

2014 GSMOL CONVENTION REPORT

APRIL 11, 12, 13

For the first time in GSMOL history, three different candidates ran for the state presidency: Interim President, Mary Jo Baretich; Jean Crowder, State Treasurer and Wally Emory, Chapter President. A special procedure took place Sunday, April 13, overseen by an Election Committee with Bruce Stanton, Corporate Counsel, presiding. Jean Crowder is our new State President, receiving the most votes in the run off election between Jean and Mary Jo. We also have a new Zone A-1 Vice President, Terri Pohrman. A new Treasurer will be appointed soon. See the Gallery on the www.slomap.org website for photos of our new Board and more of the Convention activities.

Summary of the workshops held on Friday, April 11 and Saturday, April 12:

COALITIONS and ALLIES – Tim Sheahan and Tim Geddes

Mobile home living has come under threat increasingly in recent years mainly because of a switch from “mom and pop” ownership of parks to buy outs by huge impersonal corporate groups or individuals who are interested only in maximizing their profits and pleasing their investors. Such groups seek to use their wealth and political influence to pass laws which will allow them to do this at the expense of the manufactured home owners. As manufactured home owners, our best defense against these attacks lies in networking in order to expand our power and financial base. This allows us to form a strong voting block. We can then seek out affordable housing advocates and allies in government, form partnerships, send e-mails, make phone calls, and present our case to political figures at all levels.

Some ways to do this include talking first to our neighbors and friends, then expanding our outreach to larger organizations such as SLOMAP, GSMOL, or NMHOA at the national level. We can also join forces with like-minded groups such as local senior organizations, veterans’ associations, unions, AARP etc.. We can seek out allies on city councils, in environmental groups, tenant groups, and anti-land development groups. Finally we need to get to know our opposition so we can form responses to their arguments, know where they get their funding, and stay one step ahead of the next challenge.

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT & RETENTION -

Anne Anderson, Darrow Sprague, Victor Roy

The main focus of this workshop was to show how members at every level – regional managers, chapter officers, AND individual members - can help grow our membership and build chapters. Individuals without chapters can help recruit people to join GSMOL. The nearest GSMOL Regional Officer will assist individuals in forming a chapter in their park.

Membership Management consists of Enrollment, Retention and Support. A park doesn’t have to have a chapter in order to have a designated member responsible for membership tasks. With help from your Regional Officer, a Membership Co-ordinator can make a BIG difference in a chapterless park.

As a Regional Officer, you can be a big help for all of your parks in terms of membership. Visiting and doing presentations to parks with few or no GSMOL members will help residents understand what GSMOL can do for them. Getting them involved with the LAT is often a first step. In parks with just a few members, you can focus on gaining enough membership to start a chapter. Lastly, you can help parks identify and recruit people to become officers for a Chapter Board. Combining an already existing HOA with a GSMOL Chapter can be an efficient use of volunteers.

Victor Roy, Associate Manager for the Oceanside area, outlined specific tactics for Membership Recruitment:

1. Goal Setting – for yourself, your membership group, your chapter, and for parks without chapters. Are these goals realistic? Consider Team goals vs. Individual goals.
2. Establish regular Membership Drives
3. Know your Tools: Member benefits, Chapter benefits, Special Ideas for Recruitment, Innovation.

The Membership section of the Regional Officers' Binder as well as the Chapter Officers' Handbook are both under revision. New pages will be sent out via email.

MRL 101 – Mobilehome Residency Law - GSMOL Corporate Counsel Bruce Stanton

The MRL, or Mobilehome Residency Law, is part of the California Civil Code and exists to protect mobile/manufactured-home owners. Many homeowners know very little about the MRL. You can contact any GSMOL Regional Officer and they will provide you with one. Bruce Stanton's MRL Roadshows are an attempt to point out the most important provisions in the MRL and answer the audience's questions, all in a way that is entertaining and informative. This presentation was a shortened version of the typical MRL Roadshow.

Bruce conducted the workshop in the form of questions and answers, trying to find out how much we already knew.

1. Who enforces the MRL? (We do! The only way to enforce the MRL is through the courts.)
2. If a park rule or rental agreement contradicts the MRL, which one applies? (The MRL.)
3. When should you sign a long term lease? (Never! It will remove you from any rent control protection your jurisdiction has. If your jurisdiction has NO Rent Control Ordinance, you might carefully consider a lease.)
4. Can the manager ever enter your home? (Only with your permission and in case of an actual emergency.)
5. Can the manager enter your lot? (Yes, but only at reasonable hours.)
6. Does the MRL protect residents from conversion of the park to another use? (No. There is a gutless state law, but only a well crafted local ordinance will give full protection.)

Bruce provides a full outline whenever he conducts an MRL Roadshow. The MRL 101 Workshop gave us just a taste of what we could have. We were left wanting more. Every Region should have its own full-length MRL Roadshow! We all need to be better informed about the most important aspects of the Mobilehome Residency Laws.

RENT CONTROL ORDINANCES – Will Constantine

Since ownership of manufactured home parks has shifted from “mom and pop” concerns which had more local loyalties to large companies with a desire for limitless profits designed to attract shareholders, there have been relentless attacks on existing rent control ordinances and huge use of legal and financial resources to prevent any new ordinances from being enacted. These attacks have led some smaller cities with fewer resources to rescind their rent control ordinances rather than face bankruptcy when only a small percentage of their citizenry is affected by the change.

Steps can be taken to counteract this strategy:

1. Attach rent control to an annual increase based on a percentage of CPI (new ordinances use 100% CPI).
2. Allow for a fair rate of return by owners by permitting “owner distress” raises as judged by writ of mandate hearings.
3. Encourage cities to ask for money from park owners to hire an unbiased expert to evaluate the merits of any rent increase.
4. Use 998 Code of Civil Procedures to shift costs to a pass through which avoids recovery of attorney fees and extort proofs ordinances.
5. Use the initiative process to change ordinances banning rent control.
6. Allow cities/ counties to collect fees to build a fund to defend against law suits.
7. Seek help from O.H. A.-Office of Administrative Hearing which offers legal services to seniors.
8. Avoid using outside arbitrators to decide cases.
9. In the case of a legal challenge, take the city council out of the picture by leaving the decision with a state agency where fees are smaller.

FAILURE TO MAINTAIN – Henry Heater (San Diego Law Firm)

This workshop focused mainly on the steps necessary to bring a successful resolution to a problem caused by a park owner's failure to do required and necessary maintenance and upkeep . If a good outcome is to be achieved, careful preparation and follow through by park residents is required.

1. Residents must know their rights. They need to become very familiar with the MRL provisions regarding maintenance and safety as well as the information included in their rental agreement. The MRL, of course, supersedes any other agreements.
2. If a problem arises, check to see if the situation is covered by the MRL law.
3. Immediately start to document the problem in as many ways as possible. For example, take dated photos or make videos, record meetings with management concerning the issue, make note of any professionals whose assistance you have sought. Keep copies of all letters, e-mails, or texts to the manager as well as management's responses to the resident. Be sure all are dated and signed. Written correspondence is always better than phone calls.
4. If management does not act to resolve the problem, move the complaint to the HCD if it is a major Health and/or Safety concern, or failing a response there eventually to the court system.
5. Good documentation at each step is the key.

SMALL CLAIMS COURT & MH Recovery Fund – Ron Javor

The first half of this session answered questions involving the filing of any small claims suit. This summary will include only a few resources that could be of assistance in filing a claim.

1. California Courts self help website: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-smallclaims.html>
2. Consumer Affairs Agency manual "The Small Claims Court: A Guide to its Practical Use".
3. Attorney General's website: <http://www/dca.ca.gov/publications/smallclaims/index.shtml>.

The second half of the session dealt with the Manufactured Home Recovery Fund which has 2.5 million in available funds and \$ 500,000 coming in annually. A claim can be made for actual losses that cannot be recovered from the person or company causing the loss with a \$75,000 maximum.

Some compensable claims include

1. Failure to honor warranties or guarantees.
2. Fraud or willful misrepresentation related to a. any financial provision or b. the kind or quality of the product sold or purchased.
3. Willful violation of the Manufactured Housing Act-either home defects or dealer/salesperson violations.
4. Any violation of warrantee provisions in Civil Code section 1797 and following

The website for more detailed information is <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/codes/ol/mhrfmenu.htm>.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION TEAM - Marie Pounders/Craig Hull

A re-structuring has been approved by the GSMOL State Board for the Legislative Action Team Network. A State Steering Committee is in the process of being formed. Co-chair persons are Marie Pounders and Craig Hull (Zone B-1). There will be representatives from all zones on the committee; current members are Norma Bohannan, John Bertaut, Joe Diaz, and Jim Sullivan. Other members will be selected by Brian Augusta, our Lobbyist and Darrow Sprague, our Community Organizer. The vacant positions are Zone A-1, Zone B.

In each geographical area, the Steering Committee hopes to identify current GSMOL Leaders who already are or would be willing to **forward the LAT messages from Brian to others in their region and parks**. Right now, the list of these LAT Co-ordinators/Representatives is comprised of those members who have been on our LAT Conference Calls list. (These calls provide an opportunity to "ask the experts" about our GSMOL sponsored bills and it gives Brian a chance to share planned strategies with those of us "out in the trenches".) The idea of using the members on the Conference Call list is so we don't have to re-invent the wheel.

The Regional Binder has an LAT section with suggestions on how to involve your parks in the LAT. It is important to remember that residents do NOT have to be members of GSMOL to be involved in the LAT. We want all residents to be informed about bills which may affect them, both negatively and positively. A graphic of the new overall structure of our LAT is available on the SLOMAP site and soon, the GSMOL Website. We will continue to discuss the new LAT Structure on the upcoming Conference Calls.

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE – Ron Faas

Ron Faas is the chairperson of the state PAC. Ron prepared a flyer for the GSMOL PAC which is available on the SLOMAP website and soon, the GSMOL website. The PAC functions as a separate and independent Board for vetting, endorsing and assisting candidates who are sympathetic to the interests of mobilehome owners and our members. The PAC allows us to endorse and contribute funds to candidates of our choice and volunteer to work for their local campaign committees. The PAC is funded only by GSMOL members' contributions to the PAC Fund. These contributions are critical to the PAC fund to enable it to assist the candidates who support our interests. The PAC Board consists of the GSMOL State President and GSMOL members representing the Zones throughout the state.

By participating in the PAC, GSMOL will be in a much better position to pass laws that will protect manufactured home owners and also oppose bills the park owners sponsor. The PAC cannot be successful without the support of members like you! Here are some suggestions of what you can do:

1. Get acquainted with candidates for local and state offices. Help them understand the realities of mobilehome living and how decisions they make impact us.
2. Help your local chapter and group evaluate which candidates most need the PAC's help and recommend your choice for endorsement.
3. Volunteer to work with the endorsed candidate's campaign.
4. Contribute to the PAC Fund by sending a check (for the PAC) to GSMOL-PAC, 6101 Ball Road, Suite 202, Cypress, CA 90630. You can also go online to the GSMOL website's Fund Donation Page (under Get Involved). <http://www.gsmol.org/apply/donations.php>.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR REGIONAL OFFICERS – Marie Pounders/Craig Hull

Newer Regional Officers were specifically invited to this Leadership Skills Breakout Session as an Introduction to the new Regional Officers' Binder. Two new sections of material were added. If you did not attend the Convention, we will be sending these out to you in the next month or so via email. The following topics were discussed:

1. Analyzing Regional areas and/or territories with an emphasis on how to work with your Zone VP to organize your parks by county, city or geographical area.
2. Outreach activities which will educate newer parks about their rights, responsibilities and the benefits of GSMOL Membership. See the Membership Presentation also.
3. Communication with your Parks. Use the Legislative Action Team to create an online network for your parks so they can be kept up to date on bills but also on local issues. Develop a newsletter which can be online or on paper. Develop a website (see www.slomap.org). Hold area activities of high interest to draw people to come together in larger groups (Workshops, Roadshows, Regional Meetings).

4. Providing Assistance to your Parks. Encourage them to use the PROCESSING A COMPLAINT FORM in the binder (end of Procedures Tab). Know the legal services in your area (ie CRLA and Senior Legal Services or Legal Aide programs).

5. A review of the tabs: 5 – MRL, 6 - Rent Control -Your Ordinances, 7 – HCD, Front Pocket – updated list of RCO's by jurisdiction.....2013

GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP - Carl Leivo

Carl provided both a complete handout “GET US MONEY!” and a form to be filled out by your park or group which is interested in researching ways to acquire money through grants. There are limited funds available for non-profits and there is competition. It does help if your community/organization can incorporate as a nonprofit under CA law. Then you can apply for 501(c)(3) status. Foundations, governments and businesses generally provide grants only to 501(c)(3) non-profits.

Here are the questions groups must answer in preparation for grant writing:

1. What does your manufactured home community need?
2. What's needed to build your organization's capacity?
3. Who has funds for your organization's project?
4. What are you going to do when you go back to your community?

Tips to help you be more successful:

- * Apply many times with different funding agencies
- * Listen to what funding agency representatives say
- * Research: Grant Application Guidelines
Review projects that were funded

MEDIA USE – Sharon Rose

This presentation dealt with the many forms that media encompasses. Media includes everything from fliers and e-mail to panels, press conferences and videos. It stressed that first of all, one should identify one's target audience and then tailor the form of media best suited to reach that group. The overall goal is to promote awareness and knowledge about whatever topic it is that one is attempting to advertize. Also, thinking “outside the box” when deciding on the most appropriate media to use, gives the best results. More info will follow on this topic once we receive an e-mail handout from the presenter.

LOCAL ORDINANCES – Bruce Stanton, Anne Anderson

There will be a revised version of the Rent Stabilization Ordinance Manual coming out within a few months. Most of the material presented in the workshop is in this manual. Anne Anderson described the efforts of Northern and Southern Santa Barbara County in a grassroots effort to facilitate the passage in 2012 of an all important MHP Closure Conversion Ordinance, the roles local Regional Managers played and how all parts of the county needed to work together to achieve this goal.

Elder Abuse and Protecting Yourself from Fraud and Scams. The District Attorney's Office of Orange County gave two workshops on these two topics. Both types of workshops are available state-wide in each jurisdiction. Call your local D A's Office to arrange a presentation for your group or your individual park.

