

Community spirit rooted in strength

By Murray Lyons
of The StarPhoenix

Residents of one of Saskatoon's most forested neighborhoods spent a lot of time this past weekend talking about trees.

And little wonder. When the first residents of Montgomery Place took up houses built by the federal government for returning veterans in 1946, the land where this lush, treed neighborhood sits was a farm on the highway leading to Rosetown.

It was flat, bald prairie with only the government elevators dominating the skyline. In fact, the land was so flat that it was used as an emergency, auxiliary landing field during the Second World War.

How that has changed in 50 years. Photographic displays lacked up on the basement walls of Trinity United Church this weekend show the contrast between then and now.

Montgomery Place residents past and present celebrated their neighborhood and its unique history this weekend with a commemoration ceremony, fun in the park, a supper, family dance, and fireworks display.

The event ended Sunday with a church service.

Long-time residents Al and Robbie Harder were well-known in the neighborhood for their involvement in scouting and the huge outdoor rink Al used to construct in the winter.

By the time the Harders moved into the area in 1958, Veterans Affairs was still selling the land and offering long-term, low-cost mortgages, but it was up to residents to decide how big a house they could afford.

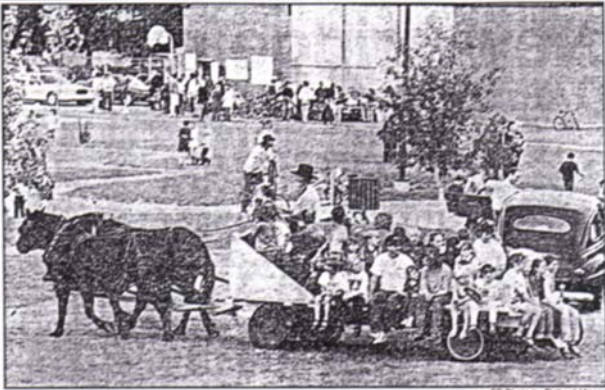
The Harders bought their land and built their house for \$10,500. As a veteran, he was eligible for a low-cost mortgage up to \$8,000.

He and his wife were undaunted by the task of developing the landscaping on a lot 83 feet wide and 200 feet deep. Some of his fellow veterans, however, did not see the attraction of helping to open up a new neighborhood in Saskatoon's far west end.

"A lot of my friends were eligible, but their wives refused to come because there were no sidewalks," Harder recalls with a chuckle.

"You had to be a certain breed of cat," he said.

The federal government, through the



Residents of Montgomery Place revisited the past and celebrated the present during a weekend-long commemorative ceremony.

Veteran Lands Act, believed providing half-acre lots to returning veterans would help them augment their income through tending garden plots, fruit trees and raising chickens.

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One of those original residents in 1946 was Margaret Gent whose memoirs of the area's first years were made available to those attending the anniversary celebration.

Montgomery Place was named for Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, famous for his victory over Rommel at El Alamein. The streets in the subdivision reflect the names of towns where Canadian troops fought during the Second World War such as Caen or Dwype, military leaders (Crerar) and warships (Haida).

When the subdivision's first 25 houses

were built in 1946, the area was in Cory Municipality. The first houses to be built cost approximately \$6,000 with payments spread over 25 years at three per cent interest.

Tax payments to Cory were about \$46 a year.

The veterans were also given grants based on years of service during the war that helped make the down payment. As well, the VLA gave residents a \$250 grant to purchase whatever was needed to furnish their homes.

"Our purchase was a gas stove and wooden table and four chairs. I still have the table and two of the chairs," Gent writes in her memoirs.

She and her late husband Arthur moved into the property in September of that year even though the area still hadn't had its sewer, water, or phone connections.

"It was rather a bleak and barren neighborhood at first and I don't think there were very many who were physically and emotionally equipped to tackle either half acre or three-quarter-acre lots," she writes.

A stipulation in the contracts said the veterans could not sell their homes for 19 years.

The neighborhood was slow to fill up in the first 10 years until the baby boom hit full blast in the 1950s. Most of the original houses along 11th Street had their frontages subdivided during that time.

Leslee Newman grew up in the area in the 1950s and '60s after the area elementary school was built and remembers what a tight group it became.

"We travelled as a herd to Mount Royal (Collegiate)," she says of her teenage years.

When she grew up, Newman eventually bought a house in Montgomery Place, and when her parents died, bought the house she had grown up in.

She says her four children are enjoying the same feeling of neighborhood closeness her generation did.

The feeling of neighborhood safety for their children was one of the things neighbors talked about Saturday night at the dance as they watched their children play in the park, Newman said.

As for the trees, Margaret Gent explains how the VLA helped arrange for fir and maple trees from a Saskatchewan government nursery at a price of 100 for \$2.

"The fir trees were about five inches tall, but baby, look at them now," Gent said.

The subdivision was eventually absorbed by the city in the mid-1950s. The residents, through a strong ratepayers association, managed to negotiate a standstill agreement that set the Montgomery Place mill rate 20 per cent lower than the rest of the city.

By the time the tax limitation agreement expired in 1980, most of the half-acre lots had been subdivided, lowering the tax burden on individual residents.

Many of the artifacts collected for this weekend's display are being collected by Janet MacKenzie, a relative newcomer to the area who also had residents attending the celebration fill out a questionnaire.



The Montgomery Place neighborhood has taken on a new look from these early bleak and barren days.

Veterans affected Montgomery Place faces land tax doubling

By Art Robinson
of the Star-Phoenix

The city assessor's office is attempting to brace veterans' families in Montgomery Place for what undoubtedly will come as a shock to many of them with the termination of a special, 25-year agreement this year.

Many of the approximately 360 families are in for a double-whammy in 1979 which in some cases could mean an increase of taxes of 150 per cent over 1978.

In many cases, such as that involving 11th Street residents, increased rates are already in the books and ready for mailing when the tax notices go out next year.

City council this week received a report from city assessor Ray Bird on forthcoming land assessment changes. City commissioner Sig Dietze recommended the information be received and that a copy of the report be forwarded to the Montgomery Ratepayers' Association.

Assistant assessor Frank Garland said Wednesday although the residents were informed in 1974 of the method of calculating the new assessments, the department is attempting to make sure they are fully knowledgeable of the change when it comes.

City officials expect some will still be shocked when the change comes.

The shock will result from two changes — one the increase in the mill rate and the other from alterations in land assessment.

The mill rate concession given veterans families living in the west-end subdivision has been given considerable attention already. Essentially, it means that as of next year the maximum mill rate set under the agreement of 51 mills will disappear and the residents will pay the same as all other city property owners. This year the rate is set at about 113 mills.

This means that a Montgomery Place resident who previously qualified under the act with a house assessed at \$7,000 paid about \$357 this year while other city residents paid about \$791.

In many cases, then, the simple mill rate revision will double taxes.

But what Bird attempted to do in his report which was presented to council was remind residents the mill rate is not the only change.

Under the old system, all residents with a lot of one-half acre or more had the same land assessment. Since 1975, the maximum established was \$1490. But now this will change.

As of next year, the residents with larger lots will pay large amounts, as is the case in the rest of the city. Much of the assessment, upon which property taxes are set, depends on the property frontage, and in Montgomery Place there are some large frontages.

Bird said without paving costs, many will have their land assessments increased by \$465. This change alone would add \$52.93 to their property taxes.

For many years, the veterans' families on 11th Street have enjoyed paved streets in front of their homes without

having to pay any more than those without pavement. This will end with the arrival of 1979. The city assessor's department had already done the calculations based on the various lot sizes and knocking off the allowance given earlier based on gravel roads.

In 1978, the average 11th Street lot was assessed at the standard \$1,490. In 1979, the assessment will be \$1,979. This is an increase of \$489 which means about \$55 in property taxes.

Bird estimates the total assessment increase will be about \$133,000. This will bring the city about \$15,000. The biggest chunk of revenue will come from the straight mill rate change which will bring the city an estimated addition of about \$90,000.

Only families of those who established residence under the Veterans Land Act have benefitted over the years from the agreement.