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A reason to be thankful: Residents purchase Oak Harbor mobile-home park

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OAK HARBOR, Wash. – When the homeowners in the 59-site mobile-home park formerly known as Thunderbird gathered to give thanks last week, they had something new to add to the list: They now owned the land under their homes as well.

The new Whispering Pines Homeowners Co-op bought the community Nov. 25 for \$1.57 million, but its members show no signs of slowing down.

“I know I’m excited that this has come through and I know it’s going to work well,” said Wayne Killebrew, vice chairman of the interim board for the resident cooperative. “Our first plan is to have a potluck meeting with all the members, recruit new volunteers, and get to work.”

“Everyone I’ve talked to face-to-face is excited about the co-op coming in,” said Paige Weeks, secretary of the co-op’s interim board. “Now they own it, so we’re going to see people take more pride in the property.”

Killebrew said board members plan to develop a community-wide cleanup strategy, and he expects to see real results in coming months.

“There are a lot of trees that are going to have to come out, so we’ll be hiring a tree-trimming outfit,” he said. “Then we’ll look around and see what people need done, like cleaning the outside of their homes. I know there are three of us who have pressure washers, so we’ll help out anyone who’s not able.”

In most manufactured home communities (also known as “mobile-home parks”), residents own their homes, but not the land beneath them—making them vulnerable to rate increases and even eviction, especially if the land should change hands.

But when the Thunderbird park came up for sale several months ago, the community formed a cooperative in order to purchase the land.

As a result, the land will remain a cooperative belonging to its members in perpetuity — while affordable housing has been preserved in a prime location, just a few miles from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.



Sallie and Wayne Killebrew of Whispering Pines Homeowners Co-op are excited about the purchase and the prospects for the future of their community. *Photo: Mike Bullard/ROC USA*

The Northwest Cooperative Development Center helped guide co-op members through the purchase. NWCDC is a certified technical assistance provider with ROC USA® Network, a national non-profit organization that helps residents of for-sale manufactured home parks form cooperatives and buy their communities. NWCDC will continue to provide technical assistance to the co-op for the length of the mortgage—at least 10 years.

Many residents of Whispering Pines have lived there for many years, said Ben Dryfoos-Guss of NWCDC.

“We are extremely happy for the members of Whispering Pines Homeowners Co-op,” he said. “The entire community came together to make the sale happen.”

This is the fourth manufactured home cooperative with which NWCDC is working in Washington. In this model, homeowners in the community each buy one low-cost share and become members of the co-op, with one vote on matters of the community. They elect a Board of Directors to act on day-to-day issues and vote on larger matters like the annual budget, by-laws and community rules.

Financing for the project was provided by ROC USA Capital and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. Partnering for the second time with ROC USA, the Commission helped ensure an affordable interest rate. The Commission previously helped to preserve five other manufactured-home communities in Washington through issuing bonds and other investment programs.

“Once again, we’re happy to partner with ROC USA to support a manufactured-home community,” said Karen Miller, chair of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. “This is our second collaboration and we look forward to more.”

As for Whispering Pines, ROC USA Capital Managing Director Michael Sloss pointed to the community’s prime location near the naval air station, which sits about 90 miles north of Seattle.

“ROC USA Capital is proud to have been able to provide financing to the homeowners at Whispering Pines,” Sloss said. “Promoting secure and affordable homeownership in such rural communities as Oak Harbor yields powerful returns in fostering community stability and reinvestment in critical neighborhood infrastructure.”

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About the Partners

ROC USA (www.rocusa.org) is a non-profit organization with a national network of eight organizations (such as NWCDC) and a national financing source for co-ops. ROC USA® is sponsored by the Ford Foundation, NeighborWorks® America, NCB Capital Impact, the Corporation for Enterprise Development, and the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund. The Community Loan Fund, a non-profit community development financial institution in New Hampshire, leveraged its experience with 107 resident-owned communities in that state to launch ROC USA with national partners in May 2008. Since then, ROC USA Network has helped 55 communities preserve 3,679 homes in 14 states.

Northwest Cooperative Development Center (www.nwcdc.coop) is a nonprofit organization devoted to assisting new and existing cooperative businesses. It supports cooperatives in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Hawaii. Founded by cooperatives in 1979, the Center has grown into the Northwest’s leading provider of services for co-op business development. It has a long history of collaborating with communities, governments, economic development agencies and other cooperatives, sharing expertise and building cross-sector support for new and existing cooperatives.

The **Washington State Housing Finance Commission** (www.wshfc.org) is a publicly accountable, self-supporting team, dedicated to increasing housing access and affordability, and to expanding the availability of quality community services for the people of Washington. The commission, which receives no regular state funding for its operations, works with lenders, investors, developers, nonprofit organizations, first-time homebuyers, beginning farmers and ranchers and energy companies to bring private investment dollars to benefit families and achieve public goals in Washington.