

South County

FOR SALE:

Luckily still able to laugh, Sue DeSellem, left, and Pat Kandola, residents of the El Toro Mobile Estates, stand in front of Kandola's home for sale. There are already about 30 homes for sale in the senior community.



JEFFREY ANTENORE

Seniors at mobile home park struggle with rents

Residents of a Lake Forest community find themselves stuck.

By **ALEJANDRA MOLINA**
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LAKE FOREST • For seniors living on a fixed income, the high cost of living in South Orange County is taking its toll.

Five years ago, Sue DeSellem moved into the senior community of El Toro Mobile Estates in Lake Forest and paid \$714 per month for her space. When her five-year lease was up in January, DeSellem was put on a one-year lease and now pays \$881 a month. Her monthly Social Security check is \$903.

For DeSellem and others on fixed incomes, it's harder to find that retiree peace of mind these days. Some stray from using utilities by bundling up in the winter and using a fan while it's hot as opposed to air conditioning.

"It's horrible to live like that," DeSellem said.

When DeSellem moved into El Toro Mobile Estates, there were only three homes to

choose from. Today, about 30 homes in the park are for sale. There are 328 units in the park. The weak housing market, coupled with the increased land rents, makes it harder for seniors to leave the community.

"They're leaving because of the rents and then they can't sell their place because nobody wants to move in and pay the high rents," DeSellem said.

Marilyn Green, property manager for Meadows Management, said they are trying to make the routine rent increases more equitable.

"We're giving higher increases to the ones that are below market and low increases to the ones we think are above market," Green said. Average land rent at El Toro Mobile Estates is \$835. Residents are now being offered a one-year or month-to-month lease that can lead to a 2, 4, or 6 percent rent increase, depending on current rent.

Green said there is a rental

assistance interest-free program for residents over 60 who have lived in the mobile home community for at least five years. If they qualify, future rent increases are deferred and seniors don't have to pay the deferred rent that accumulates over time as long as they continue to qualify. There are currently 10 residents under that program, Green said.

There are four senior communities in Lake Forest, three of which are mobile home communities. No rental units in the city are under rent control.

Councilwoman Kathryn McCullough, an advocate for the city's senior community, said she would like to see the city assist tenants in looking for funding such as block grant funds in purchasing their mobile estates and setting themselves as a governing body.

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