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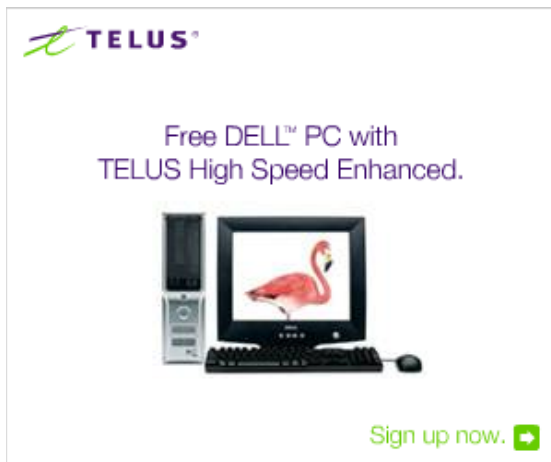
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Order to close Okotoks RV park leaves residents in the lurch

30 renters given 60 days to pack up



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Jamie Komarnicki, Calgary Herald

Published: Friday, January 26, 2007

After several years of flouting municipal regulations, the owner of an Okotoks RV park has been ordered to shut it down, leaving more than 30 permanent residents in the lurch.

A judge ordered the Wilderness RV Resort to shut down -- giving residents 60 days to move out -- after the Municipal District of Foothills cited a lack of proper development permits, coupled with safety concerns.

But permanent residents Terry and Gayle James, who pay a yearly rent and maintain their home, are protesting. They've put at least \$17,000 into their home, building a permanent addition that's embedded into the ground, they said.

"And you just kiss it goodbye? How are we supposed to up and move stuff," said Terry James, nicknamed the campground's mayor by other residents, some of whom are seasonal workers who pay monthly rent.

"We were shocked when they said you have 60 days, which is next to impossible to move anything, it's all embedded in the ground," said Gayle James.

The couple moved to the park from their Calgary condo nearly a decade ago after Gayle, who has multiple sclerosis, had difficulty managing the stairs.

They enjoy living at the site, where they can feed deer that come to their doorstep.

"A lot of people are envious because it's so pretty here," said Terry.

The campground has its own well and sewer system, he said.

As for the legality of renting the space year round, the couple said they left that to the owner.

The park's owner, Al Blomme, was unavailable for comment Thursday.

Permits have been issued to the campground over the years, but were revoked after Blomme failed to complete the conditions of approval, said M.D. of Foothills development officer Heather McInnes.

Since proper repairs weren't made after the floods two years ago, there have been safety concerns on the property, she said.

Parts of the campground are an eyesore, McInnes added.

"There are exposed electrical wires out there, sewage leaking into the groundwater, which is hydraulically connected to the river. There are buried materials causing environmental concerns."

The timing of the decision is frustrating, especially since the municipal district knew of the park's troubles for

years, said Robert Eliuk, who divides his time between Arizona in the winter and his recreational vehicle in the summer.

He's worried about residents finding somewhere else to live.

"They left it to now, where it's a crunch. People have got no place to go, you can't rent; buying is exorbitant."

After getting fed up with the park's troubled history, he and his wife began renting a Calgary apartment and returned to the campground Thursday to pick up some of their things after hearing of the closure.

Terry and Gayle James say they don't know where they can move to. They've contacted a lawyer to see if they can fight the closure.

When the campground was flooded in June 2005, park resident Rick James Petrie died after he fell out of a backhoe and was swept away by the current in Sheep River.

Blomme and another man riding in the backhoe at the time survived the accident.

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