

...in this case appears only as a partnership. Land could not net residents a large profit, but mobile homes could be bought and sold for whatever prices the market would bear.

Some believe that community ownership could actually drive home prices up in future years, thus mitigating El Rio's benefit as a low-income community. Cooperative land ownership would keep monthly payments low and stable, making homes at El Rio a more attractive investment.

Some residents see the possibility of increased home values as a plus. Others doubt the unique, but in many cases antique, mobile homes at El Rio will ever command glamor sums.

After buying the park, the residents' association would become a legally-recognized nonprofit corporation with its own charter and board of directors. Prospective members would have to come up with an initial

20 homeowners have said they are willing to buy the park, not everyone is gunning for the park-buying scheme. Some older residents especially have been adamantly opposed to the plan.

A lot of people are being led down the rocky path, being told money's free," says Lorraine Richey of "Surge," as she is known around the park. "I'm not gullible and I don't believe in free lunches."

It takes me 15 minutes to convince her I'm a writer, not a con man.

When I ask her what she'll do if someone buys the park and relocates the tenants, she looks at me square and says, "You can't fight city hall."

Earl Gettis wouldn't mind buying the land his home sits on, but doesn't think much of belonging to a cooperative.

"If I put down \$25,000 for a lot [far in excess of the amount being



Sue Marcus (left) and Cheryl Connolly

one-time-only \$1,500 membership fee, to be returned at not more than 10 percent yearly interest upon leaving the park.

The SCCHC is currently seeking loans for residents unable to pay the fee.

After that, many of the low-income residents would pay a lower monthly amount than they do now because of a low-interest loan available through the Mobile Home Park Assistance

and

"You see all these bookshelves?" she said. "I used to have upwards of 10,000 pocket books. I kept 'em in that shed over there." She points to an olive-drab shed with the word "Library" above the door in raised letters. "I loaned 'em out to anybody and everybody until this fire inspector told me they were a fire hazard. Well, I, they were pretty hot, hard books I'll tell ya, but they weren't that hot."

She remembers when the park was full of "shacks" (for outdoor camping) and people came here "for fun-sies," when going to the movies was "a big deal" and nobody locked their doors.

She has lived here for 31 years.

What is it about El Rio that brings the roots down, and why are residents so eager to secure its future?

Of course, homeowners want to protect their investments. Many residents could not afford to move to a new park. Here, mobile homes, or "coaches," as they are called, can be bought for under \$20,000, and space rents average between \$175 and \$195 per month plus utilities, which residents pay on a special "group rate."

For retired people or those on an otherwise limited income, these figures scrape the top of their budget allowances.

John Oldenkamp, who has lived in his 20-by-7-foot trailer at El Rio since 1977, is only 34 years old but is unable to find work because of a chronic back injury. He makes his living as a freelance mechanic working out of his driveway.

"I'd love to have a nice apartment, but it's the cost," he says, and he confesses, "I still run into months when I can't pay my bills."

For others it's the sense of belonging they share in this "community with a community, away from the rat race."

Frank Mims, a social worker who has lived here a little over a year, says, "My experience in the neighborhoods I've lived in is that I didn't know anyone. I didn't know my next-

door... It's like this all the time." Many of the younger people, like Mims, are first-time home-buyers and see mobile homes as a way to "step

## Just Another Tuesday Morning

The sun is bright at 8 o'clock in the morning, especially when it shines on the river near El Rio Mobile Home Park.

I woke up early one morning to attend a meeting of "the 8 o'clockers," a group of older El Rio residents who get together at Butler Hall on the El Rio grounds to tell jokes, swap recipes, exchange gossip and solve world problems.

"We like to get together, have coffee, read the paper, lie to one another," says Jim Harrington, who looks more like a rancher than what he is, a mobile home park manager. Above his desk is the Irish Prayer: "May the wind always be at your back. May the road rise to meet you...."

When I arrive a group of 15 or so is sitting around a circular table arrangement, talking. Earl Gettis is there. So is Alice Allen.

This is the El Rio old guard. Alice, who was a waitress all her life, makes the coffee.

"The younger people go to work," she explains. "The older girls and gentlemen come over for coffee."

There is the definite feeling that the cat is away.

We talk as Earl Gettis sneaks up slowly behind the coffee pot.

But Alice has eyes in the back of her head.

"It's not speedy yet, Earl," she snaps.

He takes his hand away.

I learn that vaseline cures wrinkles, Clark Winters (not his real name) has become a recluse, and Jim Harrington, when he dies, would like to come back as a bear in Yosemite National Park.

A chipper man in a red shirt and straw hat strolls in and tells me I

But I've ever threaten to sell this place, have me committed. Because this is where I should be 20 years from now. This is just perfect."

look like his dentist. He hugs one of the women and a cloud of oobles and abis rises up.

Someone is on their way to Reno.

Someone has just come back from Palm Springs.

One woman knits and another reads the paper. A long-winded joke about trouble and high seas ends with the captain hollering, "All hands on deck!" And the teller of this tale bends over and puts his hands on the floor.

"Okay, Cap'n, whatta we do now?"

Gradually the conversation turns toward mobile home parks and friends who have lost their parks to redevelopment. But there is no sense of urgency in their voices. Instead, they seem to have passed this worry, at least for the morning, onto their younger neighbors.

The man in the straw hat sings, "La Posada, La Posada...."

But no one has put more time into El Rio, collectively speaking, than the members of the 8 o'clock coffee clatch. Untold quantities of sugar have been loaned, countless volumes of information traded.

And in the process El Rio has gone from car campground to neighborhood.

"We had this great inspector one time," says Harrington. "The first thing he said when he got here was, 'You ain't gonna make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.'"

Everyone laughs. A woman bangs her hand on the table.

"That's us, that's us!"

But the inspector was wrong. El Rio is strictly silk and satin.

—Sean McDonald

Saint Cruz Pottery Club