

> HOUSING

Whistler's seasonal housing crunch a thing of the past

Other communities looking to resort's successful resident-restricted program

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When Katherine Macnab first moved to Whistler from Alberta about a year ago, she stayed in three different places during her first month and at one point was paying \$400 a month to share a small room with another person. At another house she shared a "room" with walls made of bed sheets.

But a year later, much has changed for Macnab and many others looking for seasonal rental housing. Macnab recently moved into a six-bedroom house with cheaper rent and fewer people. She said she also had more choice of available places.

The Whistler Housing Authority (WHA) confirmed that it's a different game than recent years for seasonal workers arriving in town and looking for a place to stay. It seems Whistler's rental housing "crisis" of the past has officially ended.

"Overall, looking at a snapshot (in Whistler), there is housing available for employees, which is great, because for this time of the year usually it would be a crunch for people looking for housing, but there still are options out there to date," said Marla Zucht, general manager of the WHA.

She noted the number of rental listings in the local papers compared with previous winters at this time of year. There are even

a few vacancies in employee-restricted WHA rental units.

Not only are there more available units, rental prices are also coming down marginally. Zucht noted that any decrease in rental prices is ultimately a good thing not only for tenants but also employers.

"Now, businesses trying to attract new staff to their places of employment are in a good position because there are units available. Typically you would arrive in town and it wasn't necessarily a job that was going to be tough to find – it was housing," she said.

According to a bar graph compiled by WHA, during the second week of October in 2009 there were 54 units available for rent of all unrestricted units. During the same week in 2010 there were 165 units advertised, and this year there were 184 listed at the lowest rental prices of the past three years.

Zucht credits the surplus of rental units to local residents moving into Cheakamus Crossing and the Rainbow developments, which frees up rental spaces throughout Whistler previously held by these new homeowners.

However, Whistler still seems to have a reputation among international seasonal workers as being a tight and expensive rental market. Ashleigh Mimcher, who recently arrived from New Zealand, said she heard "horror stories" from friends who weren't able to find accommodation and jobs in Whistler and ended up having to move on.

But Mimcher didn't find that to be the case. She easily secured a spot in staff housing, months before arriving in town.

Other communities are now looking to Whistler as a leader when it comes to provid-

ing affordable resident-restricted housing.

Zucht was recently asked to give a presentation to Vancouver developers, architects and planners detailing the WHA's success. Whistler's resident housing story will also be featured at the B.C. Non Profit Housing Association's annual Housing Conference as a case study, according to a WHA press release.

The WHA was created in 1997 to oversee

the development, administration and management of resident-restricted housing in Whistler. Today, there are almost 1,900 units of affordable housing within WHA's rental and purchase inventory.

Recent studies have also indicated that 82 per cent of Whistler employees live within the municipality, with two-thirds of those in resident-restricted housing.

> ACCOLADES

Three local firms up for Georgies

Glacier Creek and WHA nominated for Rainbow units

Three Whistler-based construction companies have been named as finalists in the 2011 Georgie Awards, presented by the Canadian Home Builders' Association of B.C.

Schreyer Construction and RDC Fine Homes were nominated for two awards each, while Glacier Creek Contracting and the Whistler Housing Authority were nominated together for the Best Public/Private Partner-

ship award.

Family-owned Schreyer Construction was nominated for its "Khyber House" in the Spring Creek neighbourhood. The home was nominated for Best Single Family Detached Home, valued at \$1 million to \$2 million, and Best Kitchen, \$40,000 to \$100,000. According to the company's website, the new home features a contemporary West Coast design with emphasis on local materials such as Douglas fir timber, stone and glass.

RDC Fine Homes, which won a 2010 Georgie, was nominated for its "Read Alley Home." The project was shortlisted for the Best Single Family Detached Home

up to 2,000 square feet, valued at over \$350,000, and the Best Kitchen under \$40,000.

Glacier Creek Contracting also won a Georgie last year. This year's nomination is for the Glacier Duplexes at Rainbow, a development of 80 resident-restricted duplex townhouses. All of the units meet or exceed the gold rating for B.C. Hydro Powersmart, and solar assist for hot water and heating is an option, according to the Glacier Creek website.

Georgie Awards highlight excellence in B.C.'s home building industry, and the award winners will be named at a gala on Feb. 25 in Vancouver.

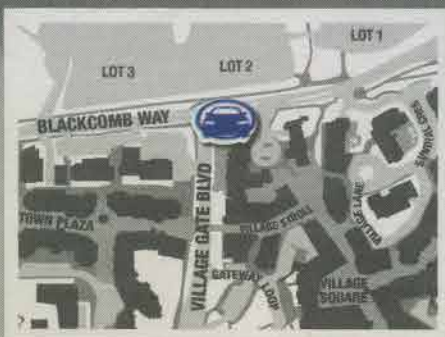
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