

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RB-6
The Wonderful World of Escom

846 Broadway-Lot #49
Saugus, Mass. 01906
March 13, 1973

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017



Dear Mr. Nolte:

Since WW II ever increasing numbers of retirees have been migrating to Florida. A burgeoning housing industry has developed to meet the incredible demand for living space. The condominium apartment, easier to care for and sometimes less expensive than a private home, has become Florida's major housing attraction. Mobile home parks have also prospered to the point where Florida currently has 1,271 parks with 165,023 lots.

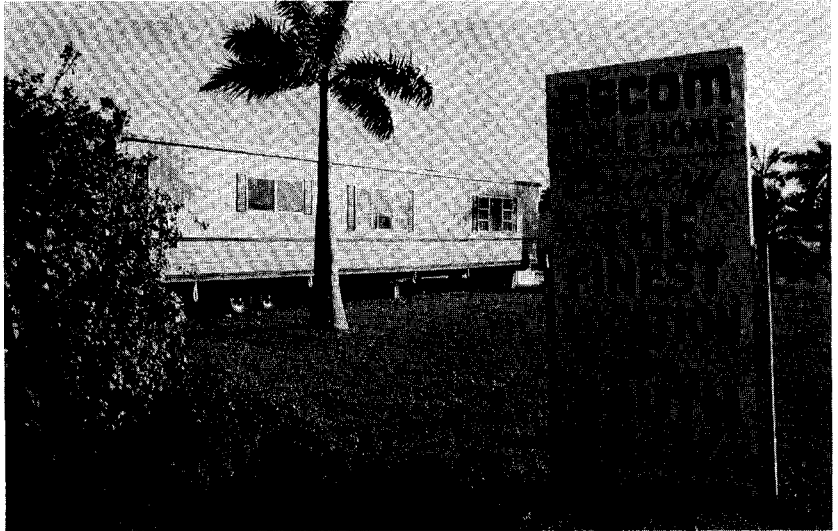
I decided that after getting a general idea of the mobile home park situation in Broward County, twelve miles north of Miami, I would select one park to study. Just as I began mapping out the county's parks my eye was caught by a full page color advertisement in the Miami Herald. On a blazing red background, three-inch letters read: "The wonderful world of ESCOM Mobile Home country." Above the pictures of people enjoying tennis, bowling and boating there was a message in blue: "LOTS FOR SALE OR RENT-own your own lot

and home or rent your lot." Then, in slightly smaller letters, it read: "1-2 or 3 bedrooms, 1 or 2 baths. All models completely furnished." The ad continued with a list of the amenities offered by the Escom communities, which include golf course, tennis and shuffleboard, restaurants, boutique, beauty parlor, and multi-million dollar clubhouse.

The next day I visited all three Escom parks, as well as a half dozen others, before deciding to concentrate on Escom's Fort Lauderdale Estates.

I began my research by stopping in at the front office of Fort Lauderdale Estates. Mr. Murphy, the assistant manager, was kind enough to talk with me. He explained that at this time 500 of the proposed 1400 lots were completed. They hoped to complete the remaining lots within three years.

I asked Mr. Murphy about the buy-rent option. He explained that a buyer has his choice. He had to buy the mobile home but he can either buy or rent the land the coach sits on. Those who rent pay \$70/month those who buy pay a \$30/month maintenance and recreation fee.



"Now," he said, "all the land is not the same price. Most of the lots are \$6,000. The lots surrounding the golf course are \$7,000 and if you want to buy a lot site by the lake it costs \$9,000. Oh," he continued, "I should add that if you want to live by the lake or the golf course you have to buy the property, you can't rent it. In any other part of the park you can either buy or rent."

One of the great advantages of buying, according to Mr. Murphy, is the financing. If you buy the land the banks are willing to write a long-term mortgage, similar to that given on conventional housing.

"They will," he said, "usually write a 12 to 15 year open-ended mortgage if you buy the land at 8.4% simple interest. If you buy the coach but rent the land then the best you can get is an 8 to 10 year mortgage at 8% add on."

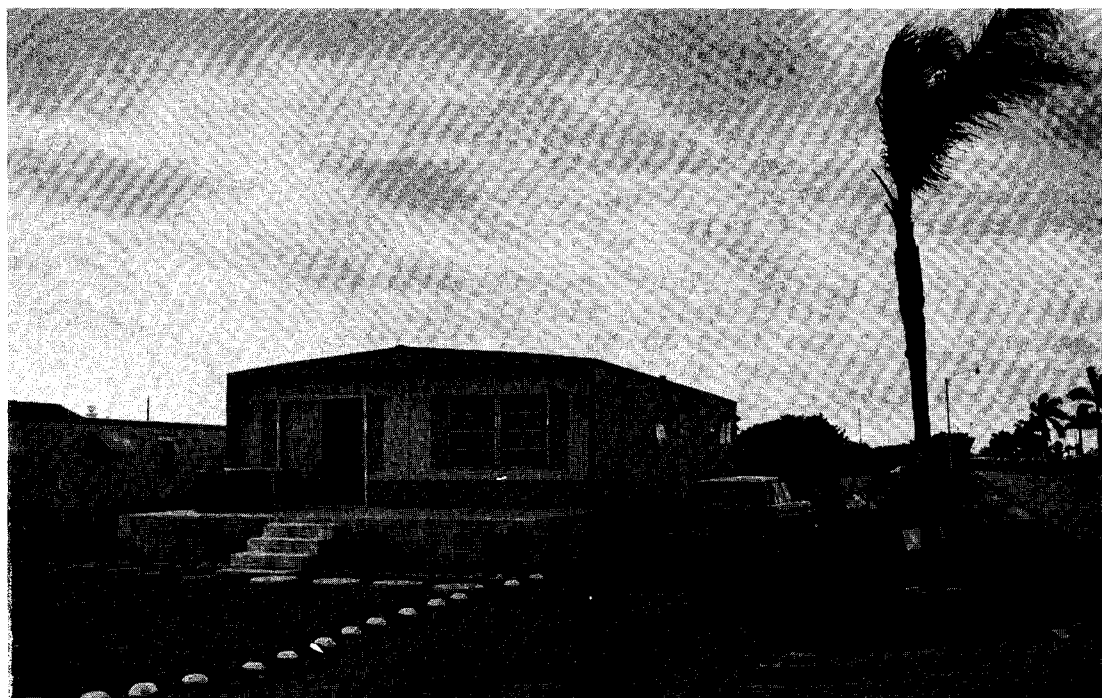
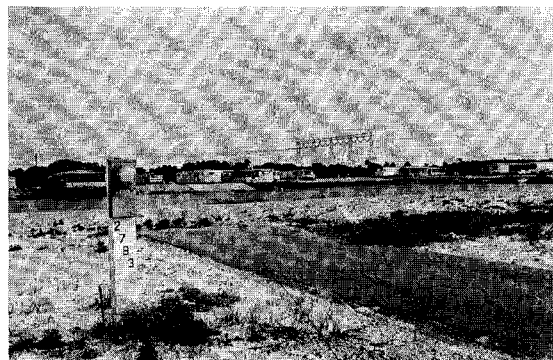
We talked a little bit more about the park and the people, the majority of whom Mr. Murphy said were probably in their late 50's. I told him I planned to go around and talk with some people about living in the park.

"Fine," he said, "feel free to. You might like to go up to the clubhouse and introduce yourself around."

Recreation center directory



Unfinished plot



Double-wide coach

I contented myself that first day with just walking around the park. I had a few brief, awkward conversations, and then I met Mr. Ameres.

Mr. Ameres was working in his shed when I walked by. I introduced myself, and asked if I could ask him a couple of questions.

He looked at me for a few seconds and said, "Sure, if you'll do the asking while I'm working."

We walked to the back of the coach where he was installing a pump to take water from the lake and feed it into his house.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked.

"You see," he said, "we pay both for water and for sewerage. So let's say I use \$1.00 worth of water. I've got to pay an additional \$1.25 for sewerage treatment. I don't mind so much paying for the water, but I'll be damned if I'm going to pay for the sewerage."

"How did I end up here, did you ask? Well, my wife and I've been coming down here (to Florida) for years. About six years ago we came down and bought our first mobile home; it was a 35 footer, which is just about the longest place you can buy and still pull it behind your vehicle. Anyway, after about a year of living in it my wife started missing the grandchildren, so we moved home to Illinois.

"The trouble is, my wife has arthritis. As much as she enjoyed being home, the cold weather started bothering her again. So within a year we decided to move down here permanently.

"At first we thought of settling on the West coast around Tampa. See, we may be retired, but I don't want to lay down and die. I wanted to find a place that had some action. Anyway, we stayed around Tampa and Clearwater for about two weeks, looking around. But it's real damp around there. At night when I would go to sleep the sheets would be all clammy. I figured hell, that wasn't going to be good for us, so we started looking around here.

"I looked at a lot of places. There weren't many where you could buy the land and that's what I wanted. The way I figure it, if you rent they can keep on raising the rent. When you're retired you don't keep making more and more, so it's better to pay a certain amount and have your own place.

"One Sunday I spotted an ad in the newspaper for this place. My wife and I drove out and we took a look around. We liked the place immediately, even though very little of it had been built. We could buy the land here, so we decided to take a place.

"The land was pretty steep for what you were getting. Money-wise they were asking more than the land was worth.

But we liked it and I guess that makes it worth the price. We picked out a spot and put down a deposit for a \$5,000 lot. Just when we were ready to close my wife spotted some kids playing around the site. She asked them where they lived, and they said next door. Well, that made her unhappy. It isn't that we don't like kids, we do. But we figured we're going to be here for a long time, and we wanted to be in a quieter place. So my wife told the salesman, 'You didn't tell us about the kids when you showed us the place.' He admitted that he didn't, and was real nice. He told us we could select another spot.

"We did, matter of fact we have seen several different spots before we took this one. Just before taking this place we had one across the street. Again we were about to close. My wife looked over at the lake and said she would really like to have a lakefront spot. I figured, what the hell, you only live once. What were we saving our money for, the kids, they'll just go out and spend it. So we paid the extra, paid \$8,000 for the land.

"Like I said, it was high but it was what we wanted. Actually it's turned out alright. Now they're selling the same land for \$9,000 and I hear they're going to raise it again. When we bought our place my wife's sister and her husband bought the place next door.

"I'll tell you something else. The taxes here are a big bonus. On our old place we paid \$700 a year. Our house was assessed 25 years ago at \$17,000. We sold it for more, but when we started paying property tax we paid a couple of hundred dollars. Every year it seemed to go up \$25 or \$50 until the year before we moved it was \$700. Here with the homestead exemption (residents owning land in Florida get a \$5,000 property exemption. If a person is over 65 he or she gets an additional \$5,000 exemption) we pay \$38 a year."

"When you first buy a coach like we did, you don't know a whole lot about them, you're sort of in the dark. If I bought again today I'd do it a lot different."

"How?" I asked.

"First, when we bought I didn't know about these expandos. If I had I would have gotten one. And then the furniture. The furniture isn't real good. If I did it again we wouldn't take any furniture. I'd buy the place without furniture. We haven't covered the furniture or anything. We figure we'll just wear it out and then start slowly replacing it with stuff we really like. When we bought it we didn't get a chair so I had to get one, and the coffee table buckles so I had to replace that. But when you first buy you're not really looking."

Someone came by to borrow a tool and talk for a few minutes. I said, "Sorry I'm taking up so much of your time, I guess I'd better be going."

"That's ok," Mr. Ameres replied, "time is the least of my worries. What else do you want to know?"

"How do you like this park?" I asked.

"We like it just fine. For my wife the place is a pleasure. She can clean it up real fast. In our old house it took her most of every day to do something. Now she can clean the whole place, from front to back in half a day. Also she has her sister here and plenty of friends.

"And me, I like it a lot. I'm not used to sitting around. When I lived in Illinois I ran a store, and I was involved in everything. I was the head of the Lions, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. I helped on heart rallies; you name it I did it. I guess when I first started doing things it was sort of selfish. I figured the more people I got to know the more it would help my business. After a while, though, it got so I was used to being busy. That's how it is here. I figure if I'm having a good time everyone else should.

"I'm social chairman. We try to set up a good program. We have all sorts of activities. Tuesday night we have shuffleboard, and bingo on Thursdays. We have a lot of informal activities, and a welcome wagon and meetings for new people.



"This place has growing pains, but I think it will all work out."

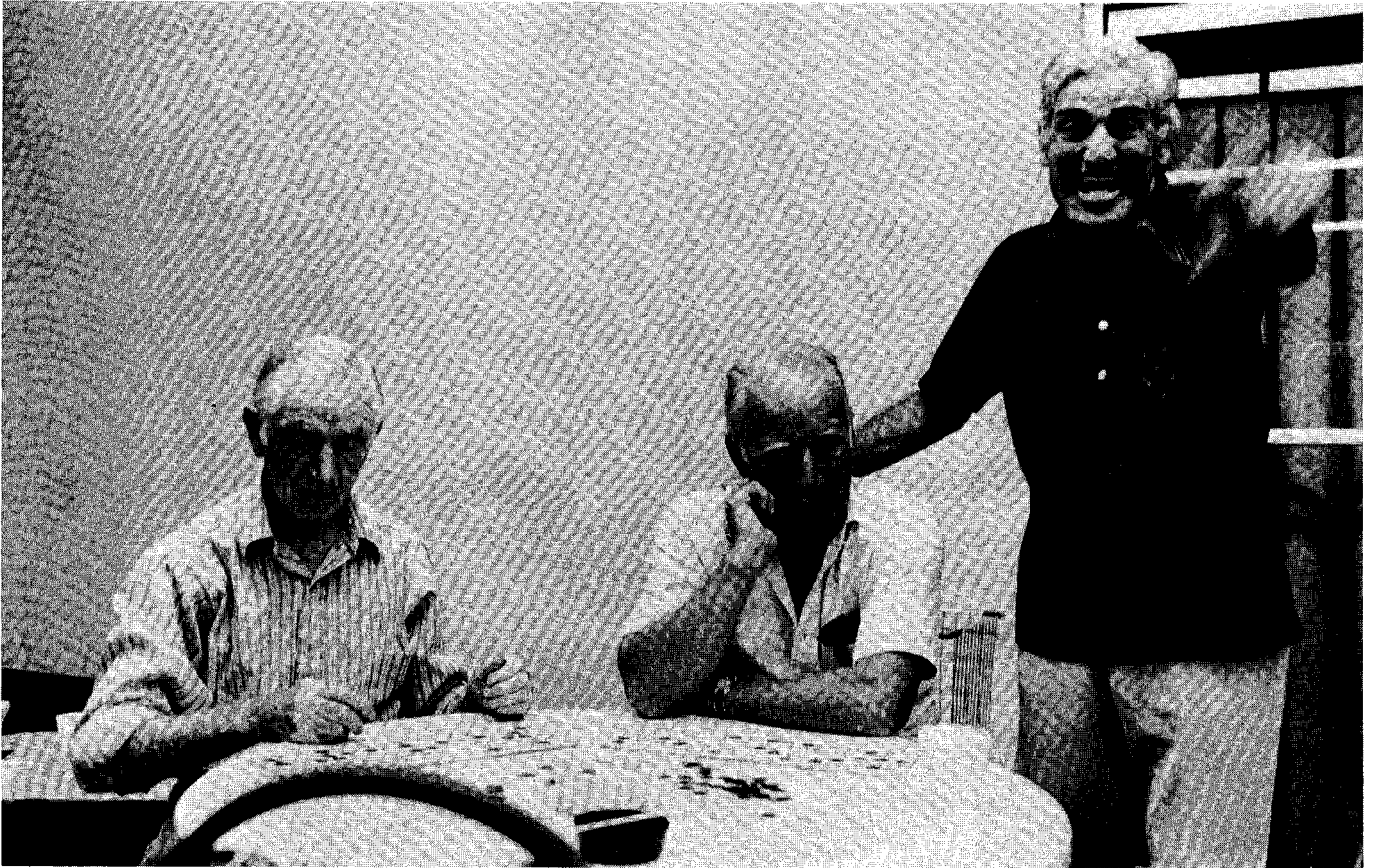




The community activities that Mr. Am-eres had described sounded interesting, so on Thursday night I went to the clubhouse to watch bingo. I was introduced to the group as a person doing research on mobile homes.

I stayed around for the bingo, but since I wasn't from the community I couldn't play without violating state lottery rules. Seventy people paid an entrance fee of \$1.25 to sit and play bingo for the evening. Included in the admission price is one playing card. You pay 25¢ for each additional card. Several players played with six to eight cards. The night began with simple straight bingo, but quickly spread into special games of x's, t's h's and four corners.





A two dollar winner.

The prizes were a picture frame, a dollar, or two, or three. After nearly two hours the prizes got bigger and bigger. First there was a \$5 prize for a straight bingo, then \$10 for an H and finally \$30 (up five from a week ago, and predictions are that it will go as high as \$50 in less than a month) for a completely filled board.

People stayed around after the game to talk and cleanup. Several people said they were willing to talk with me over the weekend about life in the park.



The night's big winner

Mrs. Martino

Mrs. Martino, who immigrated to this country from Italy 52 years ago as a 16 year old, still speaks with a heavy Italian accent. She was busy cooking when I arrived, and insisted that I sit down and have something to eat while we talked.

Mrs. Martino was married two months after she arrived in Milltown, Pa. She had her first child when she was 17, and now at 68 is a greatgrandmother. For many years Mrs. Martino lived with her family in Camden, N.J.

With her husband dead, and her family grown up, Mrs. Martino, with her daughter and son-in-law, decided to move South to a nicer climate. First they bought a duplex in Miami. It was nice, but then, she says, the coloreds began moving in, and she didn't like living with them. Next they bought a home in Hollywood.

They kept driving past this place (Escom) and they liked it. Finally they bought a place here in September, and sold their house. Both her daughter and son-in-law work in downtown Miami. Mrs. Martino stays around the house, takes care of the cleaning, and visits with friends.

She loves it, especially the Bingo. She plays every Thursday night and if one of the women has a small game during the week

in her coach she plays in that one too.

Mrs. Martino took me out back where her double wide leads down to the water. Her backyard has a little pond with a metal Flamingo. The fountain wasn't on when I was there, but she says the pond has a fountain that sprays water high into the air, and it is really beautiful at night with the colored lights on. They also have a small dock and a little boat.

When we walked back inside she said, "It's all very beautiful, isn't it?"

The Heffs

The Heffs are from England, and both speak with distinctly British accents. Right now their mobile home is sitting on a temporary spot until the developer finishes theirs and all the other plots by the golf course.

Mrs. Heff says, "Our new place is quite lovely, much nicer than the one we're on right now. Sometimes we just take a walk over there and stand on the plot."

"But," says Mr. Heff, "we have already done some work on the front here. We figure it gives the place some individual character even if it's only temporary."

According to Mr. Heff, they came here from England because his wife wanted to. "See," he said, "we have a daughter who came to this country about ten years ago as an au pair girl. She liked it, and stayed.

"The wife missed her awfully, so several years ago she came here for a visit. The two of them traveled around this country. My wife came back and said she liked what she had seen. A couple of years later I came over and I liked it too.

"When my wife's mother and father died, and with our two boys grown and on their own, there wasn't a lot of reason not to leave. So we decided to come over, and live near our daughter and her husband.

"When we began looking for a place to live in we knew we didn't want to rent, because in America there aren't any real controls on the rent. It's all up to the landlord here. It's quite different in England.

In England we have a rent control board. If a landlord wants to raise your rent he must go to the board with a request. Usually the board will only grant a one or two pound/week increase(\$2.50-\$5.00). And the board won't give it to the landlord in one chunk. No, let's say they gave you a \$5 a week increase. Well they might give you \$1.25 the first year, the same the second, third, and fourth year, so that your increase was spread over four years. It really is a good system. I think it's the product of the fact that we have often had socialist governments, and they want to help the little fellow and give it to the big fellow.

"We started looking for house to buy. We weren't here very long before we realized that we couldn't afford a conventional house on my pension. I made a good wage as a public school headmaster, but our salaries don't compare to those here.

We found that we could do best on a mobile home. You know," said Mr. Heff, "if you ever told me when we were in England that I might live in a mobile home I wouldn't believe it.

"It's really quite different from our home in England. We used to live in Darby; we had a separated house with a garden-- what you call a backyard--. It was quite nice; we had high hedges and if you wanted to you could go naked in the garden."

Mrs. Heff said, "As nice as our old home was I like this place better. In Darby we didn't really know our neighbors. Here everyone is so friendly. I think it is genuine friendliness, not just because we are English or that my husband used to be a headmaster. I just love it. Of course, sometimes it goes too far. A few people will come in and sit around all morning. I don't like that so much. I like people feeling free to drop in, but I like the flexibility to do what I want."

"We thought about getting a double wide," said Mr. Heff, "but we really couldn't afford it. We had already spent \$6,500 on the land. So we got this single. After a while I'd like to expand it. See, I can do the work myself, that is if they'll let me. Like right now I want to widen the hallway. I can't bring my wife a cup of tea in the morning without spilling it. I am also planning to put in another bathroom. There are a lot of things you can do to make the place nicer. Some people can afford to have people come in and do it for them, but we cannot. Like the air conditioner. I put that in myself. All I needed was to call someone in for the wiring.

"Still, things here are pretty expensive, and we can't afford a lot of things on my pension. So I took a job working mornings as a teacher in a private school. It's a lot different from the public schools in England.

"Here a lot of children don't seem to want to learn. They tend to come from wealthy families, and several of them seem to have no purpose. They are very lost children, and it is quite sad.



"In England the school I ran had Indians, Pakistanis, Jamaicans, and regular English boys. We never had real problems; oh a fight here and there, but nothing too terrible. I wouldn't take it--if a boy wouldn't listen I would give him a little treatment.

"I'll tell you something else, none of my boys ever drew a penis or any other lewd thing in the lav. Sure they might write a name, but I told them if they wanted to draw a member they could do it on the blackboard, where they would have more space and proper chalk. All they had to do I told them was label what they drew. I told them I was easy about that sort of thing.

"Anyway I hope to work long enough so that I can get some social security. We also will have to get medical protection insurance. There are a lot of things we need to take care of that we were used to in England, but I think we will be quite happy here.

"There are all sorts of people in this park, some are much wealthier than we are, some have little education, but they all seem like decent people and good neighbors."

The Hydes



Don Hyde met me at the door of his double wide Boise Cascade home. He and Ruth, his wife, had just moved in two months ago, and will go back up to their home on Long Island at the beginning of March.

Don and Ruth have worked very hard for most of their lives. They struggled to keep a family business going. Don proudly says, "I promised my father that I would keep the family name on the business past 100 years. It never made much money but we kept it going through its 103rd year."

Basically Don Hyde has made what money he has by being a security guard at Roosevelt Raceway. He has worked the job

for nearly twenty years. He says, "If I quit now I would get severance pay equal to \$160 for each year I've worked, or about \$4,000. But if things keep on picking up I could retire with a higher severance, and who knows, with the aggressive union policy maybe even some sort of pension. So even though I would like to come down here and stay I'll keep on working the racing season for a couple of years.

"We only started thinking about retirement and Florida a couple of years ago," Don says. "See, the accountant that worked for us in the family business had to retire because of his health. He moved into a condominium down in Florida and kept on writing and telling us we would love it down here. At first we didn't give it much thought, but we talked and talked and started thinking about it seriously.

"Realistically we knew we couldn't afford a house, or even a condominium. I mean maybe we could afford a condominium with a 20 year mortgage, but hell with furnishing it, and you have to furnish those places nicely, I would be worrying when I was 65 and ready to retire where the money was going to come from to keep up with the mortgage. With a mobile home we figured we could have the whole mortgage practically paid off by the time I'm 65.

"So we told our friend to keep his eyes open. Well he sent us a brochure on Escom, and Ruth and I took some time and came down to take a look. We liked the place immediately. I mean look around, did you ever see anything like the complex we have?

"I'll tell you, if it wasn't for some real luck we would have had trouble making a deposit on this place. My eldest boy hit a \$5,000 jackpot at the races and gave us half to put down on the house. That's the kind of boy he is.

"Well, we looked at all the coaches. Our biggest concern was our kids. We wanted to find something big enough so the kids could come down and be with us. That's why we got the double wide. It's got three bedrooms. We have three children. The oldest, a boy, is 28, then there's another boy who's 20, and our youngest, our daughter, is 19 and she just got married. They're all very busy up North, but we hope once they come down and see the place, they'll be anxious to come down."

Ruth said, "They didn't have the model I wanted on the lot, so I ordered from the book they have. Mr. Murphy, who works in the front office, said he would take care of everything. He told me not to worry, everything would be ready when we came down. The place was exactly like I imagined it would be. Not only that, Mr. Murphy had put some flowers on the table to make the place more homey. I must have looked shocked because he asked me, 'Mrs. Hyde, is something wrong?'"

"'Something wrong,' I said, 'no, everything is just wonderful.'"

"Everything has been wonderful," said Don, "this coach is great. We have more room in it than we do in our old home on Long Island. And more important, the people here are

unbelievably friendly. The first two days we were here all our neighbors came over and told us how glad they were to meet us, and how pleased they were that we were here. I have all the activity I could want. Why, I've made more friends within the two months I've been here than in the twenty years I lived in New York."

Ruth said, "For me it's just terrific. I have so many friends here. I'm kind of an introvert, not that I want to be one, but I just didn't make many friends. I don't think I made six friends in the whole time we lived in New York. Here everyone is friendly. I still can't believe it, people say come over any time and they mean it.

"I tell you something else. Around here you can walk around any time, day or night. It got so in our neighborhood I was afraid to walk out even to the mailbox. I even asked a policeman what I was supposed to do if I had to go out at night. He told me, 'Sorry Maam, if you can help it the best thing for you to do is stay home at night.'"

Don said, "We're going to go back up to Long Island in March. I'll go back to work and Ruth will come down here, hopefully with the children, in May. We still have our house up there but we plan to sell it. We would like to use some of the money for the mobile home, and give the kids some money to help them get started. Our next door neighbor wants to buy our house for his sister. We told him we wouldn't sell it to any coloreds, and would give him the first crack at the place."

Mrs. Havgood



Just back from the beauty parlor her blond hair piled high above her head, Mrs. Havgood slid out of her red cadillac and invited me into her house. Her mobile home cost her \$9,100, and the waterfront piece of land it sits on cost another \$8,000. The Havgoods feel they have made a profit on the place. The remaining waterfront property is now selling at \$9,000 and rumors are that it will go up to \$10,000. Also, they paid for a 1972 unit and when they arrived there were no 1972 units left so they were given a 1973 unit for the same price.

"We added certain things, said Mrs. Havgood, " a disposal for \$75; an air conditioning system that costs \$400; and a screened in porch that runs from the right side all the way back and around the coach. It cost \$4,400. Oh yes," she continued, "we also bought a non-rusting storage cabinet for \$260. My neighbor paid \$170 for one; she's only had it for a couple of months and already it has rust stains. We figured a good non-rusting cabinet was worth the extra money."

Mrs. Havgood, who is French-Canadian, met her husband, who is from Louisiana, in California. Both of them were working at a shipbuilding plant; she was a welder and he was a master mechanic.

"I know this sounds crazy," she says, "but I knew from the first time that I met him that I loved him and wanted to marry him." They were married a month after they met. Less than a year later they had a child.

"We lived in Detroit and had some rough times economically. When my husband started doing well as a builder-contractor we moved into a big house down in Florida. All of a sudden we hit hard times again. Two builders filed bankruptcy, leaving debts to my husband of more than \$28,000. We went back up to Detroit. That's the first time we bought a mobile home. Really we couldn't afford anything else, so we bought a used one. We lived in it for nine months. I figured I'd give it a try. We liked it alright and bought a new one. We lived in a park outside of Detroit for eight years. It was nice, but it wasn't anything like this. I mean, there were no facilities. There were about 70 units, and you didn't get to know many people all that well.

"For example, my best friend there, she was 67, nearly 20 years older than me. I met her because one day I was working on some laundry at the laundromat and I started talking to this woman. Well she said her mother lived up in this park. I said, so do I, where does she live? Well she turned out to be my next door neighbor. She looks just like my mother. I'm French, and she's Italian, but Italians are dark like French-Canadians, so I call her mom. I like her a lot, and she's going to come down and visit us in May."

"I was working as a waitress, and the husband of the woman I worked for, a healthy man who is my age, got sick one day and two weeks later they buried him. Me and my husband talked about it. We decided we had money and it was about time we enjoyed it. We decided to come down here. We saw this place and fell in love with it. We put \$10,000 down and didn't move down here till a

"When we got back to Detroit my husband was sitting on the can and he called me in and said, 'You know, I was a damn fool. We should have only put \$2,000 down. We could have held the deal with that and the extra \$8,000 could have been earning us some money in the bank.' "Of course he was right, but we were excited and wanted the place. Even with that we were better off than a lot of other people because we had lived in a mobile home for eight years, so I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted.

"I've furnished our coach just like I wanted to. For me life here is great. I can't believe how busy I am. When we lived in Detroit I worked, not because we needed the money but because I didn't have anything else to do. But it's all different here. There's always something to do. I have plenty of girlfriends. I'll tell you, we aren't moving again till they bury us. We have been all around, and I've traveled enough."

Mr. Centorino

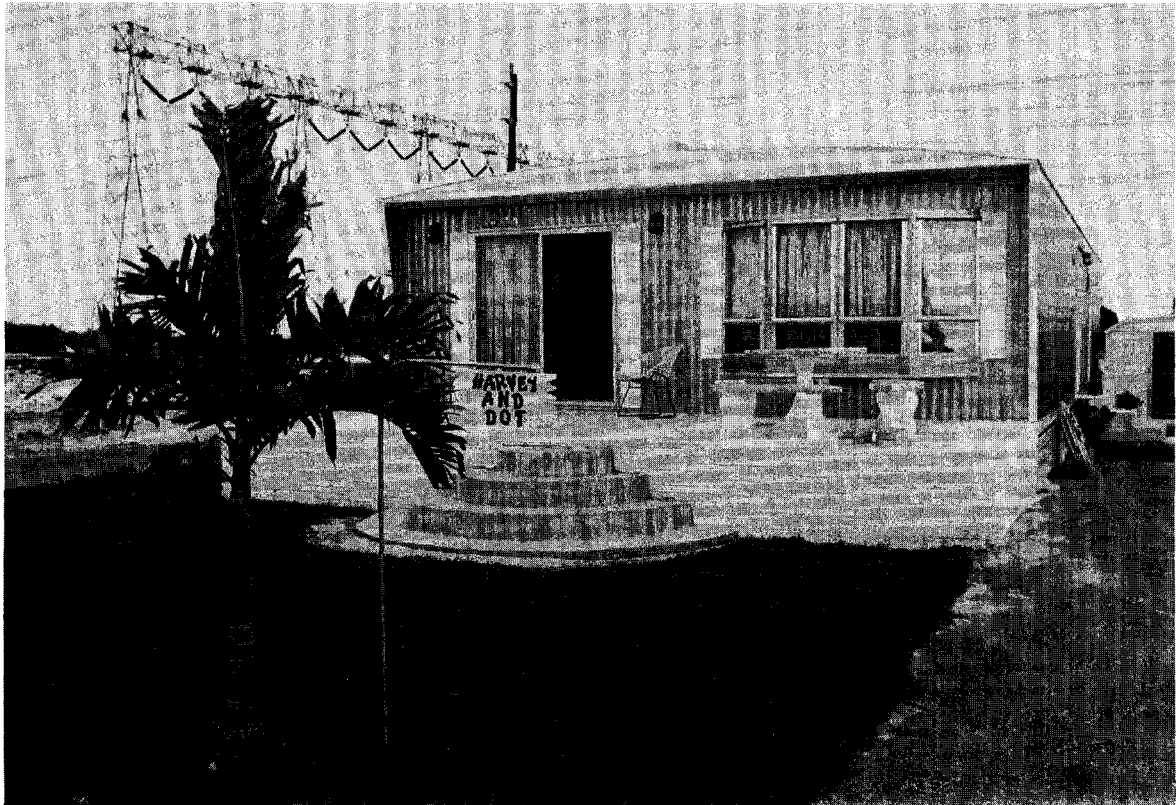
John Centorino who is in his mid-twenties, moved into this park after living in a too-small one bedroom apartment which ran him \$155/month. He took a place in the family area because his wife was pregnant, and under park rules, he had no choice.

The Centorinos are financing their coach, for which they paid \$12,000 and the land, which cost them \$6,000 with a bank loan. John got most of the \$7,000 for the mortgage down payment from his father. He doesn't know exactly what the mortgage percentage is, but he does know that the park does business with two banks and both charge the same, something more than 8%.

"Would I rather live in a condominium? Hell," he said, "this is just like living in a condominium but it's much less expensive. We've got the same sort of privileges that people get in a condominium but don't pay near as much. Sure it sounds fancy to live in a condominium, and it's not so fancy to live in a mobile home. But they pay a lot extra for the fancy. All power to them if that's what they want. Not for me. I don't want to pay the extra money for nothing.

"I like the park a lot I guess. I suppose it would be nicer if there were more young people our own age, but it's ok. People are friendly. They leave you alone if you want. We know some people but we don't like to be too close, and that seems fine with most people.

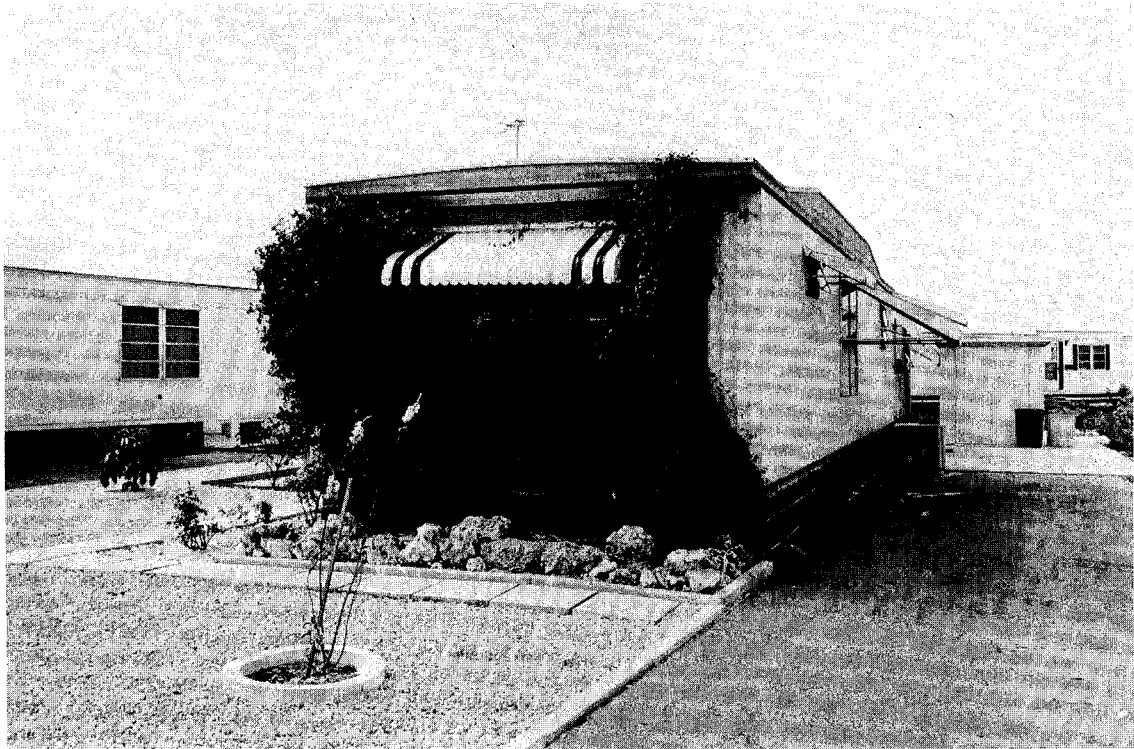
"The one gripe I have, if you can call it that, is the \$30 monthly fee for recreation and maintenance. A lot of people don't use the facilities and it doesn't seem right that they should have to pay that kind of money for something they don't use. The main reason I'm willing to pay it is for the golf course. I love playing golf, and for me it will be a good deal when the course is finished. The trouble is, it won't be finished for some time. Some people are getting up a petition to have the fee either lowered or temporarily adjusted. I'll go along with that, it makes sense to me.



A double-wide



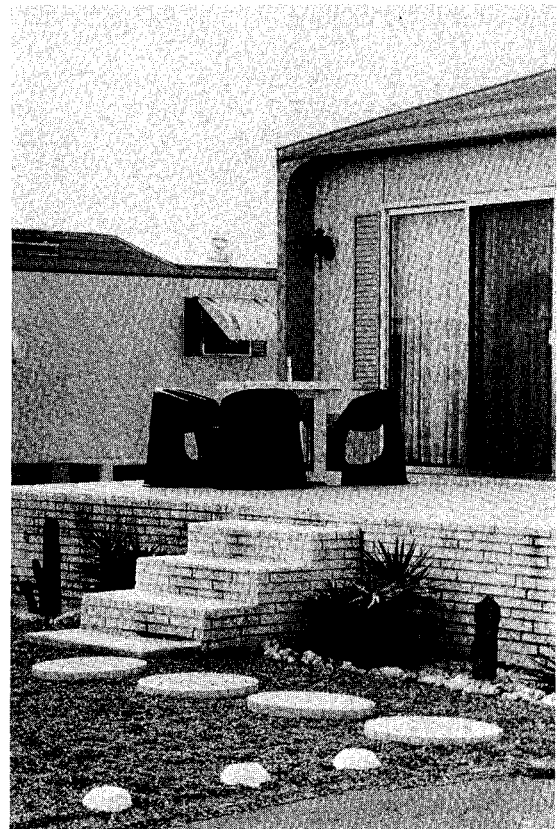
Another double-wide



A single



Garden



Patio

Mrs. Egan

"The main reason we moved here," says Mrs. Egan, "was my health. I have a nerve condition and I couldn't take the cold winters up North. We had a nice place on Long Island. But with my health and the fact that some coloreds started moving into the neighborhood, we decided to move down here. My husband wasn't crazy about the idea, and believe me I was a little worried that he would be bored to death down here.

"He was always a very busy man. He used to run three businesses. That's right. He's a CPA. He did a lot of work with people who operated bars. A lot of them would fail because the owners didn't know how to manage the places. My husband would try to help them out. He would show them ways to run their businesses better.

"One of the gentlemen he gave advice to thanked him and told him, 'Look, you tell people like me how to make money, why don't you make some for yourself? Hell, you know how to run a bar better than any of us.' Well, my husband thought about it and finally bought a failing bar. It did well under his managing and then he bought another one and finally a liquor store. He did well with all of them, but it kept him busy.

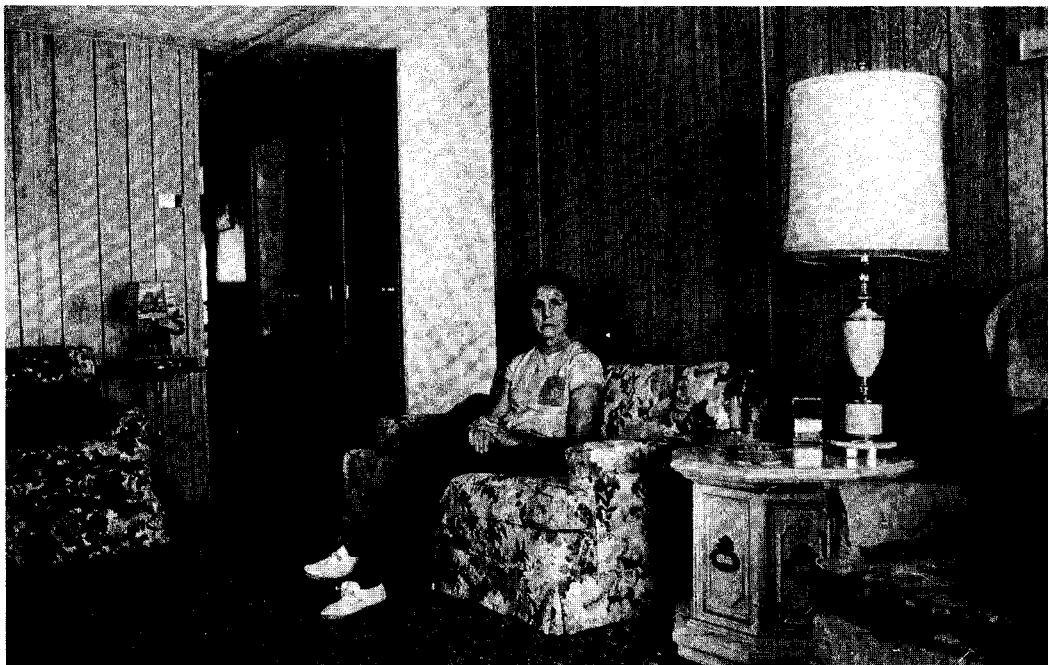
"I was worried what would happen when we moved down here and he wasn't so active. Thank god, he loves it. He has three different groups that he plays golf with. He has already involved himself in a number of different projects.

"Right now he has begun his second year as treasurer of the community. It's a lot of work, too much, but he's good at it and he feels the community needs someone to take care of the books. I want him to quit after this year so that he'll have more free time.

"For me it's just great. Before we came down here I had three cancer operations, the last one was five years ago. Since we've moved here I've felt much better.

"I'm glad we moved into this park because it's a very special mobile home community. Not that I want to be snotty or anything, but since a lot of people here buy their land, and the places are more expensive, you have a slightly better class of people. People don't have to worry about impressing each other so much. We all know that everyone is comfortable. For example, my neighbor across the street has a Cadillac, we've got one, plenty of people have them, so it isn't a big deal.

"We took time looking at different units. We decided to buy a double because I couldn't stand a single. I'd feel claustrophobic. When we first moved in we only rented the land. One day, about six weeks later, my husband came home and said he didn't want a fight from me, that he thought we should buy the land. He had talked to a couple of the other men in the park and they convinced him it was a good investment. It was more than I wanted to spend on a mobile home. I wanted the money for the boys when we passed away, but he convinced me. We like to make decisions together.



Mrs. Egan showed me through the coach. We stopped for a moment in the extra bedroom where pictures of her two sons sit on the bureau.

"You see the picture of the boy on the right?" she asked, "his name is Lawrence. He's a priest in the Maryknoll order. He doesn't care about money. Right now he's in Latin America.

"He knew very early, from around the age of five, that he wanted to be a priest. I told him before he left home at 15 for the seminary that I wanted him to promise me two things. First, if he decided the life of a priest was not for him, that he would have the courage to quit before taking the vows. Second, once he took the vows I wanted him to realize that it was for life, and I expected him never to embarrass. I meant that he should never drink, and never chase skirts. I mean some do, not as many as the press makes out but some do.

"You really have to be strong to be a priest, but Lawrence loves his work and is very good at it. I hear that he's going to be nominated to be director of the order's work in all of Latin and Central America. He's only 34, and it's quite an honor just to be considered for such a position.

"Donald, our other son, is quite different. Donald looks down on this place, and to tease us he still calls it a trailer. I don't think he'll ever come and visit us here. But because of my health he has invited us out to Denver. He pays the fare. He can afford to because he's terribly successful. He's only 31 and he is already making \$160,000. That's right, he makes \$100,000/yr. in his private practice and an additional \$60,000/yr. as head of the state's methadone maintenance program.

"Donald has always been a go-getter. Ever since he was in high school people have been telling him he should be an inter-

national lawyer, or financier. But not Donald, he wanted to go to the Service Academy. He got into the Air Force Academy. Two years into the Academy he decided he wanted to be a doctor. Nobody from any of the Academies had been allowed to do that. Well, Donald got special dispensation from the Surgeon General and then had to find a medical school that would take him. The University of Colorado Medical School accepted him. He did so well, that I heard, though I never saw it, that the school wrote to all the Service Academies after Donald graduated and said if you have any other cadets like this one we'll accept them into medical school.

"Donald had studied to be a surgeon, but decided to be a psychiatrist instead. The Air Force felt he wasn't dedicated enough and let him go. Lucky for him. Now twenty other Service Academy people have followed on Donald's coat tails and are in medical school, but they have a 20-year hitch attached to it.

"We're quite proud of both our boys, and we have been fortunate that they have turned out so well."

"Mrs. Egan," I said, "about the mobile home, do you like this model?"

"Yes," she said, "it has little problems, but basically I think it is well designed. I've changed some things around, made myself some more room here and there, but I'm satisfied.

"We like the place but we've had a leak in the roof for more than a year now. Now that isn't right, not when we've put so much money in the house. All together it has cost us more than \$25,000. But the manager here, he doesn't treat you right, he hasn't taken care of the leak and now we have to. He told us we were lucky to have a year guarantee on it, now they're only giving 30 days, but even if that's true they shouldn't talk to you that way.

"Also, I'm a little concerned about the new neighbor across the way. They must have some money because they bought their place, and paid for the land. But the place is like a shanty. Maybe I'm getting old, but they come in and out at all hours. And the woman, I've never seen her wear a dress. A couple of us have talked about it. It seems to us that the management isn't screening people any more-- if you have the money that's all they seem to care about."

Not everyone thinks that Escom is what it is cracked up to be. The day before I left Florida, I happened to run across a Miami Herald article dated 1-16-72 and written by Doug Clifton. The article was entitled "Escom Country: what you see is Not what you get."

Although Mr. Clifton's comments are written primarily about another of Escom's parks (Hollywood Hills) many of his remarks including the following are applicable to Fort Lauderdale Estates.

"The most difficult rule to live with at the Escom mobile home community in Hollywood is the one requiring golfers to replace divots on the nine hole golf course. That's because there is no golf course. Instead there is an open field where the link should be.

"The golf course exists only in the promises of the aggressive sales force at Escom Enterprises- and in the colorful brochure that lures customers into the park."

Of all Mr. Clifford's other complaints about park practices probably the most damning, if true, is his statement that:

"... for a 12 foot wide by 60 foot long mobile home Escom charges \$10,500. An identical trailer with the same features at a park in Boca Raton costs \$8,900. And the same model can be purchased 'on the street', that is without space in a park, for as little as \$7,000."

If what Mr. Clifford said is true, why do people seem so happy? He included in his article quotes from disgruntled residents. The residents I met did not seem disgruntled with one exception. He had nothing good to say about Escom or almost anyone in the park.

"I hate this place," he told me, "and if it wasn't for my wife I'd get the hell out of here. I don't like the park and I don't like my neighbors. One clique formed, they run the social life, and they run it the way they want to. The place stinks, and you pay \$30/month recreation fee for nothing."

The other people I met seemed aware of park problems. Some had specific complaints, but most were more than satisfied with the park. They were proud of their homes and the splendor of the park. They seemed to have a genuine feeling for their neighbors.

From a distance, at least, it seemed that these people had found part of the good life and were busy enjoying it.

Richard Bager

