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BC Housing

Tenant Newsletter

December 2008

News FOR YOU

H O U S I N G U P D A T E

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2

Message from the CEO



Shayne Ramsay

It has been my pleasure to attend a number of tenant events over the past few months. I am always impressed with the initiative our tenants demonstrate to meet the needs of their communities. These events are also a great opportunity to get together with you and hear first hand what your comments and concerns are. Our staff are committed to providing you with the best level of service possible.

BC Housing is a provincial agency. Since the June issue of *News for You*, a new ministry has been created, which we report to. The Ministry of Housing and Social Development combines all agencies that deal with housing, plus employment and income assistance, and other community services. By bringing these together under one roof, Minister Rich Coleman is making sure all British Columbians in need are helped to achieve their social and economic potential. That's a goal that we share and I encourage you to get involved at your site and take advantage of any special activities happening.

Best wishes for the holidays and for 2009.

Regards,

Shayne Ramsay



Close-up detail of a hummingbird and sunflower sculpture installed at Doug Drummond Manor. The sculpture was designed and carved by tenants who worked for over a year on the project with sculptor Eric Neighbour. The hummingbird was carved from a sequoia tree that once lived at Doug Drummond Manor and the flower came from a cedar tree that was uprooted during the 2006 wind storm that hit Stanley Park. The sunflower represents Doug Drummond Manor and the hummingbird, which receives sustenance from the flower, represents the tenants.

Doug Drummond resident wins Local Hero award



The City of Burnaby is honouring tenant Ken Best with a *Local Hero Award* for founding the Garden View lunch program at Doug Drummond Manor in Burnaby. The volunteer-run program is also celebrating its 15th anniversary.

Every week, residents Shirley Black, Jack Patry and Ken Best cook lunch for other tenants in this mixed adult development. Lunch is served Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and is open to all tenants. There's also a second seating for seniors

visiting from community agencies three times a month. Customers are served a full meal with dessert, tea or coffee for \$3.50 and the money is used to buy groceries for the next week.

"We all volunteer because we want to give something back to the community," said Ken, who has lived at Doug Drummond for 16 years. "The lunch program helps ensure tenants are eating well, and gives everyone an opportunity to visit and enjoy each other's company."



Top: Doug Drummond Manor tenant Ken Best

Left: Doris and Kevin Gajjar at the Garden View lunch program 15th anniversary celebration.

New tenant meal program in Surrey

Many tenants at Len Shepherd Manor in Surrey now get together every Monday to socialize over a healthy lunch. Robin Harris, Recreation Services with the Canadian Mental Health Association, runs the new meal program.

"We wanted to make sure people weren't feeling isolated, and everyone seems to enjoy the meal and visiting," said Robin. "About 20 to 40 tenants come every week. Tenants leave happy and full, and we send them home with leftovers, if possible."

Fraser Health staff help cook and serve lunch, and some tenants volunteer to set up tables, and serve coffee and tea.

BC Housing Holiday Schedule

BC Housing's offices around the province will be closed on Thursday, December 25 and Friday, December 26, 2008 and Thursday, January 1, 2009.

If a major emergency arises when BC Housing offices are closed, such as burst or frozen pipes, fire or loss of heat, please call our Emergency Services:

Greater Vancouver: 604-682-4852
Victoria: 250-213-8798
Interior: 1-800-834-7149
Prince George: 250-562-9251
Prince Rupert: 250-627-7501

All other communities are encouraged to contact their Site Representative.

A reminder to residents in our northern and interior communities:

During cold spells, please leave your heat on when you are away to prevent frozen piping. If possible, have a friend or family member check your home while you are away.

Public Housing Advisory Council message

Sharon Mohamed, Chair



Sharon Mohamed

As you read this issue of *News for You*, you may notice several stories have a common theme: tenants taking action in their developments and reaching out to create partnerships to support these actions.

I would also like to encourage you to get involved in your community. From my personal experience leaving an abusive relationship, I know how desperate people can feel when they are in difficult situations. In 1988, my three children and I were lucky to find a home at Skeena Terrace. The time I spent volunteering here and at the neighbouring community centre restored my self esteem, and gave me a sense of worth and empowerment. It made me feel that I was taking control of my life again.

There are many ways that you can help out at your site or in your neighbourhood. Talk to the principal at your child's school or a leader at your church or

temple; visit your local community centre or YM/YWCA; speak with your neighbours or building manager about ideas for a tenant get-together.

There are also many programs available in communities throughout British Columbia that can help you move forward and build your self esteem. If you would like help in finding resources in your part of the province, please feel free to send the Public Housing Advisory Council an e-mail message (phac@bchousing.org) and we would be happy to help.

We all need someone special in our lives to help us through crises. My son, Jason, has been that person to me. A special thank you to him for supporting me in so many ways.

On behalf of all the council members, I would like to wish you a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year.

Prince George tenant pursues graduate degree

As a single parent, the only way Lisa Close could afford a graduate degree was to win awards that pay for textbooks and tuition. She succeeded: Lisa won a BC Housing Alexandra Thorpe Award in July and a university scholarship for academic achievement. She started her Masters degree in English at the University of Northern BC this fall, and her thesis will examine the impact of First Nations literature on culture and identity in Canada.



Lisa Close

Lisa has lived in Vanier Apartments since returning to school in 2005. She's also worked as a youth mentor and Sunday school teacher, and helped the organization, Impact International, with a health and education project in east Africa. Lisa plays intramural soccer at UNBC and runs competitively.

"I'm teaching an undergrad English class this semester, which gives me some career experience," said Lisa. "I returned to school to pursue my goal of teaching at the college level, so I can provide a better quality of life for my son and myself."

BC Housing gave out 97 education awards and bursaries in 2008 – up from 46 a year earlier – to help tenants across the province pursue their educational goals and develop new skills.

Five \$1,000 Alexandra Thorpe Awards were funded by BC Housing, the Minerva Foundation for BC Women, and Edge Consulting to support BC women in financial need. Alexandra Thorpe was a bright young woman who touched the lives of everyone she met. Although she struggled with depression and drug addiction, she hoped to return to school, and this award is a tribute to her spirited life.

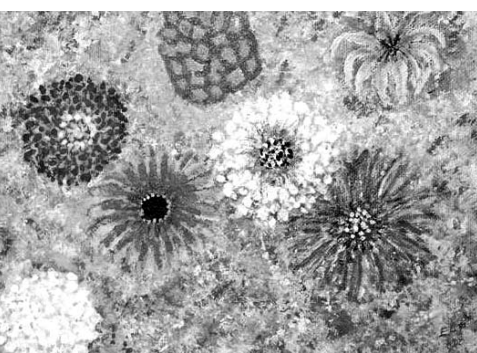
Stamps Place anti-smoking/drugs seminar

Twelve years ago, Shamsul Khondoker's doctor said he would only live another year or two if he didn't quit smoking. So Shamsul quit, and decided to stop drinking alcohol at the same time.

"As soon as I quit smoking, I started sleeping well, eating well, breathing well, and I saved money because smoking is expensive," said Shamsul, head of the Social Committee at Stamps Place in Vancouver. "Everything improved and I got a new life.

"My son was also smoking and drinking at the time, so I took part in a support group for parents, where we discussed how we could help our children stop smoking, drinking or using drugs."

Shamsul drew on these experiences to organize an anti-smoking/drugs seminar at Stamps Place in June 2008. BC Housing provided funding for food, and 113 tenants—52 adults and 61 children—came to discuss how to guide children and youth to prevent or stop smoking or substance use. Now Shamsul plans to arrange a second session for tenants.



Tenant art show in Surrey

Ted Kuhn tenants will display their art work at an onsite exhibit on December 12. People have produced pottery, paintings, mixed media collages, and mosaics. Tenants will soon learn wood carving and jewellery making too.

Community Resource Worker Leslie Walsh began the art program and is coordinating the show. "Tenants have created some wonderful work, and this exhibit is an opportunity to showcase their accomplishments," she said.



People, Plants and Homes summer splash

Thank you to all the tenants who participate in our People, Plants and Homes program. This year, the program's focus shifted to growing foods organically and to promoting recycling, composting and sustainability. We saw some great results in both food production and the usual beautiful display of flowers. Look for things to start blooming again this spring!



Top: A display of photos from Len Shepherd Manor's community garden.

Left: Flo Grieve (centre) with BC Housing's Gisele Sabourin and Dominic Flanagan was the recipient of this year's David Tarrant Spirit of Gardening Award. Flo has coordinated Len Shepherd Manor's community garden and shared her knowledge of gardening with tenants for many years.

Center: A delightful basket of home grown veggies from the summer parties.

STEP graduate gets a job



Alyssa Skuro

Alyssa Skuro now has a regular part-time job, because her employer with the Student Tenant Employment Program (STEP) saw she is a good worker and hired her after the program ended. Alyssa lives with her grandparents at Cedar Place in Burnaby.

STEP is a summer employment program for youth aged 15 to 18, who live in Lower Mainland public housing. Participants receive job readiness training

and a job placement with an employer in the community. BC Housing partners with the YMCA to help these young people develop the leadership and job skills needed to achieve a financially stable future.

"We met once a week to learn how to write a resume, develop job interview skills, and complete First Aid, FOODSAFE, SuperHost, and workplace hazardous materials training," said Alyssa, a grade 11 student. "Then I worked four shifts a week at Banana Republic, my job placement with STEP.

"Without this experience I wouldn't be as confident about work," she added. "Now I know I can do well in a job interview, and have learned how to act professionally with other staff and managers. I'm familiar with my workplace rights, and really enjoy selling clothes and helping people. I work part-time twice a week after school and on the weekend. I plan to keep this job for awhile, and then my long-term goal is to study medicine at university."

"STEP is an awesome program," says Alyssa's grandmother, Leah. "Getting a job has really bolstered Alyssa's confidence, and we're grateful to BC Housing."

"CompPuters" for common areas

Could tenants at your site benefit from a shared computer? The BC Housing Complimentary Computer Program, or CompPuter Program, may be able to donate a used computer to your public housing site provided tenants create a plan for how they would use it and support it. Tenants need to demonstrate that they could collaborate on maintaining the system and coordinate time management, access control and finances. Computer systems are donated as they become available, and may be provided to priority groups based on existing community resources and the number of requests submitted from across BC.

For more information, please contact:
Community Developer Nicholas Najda
E-mail: nnajda@bchousing.org;
phone: 604-529-2268; toll free: 1-866-465-6873.



A Bauer Villa tenant uses a computer donated by BC Housing for school work.



Important Dates to Remember

- ▶ People, Plants and Homes program: Plant order forms available March 2009
 - ▶ Student Tenant Employment Program applications available May 2009
 - ▶ Education Awards applications: available March 2, 2009
 - ▶ Applications for Special Event Funding for Tenant Activity Grants: available throughout the year.
- Contact your Building Manager or Site Rep for more information about any of these programs.

Tenant Tips

Keeping holiday costs low



- Make gifts like edible treats.
- Record interviews of parents and grandparents, or of children singing songs.
- Give a book of favourite family recipes.
- Make a scrap book with family photos and stories.
- Give an IOU for a home cooked meal, car wash, gardening, babysitting.
- Offer to teach a skill like knitting, photography, canning tomatoes, or swimming.
- Re-gift items you don't use.
- Recycle gift wrapping paper. Re-use gift bags. Use your children's art work or newspaper to wrap presents.
- Make your own gift tags from last year's holiday or birthday cards.
- Use natural tree trimmings like popcorn strings, pine cones, twigs and feathers.

Safety First!



Holiday safety tips

- If you buy an artificial tree, make sure it has a Fire Resistant label.
- Only use lights with a safety-tested label.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard damaged sets.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Turn off all lights on trees and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house. Lights could short and start a fire.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree.
- Keep candles away from decorations and wrapping paper.

Prevent winter falls

- Wear shoes or boots with soles that provide traction on snow and ice. Avoid shoes with smooth surfaces, which increase the risk of slipping.
- Never run on icy ground.
- Walk slowly and take small steps to keep your centre of balance under you.
- Use a handrail where available.
- Step carefully from vehicles, using the vehicle for support.
- Keep walkways clear of debris, water, ice and slippery materials.
- Don't let rain from your umbrella pool on indoor walking surfaces.

BC Housing Contact Information

News For You is published twice a year by the BC Housing Management Commission for the tenants of its public housing developments.

We welcome your feedback and inquiries.

BC Housing Home Office
1701 – 4555 Kingsway
Burnaby, B.C. V5H 4V8
Fax: 604-433-3295

Editorial Board Members
Donna Cairns; Dominic Flanagan;
Joyce Fitz-Gibbon; Jill Lunde;
Pamela Reddy; Sairoz Sekhon;
Nicholas Najda

Editor
Jill Lunde
glunde@bchousing.org
604-439-4135

For questions relating to your development, please contact your Property Portfolio Manager.

For questions about BC Housing tenant programs and services, please contact:

Joyce Fitz-Gibbon
Operations Program Coordinator
jfitz-gibbon@bchousing.org
604-439-4141

Nicholas Najda
Community Developer
nnajda@bchousing.org
604-529-2268

Pamela Reddy
Community Developer
preddy@bchousing.org
604-454-5431

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BC Housing

BC Housing is the provincial agency that develops, manages and administers a wide range of subsidized housing options for those most in need in British Columbia.