

The Acorn

Twin Oaks Housing Co-operative Newsletter

Winter-into-Spring Issue

February 2003

EDITORIAL MUSINGS

By Manuela M. Costa Lima

The end of winter is discernable: morning frost is lighter, days are longer, and my most precocious rhododendron has been blooming for a few weeks now. Tender green blades pierce the black earth of my neglected flowerbeds, promising daffodils, tulips, irises and elegant gladioli. Cyclical life breathes anew on branches and tender stalks and where fallen leaves have quietly deteriorated. The eager grass in my marshy backyard has grown too tall for my liking, having successfully pushed its way up from underneath the plush, prolific and oh-so-tenacious moss.

These beautiful portents of life, colour, scent and sensitivity wrap my senses and this housing community in a generous and familiar embrace. But there's a silent longing to clear away the winter dross and discover that the perennial mud has finally dried up. There's a need to make room for new growth and for drier, neater spaces.

Very soon, Twin Oaks members we'll venture outdoors, where there will be plenty of work for everyone to do, not only in their own yards and flowerbeds, but also during the seasonal work parties that will be organized to prune, rake and clean the various common areas of this property. As members of a housing co-operative, we are contractually responsible for ensuring that the "bits of Co-op real estate" assigned to each of us are properly and regularly maintained. Gardening talents and individual energies may vary; but personal accountability still remains. In the coming weeks, several members will also begin to clean and turn the soil of the vegetable patch they selected and cultivated last year. Other members will be contacting Maintenance to reserve a garden plot for the first time. We can expect a lot of activity in the community garden area come March.

Large or small, beautifully structured or simplified, the yards and flowerbeds left in our care are an integral and visible part of Twin Oaks. Properly maintained lawns and tidy flowerbeds are a pleasure to the eye and keep invasive weeds away from neighbouring areas. After all is said and done, the exterior appearance of this property speaks of the type of people who live

here and of their individual and collective sense of responsibility to their neighbours, to the Co-op, and to the community at large. There's nothing conceited or unhealthy about wanting to project a positive image. It's not unreasonable to think that we have the ability to make a collective and continuous effort to dissolve any misperceptions that may exist about social housing vis-à-vis a less-than-ideal "renter's mentality."

Even with our personal differences and procedural shortcomings, we are a very fortunate group indeed. We live in a safe and beautiful complex, where shelter is very affordable and privileges abound. And yet we often resent our responsibilities to the Association and neglect the contracts that have brought us here...

And so it goes.

And so Twin Oaks will welcome another season.

May spring be a happy one for all!

Manuela Costa Lima
Newsletter chairperson, Unit #14

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This Editorial does not intend to express the individual or collective views of other Twin Oaks members.

NOTICES & REMINDERS:

Dog Licences for 2003:

- As of March 1, dog licences will cost an additional \$5. Saanich and Co-op bylaws **require** that dogs be licenced every year. If you haven't already done so, please buy your pooch's tag before the end of this month.
- Also, dog feces are not always being picked up in the common area between units 13 and 14 (grassy strip leading to the community garden). **Always** take a bag with you for those "emergency trips." Pooches have a way of "doing #2" when we think they only need to "go #1."

SECOND NEWSLETTER NOTICE RE: CANADA POST MAIL DELIVERY

The law requires that the mail be delivered into a safe receptacle: a mailbox or a mail slot. When Co-op members open the front door and leave the screen door closed (or locked), there is no way for the mail to be delivered through the slot in the door. There are many members who, to let in light or to ventilate their unit, open the front door and latch their screen door. At times screen doors are locked even when the front door is closed. The mail slot is not accessible at all under these circumstances, and there can be no delivery of Canada Post mail or of any other printed materials. It's also against Canada Post regulations for mail carriers to open doors and throw the mail in the entry hall. If they do this, it's not permitted anyway. Canada Post Mail cannot be left under doormats or under rocks or potted plants. Canada Post has the right to refuse delivery when a proper receptacle for the mail is not provided. A mailbox is quite inexpensive to buy. It's also easy enough to make one.

REPORTS were prepared by designated Co-op representatives for the purpose of updating Twin Oaks members on the various activities and aspects of our Co-op community. This issue of *The Acorn* is designed primarily to inform the Membership. Some of the articles submitted used the following resource materials: The Cooperative Association Act of BC, the Co-op's Incorporation Documents, instructional materials utilized by CHF BC and CHF Canada, and the Co-op's own Rules and Policies.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

The general membership of Twin Oaks wishes to express its gratitude to the Board for their managerial support and hard work during the past year. Thank you!

In preparation for the upcoming Annual General Meeting of February 25th, the membership received a comprehensive package on the 20th. All members are asked to review these materials carefully prior to the general meeting. Attendance is mandatory.

A blurb or two on elections...

When Twin Oaks boards are elected by the general membership, it's fair to assume that we nominate members we deem trustworthy and capable of working in the best interests of the Co-op. With or without previous board experience, directors rely on each other and on the support and confidence of the members who approved their nominations. Boards do their best for the Association and quickly learn the merits of open-mindedness, education, communication, and constructive criticism.

The Co-operative Association Act and some sections of the Company Act set out regulations for the directors. These include the following:

* A person must not become or act as a director unless the person is an individual who is qualified to do so.

* All directors must be members of the Association, over the age of 18, and competent to exercise the duties of their position

* A person who is an undischarged bankrupt or owes moneys to the Co-op cannot be a director

* Persons convicted of an offence involving fraud cannot serve on the Board, unless five years have elapsed since the end of the sentence

* Persons who are employees of the Co-op cannot be directors

Members who haven't served on the Board for many years - or have never done so - should re-evaluate their participation commitment to the Co-op. It would be ideal for the Board to have a healthy mix of new energies and old experience.

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## **ANNUAL EDUCATION REPORT**

By Margy Ransford, Unit #2

The Education Budget Allocation for our Fiscal Year 2002/03 has been applied thus far to attendees from Co-op Housing BC workshops and registration for the Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Housing Co-operative Association.

At the AGM of CHF BC, three Vancouver Island delegates were elected. Reinstated were incumbents Candice Bunting of Cameo Co-op, Joe Johnson, from Seawalk Place, and newcomer Janet Hall of Pheasant Meadows. Nine co-ops were represented, including Twin Oaks, Lang Cove, Northridge, James Bay, Krisineleos, and Tyee.

I would like to make the following points for review by the membership:

- We need to update our emergency preparedness plans as a community. Under Block Watch, we have a cohesive template upon which to register and remind ourselves of our strengths and needs. However, since the move-out of Joie Slater-Burrows, this has gone out-of-date.
- The Cooperative Sector, through Membership Education, remains a viable segment of affordable housing within B.C. and Canada. It is highly recommended that we retain our connections with CHF Canada and CHF BC through representation politically and with reference to issues of social housing. With the volunteer activities of members toward our own education, we nevertheless need to consider that, at times, it will be necessary to spend some money in order to get some training for members, **as the need arises.**
- With the absorption of VICHA Services (the former association known as Vancouver Island Cooperative Housing Association) by CHFBC (the Cooperative Housing Federation

of British Columbia) we will see an inevitable rise in costs of workshops and possible consultation in the immediate future.

- While we have been fortunate indeed to have been able to deal with issues as they have surfaced, it would be wise and proactive to retain a reasonable sum for use towards **Education Projects** as needed, regardless of when in the fiscal year it may (or may not) be used. Just as the Board has a fiduciary responsibility to guard the financial viability of our Co-op, we also need to educate ourselves in order to remain functional in the current and changing housing and political sector, or risk loss of the autonomous and self-governing aspect we all hold dear.
- We all need to keep current about policy guidelines regarding many issues of cooperative housing.

Please consider these points as an ongoing priority and let's keep educating ourselves. Thank you.

**Margy Ransford**

Twin Oaks Co-op Education Rep

*Please read your **Scoop** news for a joint report on the 20 years of service through CHF BC, which Twin Oaks recently joined.*

#### **ADDITIONAL NEWS:**

### **Island Education Day**

**Saturday, March 8, 2003  
1507 Glentana Rd.**

**Workshops are held in the  
Glentana Recreation Centre,  
Cameo Co-op**

Workshop for New Directors – **Board Basics** – will take place in the morning. Instructor: Eileen Beaudine. 9 AM – 12 PM.

Twin Oaks should seriously consider sending new directors to this workshop. This is also an ideal opportunity for experienced members looking for a refresher and for anyone thinking about running for the board in the near future.

Afternoon Workshop: **Securing our Future**. Instructor: Jamie Ritchie. 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM.

This afternoon workshop will focus on the imminent end of many co-ops' Operating Agreements and how this will impact the co-ops. Our own operating agreement expires in 2019. The years will pass quickly. The workshop **Securing our Future** will address the following concerns: How can we continue to house low income members when there are no more subsidies? Can we afford major repairs and replacements then? Can we think about physical improvements to accommodate the needs of our Membership? How about building more units and community facilities?

Now is the time to start planning for our future.

FEES: \$100 for full day (non-member co-ops pay \$200)

- \$60 for half day
- Workshop limit is 20 people; workshops with less than 10 people will be cancelled

Fees include lunch and do not include GST.

Members interested in attending these specific workshops (one or both) should contact the Board.

To register call Kerry Panter at 384-9444 or email [kpanter@chf.bc.ca](mailto:kpanter@chf.bc.ca)

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As a co-op community, we should try to keep in mind that member education is indispensable and ought to be an ongoing process. In spite of the invaluable experience long-time members have been able to secure, no one can possibly claim that he or she knows everything that there is to know about the "Co-op Experience." Regulations and procedures change, and it's our responsibility to become acquainted with those changes and to be aware of what goes on in the co-op sector. Decisions can be made with more confidence when they are well researched and based on experiences that have been successful in communities similar to our own. When it comes to the security and longevity of our home and community, ignorance is definitely not bliss.

For those Twin Oaks members who, through the years, have attended workshops and participated in various conferences, most seminars have proven very beneficial. Workshop participants learn from each other, compare notes, exchange ideas.

Education should also be an ongoing internal process. Disturbing or consequential "scenarios" can often be avoided if the members making the decisions take the time to study policy or consult other sources.

Social, economic, and contractual changes affect today's social and non-profit housing in many different ways. Our future – and the future of our children and of prospective Twin Oaks members – depends heavily on the decisions we make now and in the negotiations we undertake. That's an awesome responsibility! But we don't have to make them alone: we have educational materials, educated professionals and resource people who can guide us through the process. We need, however, to know when to reach out, or when we should simply watch and learn, or read and learn, or dispute and learn.

Manuela Costa Lima

From information provided by K. Panter, CHF BC.

The importance of Education was stressed by various participating co-ops during the CHF BC Vancouver Island Council Meeting on February 15. I was a last-minute replacement (and not so effective, I might add) and attended in lieu of Margy Ransford. Margy is our most capable Education Rep.

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## **LEAKY CO-OPS NEED OUR HELP!**

You have probably read in the *Scoop* the sad details about over 50 leaky co-ops in BC, which makes up 20% of the province's co-op housing. Donations continue to come in. To date, contributions in the excess of \$47,000 have been sent to the Leaky Co-op Defence Fund. This fund will support a campaign to raise awareness about the leaky co-op crisis, and convince the federal government to provide immediate assistance to leaky co-

ops. BC co-ops hope to raise \$100,000.00 in donations.

Unfortunately, there are two co-ops, and possibly more, on the Island that have been deemed leaky. With this in mind, CHF BC urges the unrelenting support of all the co-ops in the Island. In the national campaign, CHF Canada will match co-op donations dollar for dollar.

To elicit the much needed government support, Island co-ops have been asked to participate in a postcard campaign. Twin Oaks members should do their part and send their cards to Ottawa. The tan-coloured card is to be addressed to our MP and sent to him in Ottawa; the black postcard goes to the Minister Responsible for CMHC. Both postcards need to be completed with the member's name and address. No postage is required.

Please take a few minutes to send in your postcards in support of this very important campaign. We are all housing cooperatives. We belong to the same movement and should help one another in a time of crisis. Just think: it could be happening to us right here at Twin Oaks...

## **MAINTENANCE REPORT**

Members who may need repairs of any kind done in their units are asked to please contact Brian Rosborough, in Unit #24, or Ken Knowles, in Unit #7.

Members are again reminded that requests must be done in writing, except if there is an emergency. A phone call is obviously faster in an emergency. The committee keeps records of the

work that is done in each co-op unit.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Members cannot call a contractor, or service person, directly, as our contractors will only respond to a request from Brian or Ken. Phoning directly will only slow down the repair process. Failure to follow this procedure will result in the member being held responsible for the cost of the service call and repairs. It's important to understand that work orders have to be approved by Brian or Ken before the contractors arrive to do the work.

Please do not hesitate to contact Brian or Ken when you suspect that a repair in your unit is necessary. We will be glad to respond as quickly as we can. Do not, under any circumstances, let a problem go unattended! Neglect has cost our Co-op a great deal of money, as well as inconvenience to the members involved.

Details submitted by:  
Ken Knowles, Maintenance co-chair

## **MAINTENANCE TIDBITS...**

### **Oh those pesky fleas!**

There's nothing quite as distressing as a house full of fleas. Worse yet, there's very little that can compare to the shock of moving into a unit where the fleas have taken over...

If you suspect that fleas have invaded your pet's fur, as well as your home sweet home, here are some helpful hints:

1. Wear white knee-high socks in the room that you suspect contains fleas. Fleas will be

attracted to the vibration of your footsteps and will jump toward your legs – looking for a free meal, of course.

2. Since you're wearing white socks, fleas should be relatively easy to detect as they jump onto you.
3. Fleas will try to get to your skin through the thick white socks and will burrow into the fabric. As they do this, crush the little critters with tweezers.

This simple technique is certainly not a flea control method; however, it will help you find out if, in fact, you have fleas in your unit. If you happen to collect more than five fleas in one given room of your home, you can rest assured that you have a serious flea infestation that will require immediate attention and control.

Brushing and bathing your pet will be necessary. There are all types of shampoos and foams available. These products are safe for your pet and efficacious on fleas and their eggs.

Products that are safe for the environment are available at veterinary clinics throughout the area. The idea is to get rid of the eggs – before they hatch and become a very large army of annoying parasites.

Never let the flea problem get out of hand – and don't wait until move-out day before you work hard on a solution to control the fleas in your unit. As we all know, *flea infestations* are seasonal but manageable.

Vacuuming often and observing good standards of cleanliness also help to keep the flea population more controlled. Also, put a couple of mothballs in your vacuum cleaner bag;

naphthalene is not too popular with fleas and will kill them, and their eggs, as they are picked up into the vacuum bag.

### **UNIT INSPECTIONS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Maintenance Committee has formed a sub-committee to deal with several aspects of unit inspections.

Ken Knowles, from unit #7, is the sub-committee's chairperson. Other Co-op members helping out are: Scott Henson, Laura McCallum, Bev Rougeau, Gary Caloyloy, and Manuela C. Lima.

The sub-committee has met three times. The following projects are being worked on:

1. **New Inspection Forms:** Forms will be unit-specific and more detailed.
2. **Policy review:** Amendments are necessary, to accommodate current situations and to alleviate problems found in many units. Changes in policy will be submitted for the approval of the general membership in the near future.
3. **Job Description & Training:** Selected members will know what is expected of them and will be trained on how to conduct proper unit inspections. There will be the same guidelines for all and equal expectations from all inspectors. This will result in consistency.
4. **Member education.**

During the first meeting, the group discussed the suggestion of unit inspectors being paid X amount to conduct all the annual and move-out inspections. Discussion led to conclusions where paying our own members would defeat the purpose of co-op housing. Co-ops survive on

the volunteer work of the membership. Salaries would be feasible only if we contract people from outside the co-op. This would be a costly endeavour and would put the co-op in a position of being "managed."

There is still much to be done. Scott has been working on the unit-specific inspection forms. Manuela has created a very detailed Member's Move-Out List with the input of the other members.

The sub-committee hopes to assist the Co-op in minimizing the negative, yet avoidable, experiences associated with unit inspections. Almost without exception, move-out inspections have proven that the Co-op needs to work seriously on improving Unit Maintenance Policies and on restructuring and tightening the standards to be used in move-out inspections.

Please direct your questions or suggestions about the sub-committee to Ken, in Unit #7.

### **From the Newsletter chairperson:**

The Co-op Newsletter is a very interesting and rewarding project. I have been involved with it for over eleven years and have enjoyed the experience.

Now that we have "new blood" and plenty of "fresh talent" in the Co-op, it would be ideal for me to take a well-deserved break from my position as principal writer and publisher. It's time for another Twin Oaks member to take over the production and publication of *The Acorn* for a while. I will, however, continue to prepare special reports for the newsletter and will help during production.

I am most grateful to the members who submitted stories and reports through the years, and appreciate the support and constructive remarks of the Membership.

