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February 13, 2004

### Exodus starts at Clear View Court

**By HEATHER BOERNER**  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — By the time you read this, all evidence of Deborah Turner's existence at Clear View Court will be gone.

After six years, Turner's single-wide mobile home was removed Thursday, on its way to storage as Turner looks for a new place to live.

It was the only solution Turner could find to the tripled rents she and about 28 other residents of the low-income park faced starting next month. Turner and the others in the approximately 62-space park across the street from the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel were the only residents not on rent control.

But Turner, a UC Santa Cruz employee, was one of the lucky ones. She got out before the increases went into effect. The farmworkers, maids, nannies and other service workers who make up the majority of the park's working-class population say they can't afford the rent, but also can't afford the thousands of dollars it will take to get them out.

Like residents at De Anza Mobile Estates, the other city mobile-home park where rent control is being replaced by long-term leases, residents here feel like the park is a prison.

"I call it a beautiful concentration camp," said Liberty Lana, who saved up her money working as a nanny to buy her small mobile home. She is on rent control so she won't face the immediate rent increase, but she's friends with many who are not. And as one of the few residents who speak both English and Spanish, she hears the stories of residents who didn't know they weren't on rent control until it was too late. "We just walk by each other in the street and cry and hug."

Now that the City Council has removed rent control, they are on their own.

Clear View Court, like De Anza Mobile Estates, lost

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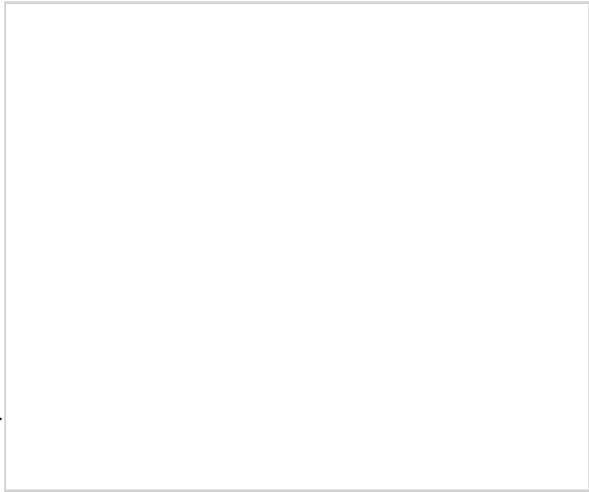


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rent control when the City Council settled several lawsuits with De Anza's owner, Manufactured Home Communities, in the fall. On Dec. 5, residents who weren't on rent control received letters notifying them that their rents would climb from an average of \$475 a month to \$1,250 a month. Some rents increased to \$1,500.



Many bought their homes for less than \$100,000, compared to the January median house price of \$580,000.

Martin Menne, real estate manager for C.L. Swenson Inc., said C.L. Swenson and Corbett Wright, who own the park, raised the rent on non-rent controlled units to make back some market rents. The rents on the rent-controlled units will remain the same and new long-term leases will allow them to keep rent control for the next 34 years. But people without rent control will also receive 34-year leases that cap rent increases to a small percentage yearly.

"We're offering the 34-year leases to everyone, and we're trying to bring the people who are not on rent control up to a reasonable approximation of market rents before the leases start," Menne said. "This is not going to make everyone happy, but we are trying to find a reasonable starting point."

Though technically not on rent control in the past, residents who did not sign up for rent control with the city still received "depressed rents" from the park owners.

Residents didn't sign up for rent control for various reasons. Some didn't do it because they would lose \$20,000 or more in the equity of their home when they sold it. Others were reportedly told by the previous park's owner that they were already on rent control, and others, who did not speak English, said they didn't understand the complexities of the city's rent-control program.

The City Council settled a suit with De Anza owners Manufactured Home Communities in the fall. That settlement eliminated rent control for the two mobile-home parks protected by it.

The park's residents find the solution unreasonable. Already, residents have raised \$6,000 through donations and selling 400 tamales. They're considering another fund-raising effort in which they make tacos or carnitas. They are pooling the money as they mull future legal options.

"It just doesn't leave us with a lot of options," said Vista Pickett, who has lived in the park for two years. "Even if I quit eating, I wouldn't have the money. I'll be 61 this year. I work at Gottschalks, in retail, and I'm tired when I get home. I can't take on another job."

Mayela Luna leaves her mobile home and her 1-year-old baby at 4:30 in the morning to go to her first job at Safeway. She doesn't return home until after 6 p.m. from her second job cleaning houses.

"I got rid of the two house-cleaning jobs a while ago, but I just got them back

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so we can have a little extra money. I can't work any more than I do," she said. "If we could pay that much (\$1,250) a month, we would have something better. But that's why we're here. We don't have the money for something better."

Contact Heather Boerner at [hboerner@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:hboerner@santacruzsentinel.com).

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