

Stormwynn sheds its past

Life improves dramatically for residents at once infamous mobile home park

Mike Chouinard

The Times

Friday, December 11, 2009

Stormwynn Mobile Home Park used to be a haven for drugs and prostitution, a fact exposed by a homicide early one morning in the spring of 2007.

A lot has changed at the lots along Yale Road West in the time since. The trial has come and gone, but new owners took over during the middle of 2007. Instead of erecting some high-end condo development though, they kept the mobile home pads and began working with the residents to improve life at Stormwynn. Last month, the residents, owners and management, the deputy mayor and representatives from the police gathered to hold a barbecue to mark the fact the park is now part of the city's crime-free multi-housing program, which encourages higher density developments to take steps to keep out crime. A sign at the entrance to the property attests to the new status.

"We certainly would not have a sign like that a few years ago," says Dennis Desjardins, who has lived at park for about three years.

Much of the underworld activity that went on at Stormwynn took place in eight cabins along the east edge of the property. Residents at the nearby mobile home lots were at the mercy of those behind the drug-dealing and prostitution that went on. There were residents like Noreen Whyte who has lived at the park for approximately 15 years--long enough that she cannot remember exactly when she moved in--who just tried to avoid the troublemakers. With all the personal belongings being stolen and vehicles broken into, Whyte didn't feel the urge for contact with the people around her. However, she's noticed the changes.

"When we had the cabins, things were going on," she says. "Now you don't see anything going on."

She's still a little standoffish but did attend the barbecue in November. She's starting to get to know more people at the park and finds life there safer and more secure.

Katherine Pelletier works for Jake's Contracting, one of the members of the new ownership group, Stonewater Ventures, that purchased the property in June 2007, and she has managed Stormwynn since last May. The major work to clean up the site started last year and focused on getting rid of the people causing problems--and their base of operations.

"We took down the cabins in March of 2008," she says. "We started working at cleaning up the park. . . . We are now proud to say that it's crime-free."

At present, 34 people live on the site, which includes 22 units for mobile homes and one house. Since the work began to improve the park, some units have sold and new residents are moving in. The owners now plan to add a

couple of new spaces for RVs. Other work has included bringing in large garbage bins to yard out junk on site and clearing out the lanes on the property, which now not only provides better vehicle access but removes potential hiding spots for troublemakers. They are also fixing up parts of the property that had been broken or damaged. Many residents are even planting flowers on their lots.

"They're taking great strides in improving their units," Pelletier says. "Now it's become a community."

She was also pleased to see residents that did not socialize with others in the past come out to the barbecue. Part of the crime-free multi-housing program requires multiple-home properties to have regular social events so that neighbours can get to know each other. Pelletier also points out how proud the residents were to receive their crime-free plaque.

"They were quite excited to be recognized by the city," she says. "They'd like the community to know they're crime-free."

The management is happy with the way the residents have responded to the changes, and the feeling seems to be mutual. Roy Hunter and his wife Millie moved to the park four years ago from Salmon Arm, and he is quick to credit the efforts of the new owners and management for keeping their home open and fixing the problems.

"It had to end--to get the drugs out of here," he says.

The cabins could have been nice places to live, Hunter says, but the buildings and the site as a whole had been neglected, which left many residents in a bind because the options of where they could afford to live were limited.

These days, Hunter is happy doing the groundskeeping work at Stormwynn with some help from Desjardins. He is also grateful the new management started down the path of the crime-free multi-housing program and decided to save the park.

"If it wasn't for the management, like Jake's, it would've closed," he says.

mchouinard@chilliwacktimes.com

© Chilliwack Times 2009

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2009 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.