

# Napa Mobilehome Owners/ Tenants Come To Accord

A memorandum of understanding was struck last week in what was hailed as a "historic agreement" between the City of Napa mobilehome park owners and their tenants.

After almost a year of contention, the park owners and tenants have worked out an agreement that will stave off the threat of governmental rent control.

"The historic eight month process, which began in July when council members (JoAnn) Busenbark and (Harry V.) Martin held a meeting with over 300 in attendance ended this morning with the receipt of the final signature," said Ellie Hubbard, executive director of Napa County Rental Information and Mediation Services, in a press release Thursday, February 16.

Signed by 10 owners of Napa mobilehome parks, members of a tenant organization and city officials, the seven-point agreement sets operating guidelines for the parks, and included continued mediation as a key component of the accord.

Brought before a vote of the people early last year, park tenants sought to change the city charter via ballot Measure A. If passed, that measure would have paved the way for rent control in Napa's mobilehome parks.

The measure met defeat at the polls by only 200 votes. Tenants, however, were adamant about bringing it back, arguing that it was a necessary maneuver in order to get park owners to listen to tenant concerns.

In an effort to work out a compromise

special election, the Napa City Council authorized additional funds for NCRIMS involvement in the negotiations.

The expenditure was apparently worth the cost, as the parties announced the MOU.

That agreement outlined several terms including: limiting rent increases to 1 percent more than

the San Francisco Consumer Price Index, with a cap at 7 percent; and a clause stating that park owners would not raise space rents when mobilehomes sold or changed hands.

The MOU also said that park owners would break utilities out of the rent bill, and rent increase would not affect utility prices for the spaces,

unless those went up independently.

"It is the best thing I have ever seen," said Jack Newell, Sr. at the city council meeting on Tuesday, February 21. Newell, who owns two mobilehome parks in Napa, had originally been against the negotiation process, but announced at the meeting the tremendous benefit he believes has come out of the accord.

"It was amazing to me how beneficial (this) could be," said Jean Phillips, president of the mobilehome owners association. Phillips was one of the leaders in the push for the ballot measure.

A motion of appreciation for both sides of the issues was passed unanimously by the council.

"It was both the homeowner and the park owners who were willing to go to the table," said council member JoAnn Busenbark.



(From left to right) Ellie Hubbard, executive director of NCRIMS, Jack Newell, Jr., Jean Phillips, Jack Newell, Sr., and Louise Kraus, NCRIMS volunteer, congratulate each other on the success of recent negotiations on mobilehome park problems.

# 'Understanding' reached between mobile-home tenants, park owners

By SUSANNE MARTINOVICH  
Register Staff Writer

NAPA - Eight months ago, neither mobile-home residents nor mobile-home park owners thought they'd be standing before the City Council Tuesday, the subject of extreme pride and adulation.

"I thought we had a better chance of settling the baseball strike," said mobile-home park owner Jack Newell Jr.

Jack Newell Sr. called it, "The best thing I've ever seen happen in 32 years. It was the greatest. We all got a fair deal."

Owners and residents settled their differences over the management and maintenance of mobile-home parks with a memorandum of understanding, which establishes guidelines on long-standing, contentious issues.

The agreement was signed on Thursday and approved by the

council on Tuesday to much applause.

Councilmembers sent owners and residents to Napa County Rental Information and Mediation Services in July to try and work out their problems without rent control or other city intervention.

At the time, Measure A - which would have allowed mobile-home residents to appeal rent and maintenance disputes to the council - had failed in the June election by less than 200 votes.

Instead of putting the issue on the November ballot as Measure A supporters had asked, the council sent them to work out their differences. Much to everyone's surprise and pleasure, they did.

Councilmember JoAnn Busenbark, who acted as the city liaison during the eight months of mediation, said she was especially

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pleased by Newell Jr.'s comments.

"You (Newell) had a much different feeling when we started out, so your comments mean a great deal to me," said Busenbark, who noted she's seen an improvement in the upkeep of some of the parks already.

Councilmember Harry Martin said he had been working for this day for seven years.

Martin said getting the signed agreement was, "like Christmas" for him.

## Harmony Over Mobile Home Rent Control?

The June, 1994, local elections included "ballot Measure A," which, if enacted, would have repealed a provision of the City Charter provision to allow the Napa City Council discretion to pass rent control in Mobile Home Parks—an extremely controversial ballot issue. Measure A was defeated by 162 votes. The residents of Napa's mobile home parks — primarily senior citizens — wanted to put the measure back on the ballot—a costly item for the City of Napa.

To understand the reasons behind Measure A and the concerns of the mobile home park residents and owners, a Council subcommittee met with over 300 concerned mobile home park residents and owners. Several "information gathering" meetings were held in the twelve mobile home parks within the Napa city limits. The Napa County Rental Information and Mediation Services (NCRIMS) agency, lead by Executive Director Ellie Hubbard, was designated by the Council to conduct the meetings and report back on their findings.

After nearly six months of intensive outreach, an extensive report including a five-point plan of recommended solutions was presented to the Napa City Council by NCRIMS. Concurrently, the City of Napa Mobile Home Owners Association offered an eight-point plan. With the support and continued dedication of NCRIMS, a Memorandum of Understanding between

the City of Napa Mobile Home Owners Association and the City of Napa, emerged. It contains a number of provisions including the following:

- a mechanism to continue NCRIMS' mediation of any future problems that may arise in the parks;
- a program to assist "residents in need" through a private rent subsidy program;
- guidelines for rent adjustments, park maintenance and capital improvements;
- options for residents who must leave the park environment and are having difficulty, selling their mobile homes due to hardship circumstances;
- follow-up annual review of the MOU by NCRIMS;
- and follow-up meetings to discuss matters of mutual concern regarding the MOU or mobile home park issues in general.

The cooperative efforts of these groups enabled the City of Napa to avoid a costly election and brought harmony among the groups as well. A great deal of recognition is due the Napa Valley Mobile Home Park Owners Association, Napa County Rental Information and Mediation Services, the mobile home park residents and the Napa City Council who worked together to develop this outstanding and innovative model program improving the quality of life for residents of mobile home parks within the City of Napa. Contact: JoAnne Busenbark, Council Member, (707) 253-3081.