The Coalition of Mobilehome Owners

MH Life

Advocating for Mobilehome Owners

Orange County
April 2016

Volume 4 Number 4

The #1 Source of Information for Manufactured/Mobilehome Owners in California

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From The Staff MH Life Magazine

Welcome to MH Life Magazine. We are again doing a "double" month issue, i.e. April 2016 and May 2016 together to save printing and distribution costs. Please consider sending us a donation to help us to continue our important work. No need to fill out an application. Just send a check to MH Life Magazine, P.O. Box 3774, Chatsworth, CA. 91313.

Our friend Scott Hoaby, a Gardena mobilehome resident now living in North Dakota, has provided us a road map to success. Under his leadership, Gardena residents now have Rent Mediation and Arbitration Procedures in place. Congratulations Scott and the others. (See pages 4-5).

Sam Meng, our newly appointed Secretary of COMO-CAL, continues his story about the homeowners association MRA1441 and their quest to gain benefits and protections for residents in Rowland Heights MH Estates. (Pages 6-7).

The article on "Quasi-Homelessness" talks about the vulnerability of MH owners who rent the on which space their home sits and the value of resident ownership. (Pages 8-9)

We continue to promote our 36 page Handbook of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (details on page 10). It is free with a COMO-CAL membership, which also provides you an annual subscription to the Magazine. Just fill out the application on page 11 and mail it into Chatsworth.

The May issue of MH Life includes several articles of interest to the community.

- Residents in Mountain View park fear eviction, especially those who are long time residents and pay lower rents.
- An "urgency ordinance" was adopted by the Santa Clarita City Council Tuesday evening, extending the temporary ban on the conversion of senior-only into all-age mobile home parks.
- Residents in Corona are worried about increasing rents and are fighting
- Residents have a last ditch option - the Rent Strike
- COMO-CAL and MH Life Magazine are holding meetings to discuss the formation of Regional Groups
- The idea of Regional Groups is modified using MH Life Magazine
- An update on the status of GSMOL, and comments by COMO-CAL.
- A new COMO-CAL Board member - Sam Meng of Rowland Heights
- A new group is forming in Sacramento - the Sacramento Area Coalition (SAC)
- Leisure Lake HOA leaders join COMO-CAL and will help organize the high desert.

That's All Folks. The Staff of MH Life Magazine hope you enjoy these two issues. Watch for the next issue in June 2016.

MH Life

Serving California's Mobile & Manuf. Housing Communities

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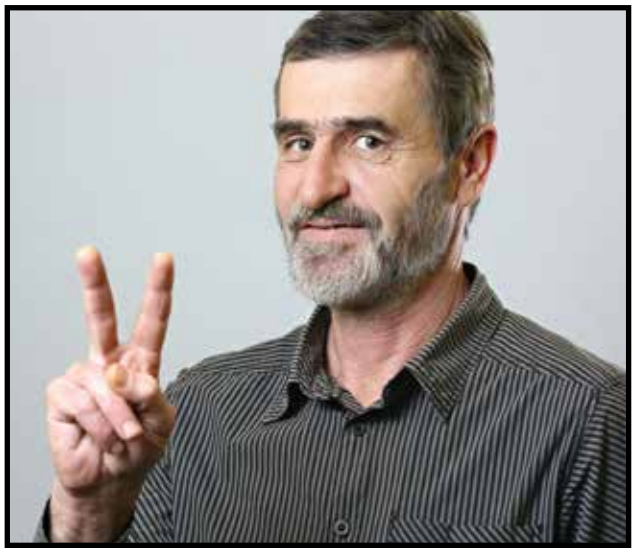
City of Gardena "How Gardena Was Won - The First Protections Since 1989."

On 8 December 2015 the city of Gardena, CA passed Ordinance 1761, which strengthened protections for mobilehome owners against excessive rent increases. It was the first increase in protections for mobilehome owners in Gardena since 1989. Here is an account of how this protection was won.

The city of Gardena has had protections in place for its renters since 1989 when it passed a set of laws enacting Rent Mediation and Arbitration Procedures. Per these laws, renters (of apartments, homes, or spaces in a mobilehome park) could ask the city to mediate between them and their landlord if they felt a rent increase was excessive. Renters had 10 business days (2 weeks) from receiving a notice of a rent increase to request mediation. If Gardena's rent mediation board could not successfully mediate between a landlord and a tenant, then either of them could request arbitration. These procedures were not as good as rent control, but they were better than no protections at all. In 2008 the city amended these procedures – it would only mediate if a renter asked and his rent went up more than 5% within a year.



By 2011, after a decade of rent increases surpassing wage and social security increases, mobilehome owners were feeling the pinch. They had less and less money after paying their space rent. So some mobilehome residents began studying Gardena's Rent Mediation & Arbitration Procedures to see what could be done and concluded that the procedures gave a significant advantage to their park owners, especially with its 5% threshold.

So in August 2011, Scott Hoaby asked the mayor of Gardena for a meeting with concerned mobilehome owners. They finally got a meeting on 6 January 2012. The dozen mobilehome owners in attendance asked that the M & A Procedures be modified. Mayor Tanaka asked the city manager for a report of rent stabilization ordinances in surrounding cities. This report, completed in March 2012, concluded among other things that the 5% threshold was excessive. However, nothing came of this.

So in September 2014, Hoaby went public. Utilizing Gardena's 3-minute oral communication, he spoke to Gardena's city council. He presented a chart showing how space rents in his mobilehome park – Gardena Villas – had increased since 2000 compared to the consumer price index (CPI). At the time, space rents in his park were about $735 per month, whereas if rents had increased per the CPI since 2000, they would have been about $475. The message: rents had gone up way faster than wages and the CPI. He then asked that Gardena: (a) rescind the 5% threshold, and (b) increase the time to ask for mediation from 10 business days to 25.

Crucially, a few years before this – In March 2010 – Frank Wodley and Hoaby organized a meeting that became the South Bay Mobilehome Residents' Alliance. Composed of concerned mobilehome owners in Carson, Gardena, Torrance, and Harbor City, it became a vital support group behind the scenes for all that would transpire in Gardena. By September 2014 they had been meeting and educating each other for over four years. With members' experiences in political participation, especially in Carson, they gave Hoaby a steady stream of sound advice and joined him at Gardena council meetings until the crucial vote in December 2015.

In October of 2014, Hoaby spoke to the Gardena City Council again, and Bill Smalley and Glenn White of the Alliance also spoke. They brought rent data and sound reasoning to further argue for the two changes that Hoaby had asked for. City council members are not allowed to act nor (generally) to comment during oral presentations, so one could not tell what the council members were thinking.

After a reprieve for the holidays, Hoaby, Smalley, and White went to the Gardena city council meeting again in January 2015 to further their case for change.

About this same time, members of the Alliance learned that Gardena had two city council seats up for a 3 March 2015 election. Candidates in Gardena typically win by margins of 400 votes or less so Gardena's five thousand or so mobilehome owners could elect their preferred candidates if they got out and voted. Hoaby contacted each of the four candidates by e-mail asking for a meeting. The objective was to identify which candidates would support mobilehome owners and then help them get elected. Three agreed to meet – Dan Medina, Mark Henderson, and Ron Ross.

Mobilehome owners from Gardena Villas and the Alliance met with Medina, Henderson, and Ross in three separate meetings. The candidates knew little about mobilehome parks, so explaining the rent dynamic was the key focus. All three candidates became very intrigued, asked good questions, and

were shocked at the loss of homes through evictions. Ross and Medina brought their wives, who also brought great comments. The Alliance deemed all three candidates worthy of support.

So Carlos Marquez, Hoaby, and members of the Alliance distributed 'get-out-and-vote' flyers to mobilehome residents in Gardena. Hoaby walked with candidates or their teams to distribute literature in neighborhoods

On 3 March, Gardena residents voted. Two of the three candidates supported by the Alliance won the two seats. The candidate who did not respond to Hoaby's request for a meeting was favored to win one of the seats because of his long-time active role in Gardena government, yet he lost. This was a huge victory for mobilehome owners.

As the race for city council had progressed, Gardena's city attorney had been busy drafting an ordinance to adopt the two changes that Hoaby had requested. On 10 March 2015 the city presented Ordinance 1761 (containing the changes) at a city council meeting. People widely believed the city council would vote on it at the next city council meeting on 24 March. However, a representative of park owners explained to the city council they had just learned of the ordinance and needed time to study it. So Mayor Tanaka granted them 60 days. The real fight had now begun.

On 23 March the Dowdall law firm representing park owners filed a long objection to Ordinance 1761. Claiming the ordinance and Gardena's arbitration procedure were unconstitutional, it issued a veiled threat to sue the city: If you withdraw the ordinance, we will remove our objections. Gardena's city attorney, Peter Wallin, sent a copy of Dowdall's objection to Hoaby asking for comments from him and his contacts. Hoaby's contacts were mainly members of the Alliance, which included Mary Jo Baretich of GSMOL. None of these contacts were attorneys. However, they researched relevant court cases and the law, and together discussed how to respond.

Hoaby then provided a two-page response to Dowdall's objection to Wallin in April 2015, along with copies of relevant court cases. The response argued that Hoaby's two items in the Ordinance were a separate issue from Dowdall's claim of unconstitutionality with arbitration. It argued and showed that Hoaby's two items in the Ordinance were constitutional, but acknowledged there might be an issue of constitutionality with Gardena's arbitration procedure as Dowdall claimed.

In June 2015, City Attorney Wallin scheduled a meeting on August 24 requesting the attendance of both park owners' and mobilehome owners' representatives. The stated purpose was to find common ground between the two sides.

At the August 25 meeting, to the surprise of the mobilehome owners' representatives – Smalley, Jane Osuna, Smalley, and Hoaby – Wallin presented an updated Ordinance. It contained the two basic items Hoaby had asked for, and it fixed the issue of unconstitutionality with the arbitration procedures. All in attendance agreed that 25 business days was a reasonable time for mobilehome owners to respond to a rent increase. But the park owners' representatives were unhappy with the new threshold. While the 5% was not completely rescinded, it was lowered (for mobilehome owners) to one-half of the increase in the regional CPI. The regional CPI went up about 1.4% in 2015, so a rent increase of 0.7% would be eligible for mediation – a significant improvement from the 5%.

The next three and a-half months was a series of battles. In September, Hoaby wrote and provided to the Gardena city attorney a 4-page response to the new ordinance. While voicing approval, the letter showed how mediation (even with the improvements) was a relatively weak protection, and offered that rent control may be necessary. In October, Hoaby wrote a letter to Gardena mobilehome owners urging them to go to the November 10 city council meeting and urge the city to pass the new ordinance. His wife Mary translated it into Spanish. Marquez distributed English and Spanish copies in several mobilehome parks. At the end of October, the Dowdall law firm filed another lengthy objection with Gardena on behalf of park owners. On November 6, Hoaby provided a 20 page letter to the Gardena city council arguing at length for the ordinance and exposing the three main arguments that park owners bring against rent control.

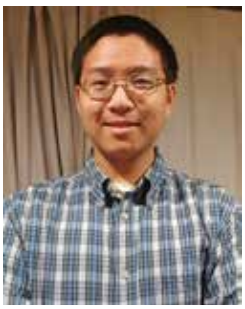
On November 10, the city of Gardena introduced the new ordinance. The city manager announced that no issue he could recall had generated as much response from the public. He then opened it up for oral comments. About fifteen mobilehome owners attended – three times more than had ever been at a Gardena city council meeting on this issue – and about 6 people spoke urging passage. Then seven park owners' representatives spoke urging the city to study the issue further, form task forces, etcetera and to not pass the bill as-is. The Gardena city council however voted 5-0 to 'introduce' the ordinance 'as-is', and scheduled a second reading on December 8.

The Alliance, chaired by Tom King, quickly scheduled its November meeting to prepare for December 8. Hoaby invited council member Medina, who graciously agreed to come explain what the November 10 vote meant. The Alliance learned December 8 would be the vote. The Alliance asked Medina if they had weaknesses, and he replied, "You need more mobilehome owners there."

Between November 10 and December 8 the Alliance went to work. Osuna and Hoaby wrote letters to the city council and, using facts and data, refuted arguments of park owners' representatives and Dowdall in his October objections. Next, Osuna drafted a blunt flyer telling mobilehome owners they needed to show up at the December 8 city council meeting. Marquez distributed 650 copies of this throughout Gardena. Alliance members also prepared 3-minute speeches for December 8.

On December 8, mobilehome owners filled the city council chambers. It was standing room only, spilling into the hall. About a half-dozen mobilehome owners spoke – several of whom Hoaby and the Alliance had never seen before. Six representatives of the park owners spoke. The city council then voted 4-1 to pass the Ordinance. It had been a great journey – Gardena's mobilehome owners won.

1441 Manufactured-Home Residents Association Our Experiences. Unity Works!



Sam Meng

Since its inception, the goal of the 1441 Manufactured-Home Residents Association (MRA1441, www.mra1441.org) is to unite residents to build a better community. We founded this organization after moving into our mobilehome park for a half year and finding the many instances which residents were abused by the park. Residents' cars were criminally towed, the elderly were harassed and threatened, the park facilities heavily restricted, and the rent raised, in many instances, fraudulently. The lack of cooperation from the park is seen by their retaliation against our family and the immediate closure of the clubhouse when they found that we were going to hold a meeting there. From that time, February 2013, we knew that we would be in a long fight, but recognized that with residents' support, we could accomplish our goal.

The first action we took as an association was organizing a potluck in the park. We wrote a letter to the park, stating that their closure of the clubhouse was illegal and asked that the clubhouse would be opened for a residents' potluck. The park backed off and complied, even offering donuts for the potluck. Residents were surprised by the park's action as they'd never received such treatment from the park management.

We then organized residents to "petition the government for redress of grievances." Unfortunately, as Rowland Heights is part of unincorporated Los Angeles County, our options were limited. In hindsight, petitioning Los Angeles County and even our representatives in the state legislature didn't have much effect. We also complained to the FBI and the Sheriff because some of the park management's actions were criminal. However, we received a similar response from all these agencies, stating they couldn't do anything and referring us to another department.

Next, we organized a rally for May 4, 2013, even though our family had received a 60 day notice of termination of tenancy just a day before the rally. The purpose of the rally was to unite residents together, and to let them know that they are not suffering alone. Over 150 people participated in the rally! Residents walked around the park once, stopping at the manager's home, and then walked to neighboring streets. The rally successfully increased residents' participation, and demonstrated to the county that we were united.

In hindsight, we realized that the rally put pressure on the government and the park owners to act and make changes. We found that if residents don't utilize their right to peaceably assemble, not much would be done. This event had paved the way for our organization to have the park owners personally show up and negotiate issues with residents!

After the rally, we started requesting the park to meet with residents to talk about the issues residents are facing. We also followed up with other government agencies. The LA County's Department of Consumer Affairs even provided a bus for residents to travel to their office and meet with them. Other community activities were organized for residents to commingle such as pot lucks and English, arts/crafts, and computer classes. The MRA1441 held weekly meetings where issues were discussed and we started attending local Rowland Heights community meetings to let our voice be heard.

Late 2013, we received a response to one of our letters to the park, stating that they could meet with residents but that more details were needed. We then formed a document similar to a petition, stating the five biggest issues residents had:

- The rental agreement
- The rising rent
- The arbitrary and discriminatory management
- The unusable Internet service in the park
- The clubhouse hours.

By signing the petition, the residents asked the MRA1441 to represent them in these issues. In November, we managed to have about 170 spaces signing the petition, asking the MRA1441 to represent them in these issues. After sending the park owner the formal request with residents' signatures, the park owner themselves wrote a letter to the whole park, stating that they are willing to meet with residents. For readers of previous MH Life Magazines, all these events happened while the unlawful detainer action was pending in court and while the park failed to evict us with a summary judgment.

The meeting with the park owners was held in December, 2013. From the beginning, one could see that the environment would be hostile. Two of the park owners came, bringing a lawyer from Dowdall Law Offices with them. We asked government officials and the media to also attend the meeting. Many residents came to the meeting as the park owners sent everyone this letter. Even residents sympathetic to the park owners came. The meeting started with the park owners demanding the media leave. Residents of the MRA1441 were unhappy, then demanding that the lawyer to leave too. When we realized the discussion was going nowhere, we asked the media to stop recording and continued the meeting without them.

We realized during the meeting that the park owners also had invited homeowners that were treated nicely by the park. In fact, we realized the park owners' number one strategy in

dealing with residents is to divide them. Some comments showed divisions among residents, making many of our points weaker. Few even came out directly against us. The hostile environment in the meeting, however, subsided when the residents who were sympathetic to the park owner were interested also in having the clubhouse open during reasonable hours and the unanimous agreement that the internet service was unusable.

However, as the meeting was overall hostile, the park owners eventually made an excuse to leave the meeting, stating that they would provide residents their decisions in a month. Though not ending on a high note, we still felt the meeting was successful. The park owners knew we would take further action if they did nothing. For more details on these negotiations, visit our website at www.mra1441.org/docs/negpark.

In January 2014, we received a seven page response from the park owners. They wrote about the disunity among residents (never mentioning that they had created it), and the fact that they had taken their time to come to the park to listen to residents' concerns. The park owners also announced that the rent would not be raised for one year, they would change park management, the clubhouse would close at 9 pm (it previously closed at 4 pm) and they would start working to improve the Internet service. We had won most of our concerns! And the biggest reason: we were united.

After the letter, the park owners continued their efforts to divide residents. The park owners also gave residents just enough, satisfying them so that some stopped going to meetings. MRA1441 told residents about the implications of signing a long-term lease, i.e. that the park owners are protecting themselves from any future rent control as stated in the first sentence on the rental agreement. However, the park owners started to entice residents with "promotions" when they sign a new lease, saying the rent would only be raised 2% the next year if they sign a 15 year lease. A couple residents even tried to oust the President, Ken Meng, but failed.

After that event, the Association became stronger by keeping the park in check and continuing to hold community activities. The change in park management also significantly brought more peace to many residents, and the house prices increased. However, more could've been done if residents continued to be united. The talk about the rent and rental agreement was never completed as the park owners kept stating that we do not represent all the residents. If residents continued to have faith in believing that a fair rent could be achieved, that may have changed by now. Also, the park never did improve the Internet service.

I write about our experiences because I believe people can learn from what we did; we learned what works and what does not work. The park owners are crafty in what they do. They have legal counsel that gives them a strategy to divide residents, which is what the park owners want. We need to recognize it and remember what our common goals are. Only by uniting together can we stand up for our rights and help make our mobilehome communities a better place to live in.

-By Sam Meng (ssmeng951@gmail.com)

Study Finds U.S. Manufactured-Home Owners Face 'Quasi-Homelessness'

Rising housing costs in rural America have put homeownership beyond the reach of many working-poor families. Owning a manufactured home (often also known as a "mobile home") in a rural trailer park is often touted to these families as an affordable "next best thing"—and a step toward conventional homeownership.

But a new study of trailer park residents in four states finds that, rather than being a step in the right direction, manufactured-home ownership in a privately owned park can be a trap—a declining and often dangerous structure that lacks many of the social benefits of small town life and leaves its owners in a state of "quasi-homelessness," ever vulnerable to losing their home.

Owning a mobile home but renting the land it stands on in a trailer park amounts to "a kind of serfdom," says Sonya Salamon, a community studies professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and co-author of the study.

"Being landless leaves trailer owners at the park landlord's mercy," explains Salamon. "Because the park is private property, the owners have little recourse if they're evicted."

'Half the American Dream', and Sometimes a Nightmare

Manufactured homes are the fastest-growing form of housing in the United States and a common sight in rural communities, where zoning and housing codes tend to be less restrictive than in urban areas. (According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, nearly one in six homes in non metro areas of the United States are mobile homes, compared with 8 percent nationwide and 6 percent in metro areas.)

For their research, which will be published in a forthcoming book,International Perspectives on Rural Homelessness, Salamon and co-author Katherine MacTavish interviewed 250 residents in rural rental and land-lease trailer parks in North Carolina, Illinois, New Mexico, and Oregon.

The researchers found hard-working rural families who took pride in their homes, but who also resented the popular stereotypes of trailer residents and often felt sucked into a financial arrangement filled with hidden costs and limitations.

Owning a manufactured home on land leased in a trailer park amounts to "half the American dream," says MacTavish, a human development professor at Oregon State University.

"The owners do have a house and it is often better than an apartment, but it is really seen as second best because they don't own the land," explains MacTavish. "They don't have the same control, status, or security as owning a stand-alone house."

The manufactured housing industry estimates that about half the nation's 8.8 million mobile homes are located in more than 50,000 landlord-owned parks. Salamon says that, since these trailer parks are regulated in only a few states, the parks' owners are generally free to abruptly and exorbitantly raise fees and rents as well as make their own rules—for example, limiting whether residents can have pets or repair a car in their driveway.

Salamon and MacTavish also found that park residents can lose their homes without the due process given other types of renters. Lot rents are often raised beyond owners' means, and trailer park land is frequently sold to developers. Even the misbehavior of a family's children can be grounds for eviction, according to MacTavish.

And while these units are called "mobile" homes, Salamon points out that actually moving one can be quite costly—$3,000 or more. Faced with eviction, manufactured-home owners of modest means have little choice but to abandon their dwellings.

Social Stigma, Temporary Mindset

The manufactured-housing industry uses the phrase "manufactured-home community" instead of "trailer park" in their promotional materials. But a name change can't erase the stigma of the usual setting for rural mobile homes.

Salamon and MacTavish discovered that residents of towns near the trailer parks tended, without evidence, to blame park residents for local crimes and considered the residents "freeloaders" for allegedly not paying a fair share of taxes for education and other public services.

The isolation of rural trailer parks, which are often located on the edge of a town, also limits contact between the town's residents and park residents, a lack of exchange that Salamon and MacTavish argue contributes to the stereotyping.

And the stereotypes may explain in part why the researchers found that trailer park residents lacked a sense of community, which is often considered a hallmark of rural small-town life.

"We looked at whether the trailer park was functioning as a neighborhood," says MacTavish. "Did neighbors exchange favors, for example? While we found pockets of neighborliness, most park residents were much less connected than residents of a typical small-town neighborhood."

Salamon and MacTavish found one exception in a New Mexico trailer park, where residents owned both their trailers and the lots on which the trailers stood.

"Although the park looked shabbier than some of the others we studied, there were many more community connections and the residents were more cemented in place," said MacTavish. "They worked together to get the street made into a dead end so children could play safely and cooperated with police to get a drug dealer out."

But the researchers conclude that creating more cooperatively owned trailer parks wouldn't eliminate the financial and structural downsides of trailer ownership.

"The question for policy makers is how to ensure a more adequate supply of affordable housing in rural areas that offers residents security, both financially and socially," says MacTavish.

Paola Scommegna is a freelance writer.

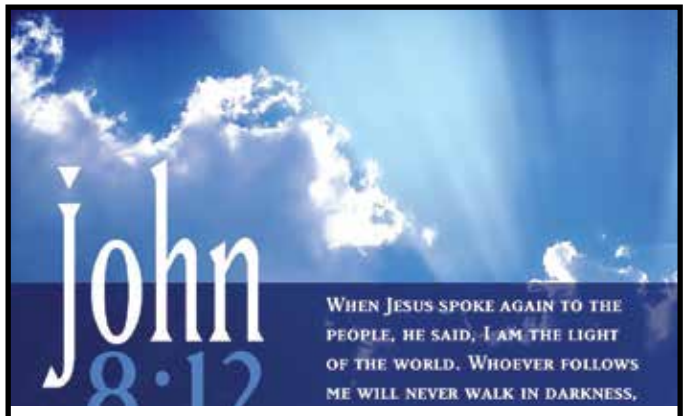
http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2004/StudyFindsUSManufacturedHomeOwnersFaceQuasiHomelessness.aspx#.VqgB6zsKAg4.mailto

Paola Scommegna (October 2004)

Editor's Comments on 'Quasi-Homelessness'

We like this article and believe it makes several accurate observations. We have a few comments:

- We do not like the wording "trailer park" as it only perpetuates the stereotype of trailer trash, a very inaccurate perception of today's mobile/manufactured home parks.
- We agree, residents are ever vulnerable to losing their homes and apparently many are not aware this might happen. In fact it is happening daily around the state and country.
- A resident can lose his/her home for non-payment of rent in less than two weeks. If this were the case with stick-built homes, there would be a huge outcry.
- Please note this article was written in 2004, yet it applies to today, 12 years later. Nothing has changed.
- The article briefly talks about resident owned parks and the fact that the park in New Mexico had more resident connections, i.e. functioned more like a community. We agree 100%, resident ownership is the only way to go. Residents take more pride in their homes and yards, and are more likely to form positive, lasting relationships with their neighbors. We will begin writing more about resident ownership in the magazine.



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Index of Our Handbook of Frequently Asked Questions

The "Handbook" was actually compiled by the Select Committee on Manufactured Homes and Communities. We thank Stephanie Reid, Senator Richard Roth and other committee members for the opportunity to publish it and offer it to our readers. **It is an invaluable tool, a reference which should be consulted whenever an issue comes up.**

Now you can receive it FREE by joining COMO-CAL. Fill out the application on the next page and you will receive the 36 page Handbook FREE by first class mail plus an annual subscription to MH Life Magazine. Such a bargain.

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Benefits of Joining COMO-CAL

- COMO-CAL is the only advocacy organization that guarantees results. If after 90 days you are not happy with our service, we will refund 100% of your dues. You may keep the $5 Handbook as our way of saying Thank You for joining.
- With our money back guarantee, you have NOTHING to lose by joining and everything to gain.
- You receive a 12 month subscription to MH Life Magazine.
- You receive COMO-CAL's 36 page Frequently Asked Questions and Answers compiled by the Senate Select Committee on Manufactured Housing Communities. This is a "got to have" reference book for any mobilehome owner living in California.
- COMO-CAL now has a Help Line (M-F 8am-9pm). The Help Line does not answer individual resident issues, but can help guide you.
- Your membership allows MH Life and COMO-CAL to continuing providing services to the MH Community.
- COMO-CAL is a 100+ network of parks in California.
- COMO-CAL advisors have years of experience and are ready and willing to take on issues that have existed for decades.
- Please don't forget to donate. MH Life alone costs over $60,000 per year. And a strong COMO-CAL means we are better able to serve you, to protect your investment and your lifestyle.
- Don't forget, you can order the FAQ Handbook for $6 (if you don't want to join COMO-CAL).
- We also provide the book Mobile Home Wars by Donald DeVore - 59 pages about the history or mobilehomes, mobilehome parks and the advocates who helped protect mobilehome owners. (Donald DeVore was a long time leader in Colorado). The book costs $15.

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MAILING ADDRESS:_____

SPACE #_____CITY:_____ ZIP:_____

PHONE #:_____PARK NAME:_____

E-MAIL:_____

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__ I believe in the cause and your good work. I want to donate. $_____

__ I will deliver magazines door to door in my park

__ I will help a group in my park. __ I will help my Regional Group

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