pasado, las cosas comenzaron a cambiar.

"Ahora está más limpio y más organizado," dijo José, sentado en la sala del apartamento

de su familia, alegremente decorada. "Le están haciendo ver a la gente que no se puede dejar carros desmantelados y basura por todas partes. Todos estamos más informados sobre lo que tenemos que hacer."

Tom Pohle, Director de Servicios Técnicos de la Autoridad de Viviendas, ha estado trabajando con el administrador judicial nombrado por la corte, John W. Richardson, para preparar una larga lista de mejoras al campamento y para determinar cuáles se pueden llevar a cabo en los meses que vienen. La meta es

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'Un sueño hecho realidad'

Con un hogar en Merrill Place la familia se siente arraigada

Cuando Maxine y Lloyd Barnes llegaron a Santa Cruz a principios de la presente década se dedicaron a mejorar la vida de su familia y a contribuir a la comunidad.

Lloyd consiguió empleo como cajero en el mercado Safeway del oeste de Santa Cruz, pasó luego a la panadería para aprender lo que esperaba que un día le permitiera comenzar su propio negocio. Inspirado por su fe religiosa se ofreció como clérigo voluntario para ayudar a jóvenes de la prisión del condado. Maxine, ex maestra, cuidó a sus niños: Patina de 13 años, Tabeal de 19 meses y Othniel, bebé.

A pesar de sus esfuerzos estaban pensando en irse de la zona por la dificultad de encontrar una vivienda que pudieran alquilar.

"Estábamos viviendo en uno de los peores parques de trailers del condado y no era buen ambiente para la familia", dijo Lloyd. "Estábamos luchando para salir adelante".

Por medio de un compañero de trabajo se enteraron de la existencia de Merrill Place, un grupo de 15 viviendas para alquilar cerca de Cabrillo College, cons-

truidas por la Autoridad de Viviendas con fondos del Programa de Construcción de Viviendas de Alquiler del Estado y con créditos de impuestos federales. Se aceptaban solicitudes en ese momento y los Barnes decidieron

to como se califique. (Los Barnes son originariamente de Jamaica.) Esperan abrir su propia panadería y algún día ser propietarios de su hogar.

"Es como un sueño hecho realidad", dijo Lloyd, mirando el



UN LUGAR AL QUE LLAMAR HOGAR: Maxine y Lloyd Barnes frente a su casa en Merrill Place, con sus hijos, de izquierda a derecha: Patina, Tabeal y Othniel.

probar su suerte.

Aceptados para una de las unidades, se mudaron el otoño pasado y ahora se sienten arraigados en la comunidad. Maxine se convirtió en ciudadana americana en septiembre y Lloyd espera hacerlo tan pron-

nuevo hogar de la familia. "Le estamos muy agradecidos a la gente que trabajó día y noche para hacer esta casa. Siento como si alguien nos estuviera abrazando y diciéndonos 'Los aprecio y los cuidaré'."

Un cambio de actitud Continuación de la página anterior

poner el campamento en condiciones lo suficientemente buenas como para poder hallar un comprador responsable que desee

comprarlo.

"Es cuestión de equilibrio," dijo el Sr. Pohle. "Trataremos de arreglar las cosas que puedan

tener más impacto, considerando los fondos limitados que tenemos."

'A Dream Come True'

With a Home at Merrill Place, Family Feels Rooted

When Maxine and Lloyd Barnes came to Santa Cruz County in the early 1990s, they set about making a better life for their family and contributing to the community.

Lloyd got a job as a checkout clerk at the Safeway in West Santa Cruz, then moved into the bakery to learn skills he hoped would one day enable him to start his own business. Inspired by his religious faith, he volunteered as a youth minister at county detention facilities. Maxine, a former teacher, took care of their children, daughter Patina, 13, and sons Tabeal, 19 months, and infant Othniel.

But for all their efforts, they were on the verge of leaving the area because of the difficulty of finding affordable housing.

"We were living in one of the worst trailer parks in the county, and the setting wasn't right for the family," Lloyd said. "We were struggling."

Through a co-worker they learned about Merrill Place, a 15-unit cluster of rental townhouses near Cabrillo College, built by the Housing Authority with funds from the State Rental Housing Construction Program and feder-



A PLACE TO CALL HOME: Maxine and Lloyd Barnes in front of the Merrill Place townhouse with children, from left, Patina, Tabeal and Othniel.

al tax credits. Open applications were being taken, and the Barneses decided to give it a try.

Accepted for one of the units, they moved in last fall and now feel rooted in the community. Maxine became a U.S. citizen in September, and Lloyd expects to do the same as soon as he's eligible. (The Barneses are originally from Jamaica.) They're looking forward to starting their

own bakery business and eventually becoming home owners.

"This is like a dream come true," said Lloyd, looking around the family's new home. "We are really grateful to the people who labored night and day to make this house possible. I feel an embracing hand, embracing us and saying, 'I love you, and I care.'"

A Change in Attitude Continued from Page 1

Richardson to prepare a long list of improvements to the camp and determine which can be made in the months ahead. The

goal is to get the facility in good enough condition that a responsible buyer can be found for it.

"It's a real balancing act,"

Pohle said. "We're going to try to do the items that will have the most impact, given the limited funding."

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tained, and the residents took over the park in 1988, many of them becoming home owners for the first time.

It turned out to be more than they bargained for. "We thought we could run the place like one

big family," said Hennessy, a member of the co-op board, "but we found we were not able to efficiently manage it. There was a lot of complicated work to do, and we suffered from turnover and inconsistency."

The typical rent is \$245 a month, half of which is supposed to cover repayment of the bank loan. But the residents got another financial shock when it turned out that infrastructure improvements to bring the park up to code would cost \$600,000.

At the instigation of the city, the Housing Authority was brought in on a consulting basis to evaluate the situation two years ago. Its appraisal resulted in a detailed manual on how to

run the park and led the co-op board to conclude that it needed professional management help.

After talking with several property management agencies, the board found itself gravitating toward the Housing Authority, with which it had established a good working relationship. The result: A contract should soon be signed for the management of the park under the direction of the co-op board, with the Housing Authority assuming those duties shortly.

"It's the best thing we could do to insure the long-term viability of the park," said Hennessy. "The stability the Housing Authority represents enables us to look at our future with more security."



A SPECIAL PLACE: El Rio, one of only three mobile home parks in the City of Santa Cruz, provides affordable housing near the downtown for about 90 people.



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