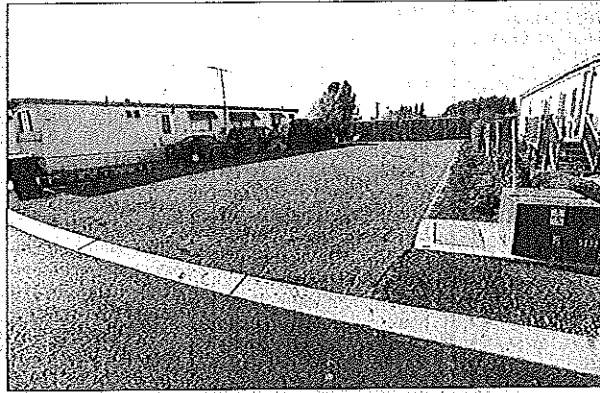


New horizon burns bright

Victor Manor mobile home park reborn in new glory



Marcus Larson/News-register

Top: Located in the middle of the mobile home park, a plot of green grass serves as a play area for children. Residents hope one day to have some playground equipment, as well. Above: While friend Garry Barnes holds a piece of wood, home owner Elias Montemayor cuts it to the right length. Montemayor was helping build a deck entrance to his mobile home as required by the city.

By STARLA POINTER
Of the News-Register

Residents of Booth Bend Road's Horizon Homeowners Cooperative are thankful for many things this year — paved streets, better utility lines, newly planted maple trees and a host of other upgrades that have transformed their mobile home park.

But most of all, they are thankful for a safe, close-knit neighborhood in which to raise their children. After all, "This was mostly for the kids," said Elias Montemayor, who is putting the

finishing touches on new porches outside his single-wide unit.

Montemayor and most of the residents moved to Horizon, then called Victor Manor, long before the recent improvements. They remember potholes in the roads and aging trees that threatened to topple in windstorms like the one that blew through Mac over the weekend.

They also remember receiving notices warning the land under them was about to be sold for redevelopment. That would have meant moving their units

elsewhere — assuming those units were up to such a move, space could be found in a park elsewhere and that park would accept older units like theirs.

Then residents formed a cooperative and bought the land themselves. They borrowed the money from ShoreBank Enterprise Cascadia, a certified non-profit community development institution.

CASA of Oregon, the Oregon Housing and Community Services agency, the City of McMinnville, former owner Les

Toth and many donors, including local nurseries, all pitched in to make what seemed an impossible dream become a live possibility and eventually a fairy tale reality.

The Horizon Homeowners' Cooperative became the first mobile home park in Oregon to undergo a successful transition to resident ownership.

"It's a pretty empowering thing to be involved not only in the purchase of a home, but also

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Horizon

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the whole redevelopment," said Rose Mary Ojeda of CASA. "The members were involved throughout the entire redevelopment. They had a lot of decision-making and a lot of learning about the construction process, governance and leadership."

According to Montemayor, they are grateful to everyone who helped with the process.

"This feels great, like an early Christmas present," he said. "The homes are set, they're very comfortable and we can have people over."

When they bought the park, residents knew they wanted to make it a great place to live again — and they would have to in order to satisfy the note holders. So in October 2008, they launched a year-long upgrade.

Today, improvements are apparent even before you enter the park. In fact, there's a new entrance, and it's slightly off Booth Bend, avoiding direct entry onto such a busy road.

Street lights now illuminate a paved main road through the park. New electrical, water and sewer lines are in place.

Each home has a paved driveway. Each has a small yard or garden out back. And the park's many children have a grassy common area where they can play.

Montemayor said residents are seeking donations with which to buy some simple play equipment — say a swing set and some benches. Everything seems possible, given the strides they have already made.

The commons was dedicated at Horizon's grand opening in October. After

the speeches and congratulations, residents dined together on food catered by a Mexican restaurant, then danced in the street to music from a live band.

"Very happy people," Montemayor recalled. They are people who care about one another, he said, noting, "It's like a family neighborhood."

Residents are keeping a collective eye on their children and neighborhood these days. An official Neighborhood Watch group has been created, in addition to an official Homeowners' Association. And the park has been enclosed with a nice new fence.

"We are very alert," Montemayor said. "If there's a strange car, we look at it twice."

"We have rules and regulations. And we appreciate that the police will come in if there are speeders or other problems."

There are 30 spaces in the park. Just over two-thirds are filled.

Several more families have applied for spaces. They have passed criminal background checks and are now seeking affordable homes, hoping to pick up units in need of relocation at little or no cost.

Montemayor said he and the other residents are on the lookout for such homes, because they want to see the park fill up.

Many of the existing homes were shifted into different spaces during the renovation. Montemayor's single-wide, for instance, was moved from one side of the street to the other.

It was an exciting day, he said.

"I stayed home that day," Montemayor said. "They came and knocked on the door and I went out and took pictures as it moved. It kind of made me teary."

Seeing it shifted into its new spot was almost as exciting as having seen it moved into its original resting place after he picked it up used from Linfield College.

"That was an opportunity, to have my own place," Montemayor said. "It's a pretty good feeling."

"Maybe in the future, I will be able to buy another home. But right now, I'm comfortable with this."

As winter approaches, he and other Horizon residents are working on putting the finishing touches on their homes.

"We have to bring them up to code," he explained. "Everyone has to pass code."

Some need new skirting. All need sturdy porches meeting code specifications.

Montemayor wants to add a ramp to his porch so his elderly mother can finally see the inside of his home. So far, he's only been able to show her the exterior.

"That will be so wonderful, to be able to bring her here," he said. Montemayor has already hosted his three grandchildren. Sometimes they spend a few nights with him in McMinnville, and he's proud to be able to offer them clean, safe accommodations.

"This is a safe environment, a nice little homey place," he said.