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# BC Housing

Tenant Newsletter  
December 2006

# News FOR YOU

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

VOLUME 21, ISSUE 2

## Message from the CEO

This is a wonderful time of the year – a time when many cultures celebrate friends, family and home. BC Housing tenants know the importance of a home and how having one is key to building a healthy community. Safe, affordable housing provides a place from which we all can pursue our dreams and build a foundation to help children realize their full potential.

But BC Housing delivers more than homes; it also facilitates a wide variety of supportive programs to build communities and respond to tenant needs. You can read more about some of these programs in this newsletter: the People, Plants and Homes program that so many of you participate in; the bursary program that offers cash awards to tenants returning to school; and the important work done by both the Addiction Recovery Program and the Priority Placement Program. Often programs are initiated by tenants and tenant groups that create their own partnerships. I am always impressed with the creativity that you demonstrate at making things happen and encourage all of you to get involved to build stronger communities.

Best wishes for the holidays and for 2007.

Regards,

Shayne Ramsay, CEO



Little Mountain resident Del Griffith with Shayne Ramsay at one of this summer's People, Plants and Homes garden parties.

## Paying your rent

Most tenants pay rent by having an automatic payment come from their bank account every month. It's a lot easier and quicker than having to pay in person with cash or a cheque at one of our offices, or by giving cash or a cheque to one of our site staff. It is also a lot safer and more secure.

If you currently don't pay your rent by automatic bank account payments, we will give you a \$5 gift certificate from a local food store or restaurant to switch to this form of payment by December 31. Please contact staff at your regional area BC Housing office and they'll help you to set up the automatic payments from your bank account, and make arrangements for your gift certificate.

If you do not have a bank account, our staff can show you how to get one or we can give you a form so you can pay your rent at any bank, without needing a bank account.

If you have submitted post-dated cheques, we would also like you to switch to automatic monthly payments from your account. Contact your regional area BC Housing office staff and they will make arrangements for the automatic payments and your \$5 gift certificate. They'll also make arrangements to return your post-dated cheques.

Please talk soon to our staff about automatic monthly payments from a bank account, because starting March 1, 2007, our regional offices and site staff will not be able to accept cash or cheque payments. Please call our regional area office if you have any questions.

## Lower Mainland regions' names change

BC Housing has recently changed the names of its Lower Mainland regional offices to better demonstrate their alignment with the health authorities and other ministries. Lower Mainland West Region is now known as Vancouver Coastal Region; Lower Mainland East Region is now known as Fraser Region.

## Tenant survey enclosed!

A survey about *News for You* is included in this issue. We appreciate your taking the time to fill it in and returning it so we can make improvements to the newsletter.

## BC Housing holiday schedule

BC Housing's offices around the province will be closed on Monday, December 25 and Tuesday, December 26, 2006 and Monday, January 1, 2007.

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 through this issue of *News for You*, you will notice the many programs that are offered. I encourage you to participate in ones that are appropriate for you and to take advantage of opportunities like the People, Plants and Homes program or the bursary program. I also encourage you to work together to create programs that will benefit you and your neighbours.

My site's tenant association works closely with a church. In a back-to-school celebration earlier this year, church representatives provided gift backpacks full of school supplies to the younger tenants. You can imagine how well received these were by both the children and their parents.

There are community agencies that would be pleased to work with your site too. Band

together, network, and find out what's available to you. Working together is a very enriching experience. And, it doesn't have to be a formal program. You probably have neighbours who could share their tips for cooking on a budget or making simple crafts as presents. Find out what strengths you have amongst yourselves and make it happen!

In PHAC news, four council members are currently working with BC Housing staff on a different model of tenant engagement to serve you better. We will be seeking the input from tenants at a number of sites in the coming months and look forward to sharing more information with you soon.

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

## 2006 garden parties

Tenants turned out in large numbers to celebrate this year's People, Plants and Homes gardening competitions. Next year is the 30th anniversary of the program and special events are being planned to mark the occasion. If you have any ideas on how to observe the anniversary that you would like to share, please contact program coordinator Joyce Fitz-Gibbon.



Jack Smith, Victoria, winner of 2006 David Tarrant Spirit of Gardening Award with Margaret McNeil, Vice President, Operations, and David Tarrant.

## Priority Placement Program helps find homes for women fleeing abuse

Since 1993, BC Housing has been operating the Priority Placement Program, which provides public housing units to women leaving transition homes. As its name suggests, the

program gives women and their children who have left abusive relationships priority to units as these come available. Over the years, more than 900 households throughout the province have been assisted.

BC Housing is now able to offer women and their children in the Lower Mainland additional support through the work of Community Developer Sairoz Sekhon, who started at BC Housing in June in a position funded by the Ministry for Community Services. Many women are still vulnerable after leaving transition homes and need help to build healthy lives for themselves and their children.

Sairoz provides crisis intervention and supportive counselling. "For many of the women I am working with, abuse has been a way of life. The Priority Placement Program settles them into a safe home and then gives them a chance to work on the other issues they face."

## School days for BC Housing tenants

Across the province, hundreds of BC Housing tenants attend post-secondary schools. And thanks to a BC Housing program, each year 46 individuals use \$750 bursaries towards the cost of their education. One such individual is Melinda Peters, a 37-year-old resident of MacLean Park in Vancouver.

Melinda recently completed her associate degree in Practical Ministry from the Salvation Army's War College. She is also in the middle of a Vancouver Community College certificate program to become a substance abuse counsellor. "The BC Housing bursary meant that I could take two classes this fall, which I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise," said Melinda. "After this, I need three more courses to complete the program. I'd like to continue on to do my Masters and eventually create programs for people living in the downtown eastside (DTES)."

Melinda already works part-time with women in the DTES and has given countless hours of volunteer time to the Salvation Army. She runs a retreat program that takes women out of the DTES for three days. She also helped set up a house that helps women stay clean and make solid positive changes in their lives. If that's not enough, Melinda also works with the women in setting up plans for change, and counsels them one-on-one, as well as running a group therapy program.

BC Housing's bursary program allows tenants from 17 to 64 to pursue their educational goals. The \$750 awards are for post-secondary education including training programs. Applications for the 2007 awards will be available in spring 2007. Please contact your site rep or a Community Developer for more information.



BC Housing tenant and bursary winner Melinda Peters.



# Addiction Recovery Program

BC Housing and Vancouver Coastal Health have created a unique program that provides transitional housing and support services for people in recovery from problematic substance use.

Since its inception in 2002, 40 people have graduated from the Addiction Recovery Program. Individuals must complete a support recovery program and be committed to a personal recovery plan that includes strategies for engagement with addictions services, social reintegration and job skills or education training.

Upon completion of the program, some graduates are able to stay on as BC Housing tenants. Brandy Kane and James Hasson are two such tenants who are making valuable contributions to their communities.

Brandy entered the program in March 2004 and graduated in August 2005. "The program helped me achieve my goals," she said. "It meant I had a good, safe place to live and that I could afford to go back to school. It's been a huge thing for me to be able to do this."

Brandy is finishing her second year at Langara College and is working towards a degree in social work. When she graduates she wants to work with other Aboriginal women.

James Hasson entered the Addiction Recovery Program in March 2005 after spending 17 months in a treatment centre in Vancouver's downtown eastside. He graduated from the program in August 2006. "This program meant everything to me," he stated. "There's not a day goes by that I don't thank the program staff and BC Housing and everyone who has helped me."

James does volunteer work with the Salvation Army as well as with the Vancouver Giants and the BC Lions. Eventually he would like to get his counselling degree and help other individuals in recovery from addictions.



Brandy Kane and James Hasson, two graduates of the Addiction Recovery Program.

## New community kitchens

Tenants at Rosewood Tower in Richmond are discovering all the bells and whistles in their new community kitchen, which officially opened on September 28. The kitchen area was renovated to allow for participation in the Richmond Seniors Multicultural Community Kitchen and Cookbook Project, which is a partnership with Richmond Foster Family Support Services and Richmond Intermediate Care Society.

"This partnership offers tenants the chance to cook together, learn about low-cost nutritious recipes, share information and shopping, and learn about budgeting," said Property Portfolio Manager Janet McAllister. "Tenants who participate in the program prepare menus and meals, and make freezer-ready foods to take home. There are also discussions about starting a supper club.

We're hoping the community kitchen will provide a place for our tenants to meet and socialize."

Meanwhile, in Burnaby, Hall Tower I also has a new kitchen and renovated lounge, which are part of an overall site renovation that is seeing new windows being installed in both towers. A grand reopening was celebrated on October 23.

"We had to change the windows, so we felt this was a good time to completely renovate the whole lounge and create something really special," said Property Portfolio Manager Richard Ho. "An architect helped with the design, which includes a brand new kitchen, appliances, flooring, and lighting. The lounge and new recreation programs at the site are creating a great sense of community."



Above: Property Portfolio Manager Janet McAllister and tenant Ed Kruger in the new community kitchen at Rosewood Towers in Richmond.

## Prince Rupert tenants attend Charlotte Diamond concert

Fifty-five BC Housing tenants in Prince Rupert sang along with popular children's entertainer Charlotte Diamond at a September concert to raise money for "Success by 6", an early childhood development initiative. BC Housing was pleased to be a sponsor of the event as well as a ticket sponsor for BC Housing residents. The concert was a wonderful opportunity for families to mingle and to boost their sense of connection to the community.



Charlotte Diamond (second from right) with Pamela Gonzalez and her family, Maria (far right), Lilianna (in Pamela's arms), and Miguel (left). The Gonzalezes are tenants at Pineridge Terrace in Prince Rupert.



## Important dates to remember

- ▶ People, Plants and Homes program: Plant order forms available: March 2007
- ▶ 2006 Bursary applications: available: spring 2007
- ▶ Applications for Annual Funding for Tenant Activity Grants: available spring 2007
- ▶ Applications for Special Event Funding for Tenant Activity Grants: available throughout the year

Contact your Building Manager for more information about any of these programs.

## Tenant tips

### Inexpensive gift ideas

As the holiday season approaches, there is tremendous pressure to buy gifts that exceed our budgets. Remember that there are many gifts that you can give that represent good value to both you and the recipient.

Below are a few ideas for gifts that won't cost much more than the value of your time. For more ideas, search the Internet for "inexpensive gift ideas". You will be amazed at the variety of suggestions posted on various websites.

- Give friends with young children babysitting coupons. Parents always appreciate some time away, even if it is just to go for a walk or do some grocery shopping.
- Offer to run errands for friends who find it difficult to get around.
- If you are already driving your children to school, offer to take your neighbours too, or suggest alternating drop offs and pick ups.
- Invite friends over for a favourite budget meal. It's not hard to make dinner stretch for one or two extra people.
- Create a recipe book to give to friends who love to cook.
- Promise your children regular outings together to new parks or different playgrounds.

## Safety first!



Many of us want to make our homes festive for the holiday season. Please keep the following safety tips in mind as you decorate.

- Use only artificial trees. Real trees can be a fire hazard and are difficult to dispose of properly after the season.
- Connect no more than three strands of lights together.
- Avoid overloading wall outlets and extension cords.
- Turn off Christmas lights when you sleep or if you leave your home.
- Unplug light strings before replacing bulbs.
- Have an operable fire extinguisher readily available.
- Never leave a candle unattended.
- Keep candles out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers easily accessible.

For those residents who live in a part of the province that enjoys a winter wonderland, here are a few tips to help you cope with the weather.

- Leave your heat on during cold spells—even if you are away—to prevent frozen piping. If possible, have a friend or family member check your home while you are away.
- Icy sidewalks can cause many falls and injuries and can keep people trapped at home. You can help by clearing snow and spreading salt over pathways. Also, avoid carrying heavy loads over icy sidewalks, as these may make you more likely to fall.

## 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.

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BC Housing

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