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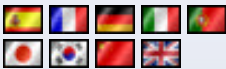
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## Manufactured housing survey has surprising results



Written by Janis Paris

Sunday, 17 June 2007

LAKE COUNTY – The results of a survey mailed to local manufactured home owners earlier this year are in, and it has revealed some surprising information.

In Lake County, manufactured housing accounts for approximately 700 new homes (of the approximately 2,000 new housing starts) per year; at 33 percent, that's slightly higher than the national average of 25 percent.

In the spring, the Manufactured Housing Citizens Group mailed 42 surveys to people who had voiced complaints about their manufactured homes. Of those mailed, 17 people who bought their homes in the last five years completed the survey.

This sample does not provide information about the number of buyers unhappy with their purchase (compared to the total number of buyers of manufactured housing in the county), but the survey does reveal something about the type of problem buyers experience when buying a manufactured home in Lake County.

The survey supports the conclusion by the famous AARP study (in 1999) that most buyers pay for manufactured housing defects out of their own pockets. In the Lake County study, only one buyer was successful in getting the dealer to correct defects, one other buyer paid for his own repairs and in 15 cases the problems remain uncorrected.

Buyers did seek help in resolving problems. More than half the people in the survey filed complaints with one or more government bodies, usually the state Department of Housing and Community Development (of HCD, the manufactured housing ombudsman) and to a lesser extent the Contractors State License Board.

Although the HCD ombudsman was helpful in procuring missing paperwork for some buyers, these agencies were not influential in obtaining a single repair for buyers at the time of this study.

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Two-thirds of the buyers in this survey consulted an attorney: of these, five are currently in litigation, one has won in court and another six were advised against legal solutions largely because of the expense.

It was known at the outset of the study that only those experiencing problems with their manufactured homes were polled; however, the level of dissatisfaction was surprising. Not one person was "more satisfied than dissatisfied," and a whopping 16 of 17 respondents said they were "extremely dissatisfied." Only three of 17 described their experience as moderately inconvenient while 14 characterized their experience as "highly disturbing."

When buyers purchased their manufactured homes they were told that they would be able to move in within a few months of purchase; however, in this study 14 of 17 buyers had to wait six months or more, including nine buyers who were homeless for a year.

A significant finding of this study is that although buyers think they are signing up for the "turnkey" purchase advertised by local dealers (meaning the dealer is responsible for all aspects of construction), another pattern is emerging in Lake County. That is, even though installation is included in the original sales contract, dealers are asking buyers to sign an additional contract with a private licensed contractor.

A few buyers report that the dealer waited months after the initial sale and then informed them the work could not be accomplished within a year unless they engaged a private contractor. In all eight cases where buyers signed with both a dealer and a contractor, the homes took from six to 12 months to finish.

The group will present the findings of this study to the Lake County Board of Supervisors in connection with a request that the board enact legislation requiring local dealers to inform buyers of their legal rights regarding the purchase of manufactured housing prior to the transfer of funds.

The group also will request that the county's consumer affairs division furnish a free clinic on small claims court to help buyers who are not able to afford legal assistance.

Anyone wishing to contact the manufactured housing group may phone 998-0249.

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