

Willow Park is now a community on the move

No they're not campers or travelling gypsies, and no their community isn't a "party city." But yes their homes do have bathrooms and yes they can stand erect in their living rooms.

Those are some of the public's misconceptions people living in Norval's Willow Park say they have to contend with because of the type of housing they have chosen.

People living in the park, which is located just off Highway 7 at the Georgetown Norval border, are not different than those living in other neighbourhoods says Andrea Perryman, a four-year park resident.

Like most communities, a variety of walks of life are represented in the 30 mobile homes that make up the park.

There are professionals, tradesmen, single people, young couples with children, middle aged people, and seniors, Larry Elliott, another of the park's residents said. And contrary to what a number of people say, no one is on welfare, his wife Joan added.

Campers however they're not. "It's a stigma that people consider us campers. They consider mobile homes somewhat like travel trailers, like gypsie life...whereas we're not, we're here full year," Andrea's husband Roger Perryman explained.

The group stresses they live in "mobile homes" and not trailers. In this sense their living accommodations are permanent, Chris Mills says. The only reason our homes are mobile is because they were built somewhere else and moved here on wheels and that's it.

Indeed the majority of residents have lived in the park from three to seven years, Mrs. Perryman said. On resident has lived in the park for 15 years she added.

"When you tell someone you live in a mobile home the first thing they say is you live in a what..." Mr. Mills said.

People don't understand that mobile homes provide their owners with relative comfort at an affordable price, the residents say.

The sited cost of an average-sized mobile home, already on a lot, in Georgetown and surrounding area ranges from \$45,000 to \$70,000, Mr. Perryman said. This type of mobile home has two bedrooms, a living room and dining room and fully equipped bathroom and is already located in a park, he explained.

Mobile homes are ideal for young couples and those approaching retirement, Mr. Elliott said. Young couples can accumulate equity while middle aged people can increase their savings, for retirement, he said.

They also pointed out that a mobile home is well suited for the elderly and handicapped people because they have only one floor.

The community's closeness is

another reason the residents enjoy living in the park.

No competition exists within the community, Mr. Perryman said. The idea of "keeping up with the Jones," where everybody has to have a pool and may or may not want to get to know their neighbour, that is common to higher priced residential areas, is absent from the park, he said.

"We're packed into a small area that everyone knows their neighbour and looks out for each other," Mrs. Perryman said.

Mr. Mills tells a story where one of his daughters was hurt while he and his wife were away from home. She had no fears about going to another trailer and asking to be taken to the hospital, he said.

Mrs. Perryman tells another

story of how residents take it upon themselves to call on a reclusive resident periodically to see how he is doing and to tell him what's happening.

Another park resident, Mr. Paul Kavanaugh, says the community is "one big happy family." But then again they recognize it's no heaven.

"All families, no matter how close have their fights," Mrs. Perryman said.

The group realizes their chosen lifestyle isn't for everyone. While some come to the park and like it immediately or after certain time, others never get used to it. But they don't expect everyone to chose their lifestyle. Instead they want the people of Halton Hills to visit the area before passing judgement, Mrs. Perryman said.



Joan Elliott (left) and Dianne Mills enjoy a summer day on the deck that surrounds the front part of Ms. Elliott's mobile home.

It's been a long search to find a new home

It will be a long and difficult struggle for the Willow Park residents if the town allows them to relocate to a new park in Acton later this year. But a worthwhile fight all the same, residents say.

The town has set the wheels in motion for a Regional Road 12 Acton site to become the new home of the 30 families currently living in the Norval park just off Highway 7.

The Credit Valley Conservation Authority first told the residents they had to vacate the site in July 1987. They originally had to move by last year, however, the CVCA extended the eviction date to this November 15.

The CVCA has been in the process of expropriating the park during the last two years because the site has been declared dangerous. It is considered dangerous because it lies in the flood plains of both Silver Creek and the Credit River, the CVCA's manager Vicki Barron said. Storm run off from the housing development on the Ninth Line would expose the park to dangerous flood conditions, she explained.

Helplessness was the community's initial reaction when they were told to move but this feeling quickly turned to one of defiance, residents say.

"We liked the area and we

wanted to stay. They were not going to kick us out," is how four-year resident Roger Perryman summed up the community's feelings.

"We felt the way anybody would feel who was told they had to give up their home," Mr. Perryman's wife Andrea added.

But after seeking legal advice the community agreed with the CVCA that the threat potential flooding posed to the community was great enough to call for the community's reaction.

They were satisfied the CVCA had exhausted all the alternatives to solving the flood problems, such as raising the park or installing a dam to regulate the flow of water, Mr. Perryman said.

Park resident Mr. Larry Elliott said however the experience has left the residents emotionally and physically scarred.

"Most of us have put our life savings into our homes, so the thought of losing them has been very, very scary," he said.

Many times residents thought of giving up the fight because the strain was so great Mrs. Perryman said. "But you just can't."

The residents' current goal, besides ensuring that they get the new site, is to try to relocate at a minimum cost.

They say there is a need for more of this type of affordable housing in southern Ontario. But the general public, because of its negative attitude towards mobile parks, have to be shown their advantages. It is important this new park be a showcase for what mobile homes can offer, they say.

The residents hope the provincial government's ministry of housing will help finance the upgrading of their homes or the purchasing of new ones. Most of the homes have been in Willow Park for several years and all may not be moveable, Mr. Perryman said.

The residents are confident if all goes well the Acton site will be approved sometime in the near future.

"We're tired, all we want to do is move and get on with our lives," Mrs. Perryman said.



Willow Park resident Dianne Mills says mobile homes aren't something out of the dark ages. Like most houses, mobile homes are large enough to house all the amenities to live comfortably.

Park will be "open space"

Norval's Willow Park just off Highway 7 will be left as an open space once the park's residents vacate the property Nov. 15, the manager of the Conservation Authority, Vicki Barron, says.

The CVCA has expropriated the land because the location poses a danger to the residents living in the area, she said. Because the park lies in the flood plains of the Credit River and Silver Creek the storm run off from the housing development on the Ninth Line would ex-

pose the residents to dangerous flooding, she explained.

The expropriation will be financed by both the Town of Halton Hills and the province. The town will pay 45 per cent of the total cost while the province will pay the rest. The full cost has not been disclosed yet, town officials say.

Ms. Barron said once the property is vacated it will probably be leased back to the town.

No building structures can be built on the property because it is

exposed to flooding, she said.

Ms. Barron said she wouldn't be surprised if the town decided to install a couple of picnic tables in the park.

But no decision will be made until the town and the CVCA discuss the situation she said.

The town is currently considering changes to its by-laws to allow for a Regional Road 12 Acton site to be the new home for the 30 families affected by the expropriation.

Stories and photos by Ben Dummett

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