



*Housing Needed to Serve Homeless Individuals*

## Tuckerton Opens Door To Veterans-Only Rentals

BY PAT JOHNSON

Community Quest Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to providing low-income housing for individuals and families in New Jersey, received the necessary variance from the Tuckerton Land Use Board to build 24 low-income rental units exclusively for single veterans. The variance allows him to build the rentals in place of an approved subdivision called Tucker's Walk.

Daniel Kelly, president of Community Quest, headquartered in Egg Harbor Township, said there are 6,500 homeless veterans in New Jersey, and although there is transitional housing available for that population, this project offering permanent housing would be the first of its kind in the state.

During the Land Use Board meeting on Thursday, the applicant's attorney, Howard Butensky, gave a brief history of the project for block 49, lot 5. In February 2006, the board approved Tucker's Walk, 24 age-restricted town homes on the site. The town homes would have been "fee-simple," or owned by the residents, and as such would contribute to the tax base. However, since the veteran housing would be owned by a nonprofit entity, the town would receive not taxes, but "money in lieu of taxes."

The housing will be located on Route 9 not far from the Army Reserve building, across from the lagoon community of Paradise Cove.

Butensky called his professionals to testify that the applicant should receive the variance for rental housing in the business zone. According to Butensky, allowing use of the land for veterans housing was akin to use by schools or churches, and therefore inherently beneficial to the town.

The applicants' engineer, Michael Intile of Crest Engineering in Hightstown, pointed out that there already were rental properties in the zone, including low-income senior housing and affordable housing in a trailer park. He also showed the new plan that would preserve more of the wooded areas on the 6.7-acre tract and have less impervious coverage to contribute to stormwater runoff. Antilles also pointed out that possibly half of the residents would not have cars; therefore, the traffic from the veteran housing would be less than that from the already-approved "Tucker's Walk."

Kelly testified that to be eligible for the rentals, veterans would have to meet low-income guidelines as set forth by the federal government,



Photographs by Pat Johnson

**NEVER FORGET:** Veterans from Egg Harbor City (top) traveled to Tuckerton to give support for a proposed 24-unit veterans housing project. On Feb. 21, Daniel Kelly (above), president of Community Quest of Egg Harbor City, spoke to the Tuckerton Land Use Board about the need for such housing in New Jersey. Besides the moral responsibility of helping veterans, the town would get state COAH affordable housing unit credits.

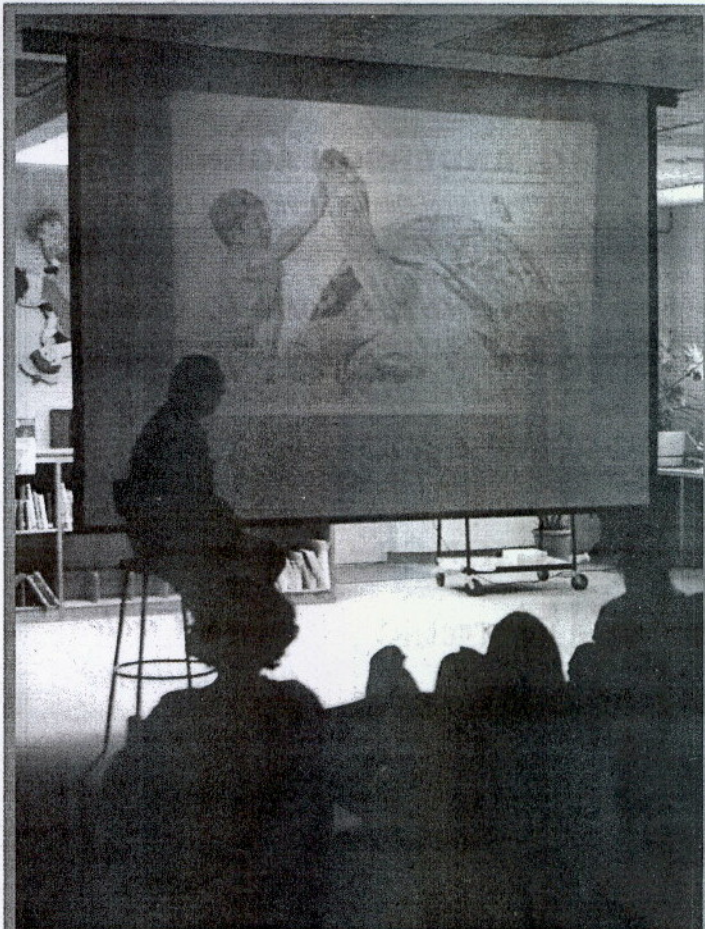
would have to be single and would have to meet certain behavioral criteria.

"This is not for families with children," he said. "The residents would be prescreened and pose no threat to themselves, the plant (housing), other residents and the community at large. They would also have to take care of themselves; this would not be a nursing home.

"After they are accepted, they will be rated annually (to be in compliance with these conditions). For instance, if a resident were to get married, they would have to find other housing."

One of the benefits could be in helping the town meet its Council on Affordable Housing obligation. According to Kelly, each unit could be worth two housing obligation units.

That aside, "Providing housing for veterans from the Middle East, World War II, Korea and the Gulf War who don't know where to go is certainly for the greater good. They went over there, and we have to take care of them when they come back."



Jack Reynolds

## Keep Your Chin Up

*Great Galloping Galapagos Turtles*

**SHOW TIME:** Authors/illustrators Ted and Betsy Lewin visited both the LBI Elementary School in Ship Bottom and the Ethel Jacobsen School in Surf City on Tuesday. The couple travel around the world photographing endangered animals to use as guides for their work. After a slide show, the couple taught workshops on creating books. The program was sponsored by the LBI PTA, and retired media specialist Janie Davis helped book the authors.

Kelly said his nonprofit corporation has been providing housing and employment for low-income individuals and families since the early 1980s.

Land Use Board member Michael Mathis asked who would screen the applicants. Kelly said his staff would do the screening while working closely with the Veterans Administration.

Board member Thomas Hennaut asked if veterans from all branches of the service would be eligible, and Kelly said yes, including reservists.

And although the 650-square-foot apartments would conform to Americans with Disabilities Act standards (wheelchair accessible), the veterans would not necessarily have to be disabled to qualify.

"People have to be self-sufficient; they have to be able to take out the trash," said Kelly.

Board member Wayne Tonnesen questioned Kelly on the amount of "in lieu of taxes" money the town could expect to receive from the complex, but Kelly would not speculate on the figure because he said the federal government would not give him the figure until he had the use permit first. "It's a bit of a bind," Kelly said.

Project architect Kyle Van Dyke of KVD Studios showed a conceptual rendering of the building, which he said would be built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design specifications, so-called green construction practices, and be environmentally friendly. Van Dyke, who is the architect who converted the Coast Guard station to the Rutgers Marine Field Station, said the architecture of the one-story building would

echo the town's maritime history. The two wings of the building would house 12 units each and be connected with a communal center area containing a living room, dining room, office and meeting room for the residents. Each unit would have an accessible kitchenette and bathroom, a living-dining area and a bedroom with storage. The communal rooms would be utilized for group functions. Also, an employee of Community Quest would be on site 40 hours a week.

Tonnesen said he was concerned that a greenway from the bay to the wooded uplands be preserved. There is a 50-foot buffer required by the state Department of Environmental Protection for the wetlands to the south of the property, but Tonnesen asked for a conservation easement for the back of the property.

Mathis instructed the attorney to have this in the resolution granting the use variance.

When board chairman Chris Bethmann opened the hearing to the public, Richard West, a resident of Paradise Cove and an advocate for the disabled, spoke. West said he had known Dan Kelly for 12 years and thought his project would be a good neighbor.

"I'm a vet and obviously have a disability. (West uses a wheelchair.) This is a project I could live in and my dad could live in if he were still alive, except that we have been fortunate not to be homeless. But I have a friend I grew up with, I was there when he signed up for the Marines. He was wounded in Vietnam and eventually got a medical discharge. He was married with three kids, and his wife left him and remarried. Then he was invited to come live in a shack on the back of



Jack Reynolds

## Big Scope Scouts Winter Ducks

**BIRD BRAINS:** Birders brave the bracing sea air at Barnegat Light State Park hoping for a gander at diving ducks. Merganzers, buffle heads and harlequins are around.

her property, and that's where he lives today so he could see his kids. This is a guy who stood up for his country, and people need to stand up for the veterans. No veteran should be homeless."

When it came time for the board to vote, Mathis said he would not vote to allow the variance because of the vague "in lieu of taxes" issue.

"The tax benefits on 24 town homes, a \$2½ million ratable – I think that's inherently beneficial to the town. We are going through the budget process now, and the town (budget) is very tight. We have a 4 percent cap on spending; we don't know if we'll have enough money to pay our secretary.

"It's an uncomfortable situation to be in, but I feel strongly that the town has to survive as well."

Board member Renee DeAngelo said she didn't believe the board was legally allowed to weigh how much a project would pay in taxes when granting approvals.

Hennatt said he was voting for the project because "the veterans put their life on the line every day so we can sit in our houses and eat good food and feel safe. I worry about when the person comes back and can't find a job or housing. For the small amount of taxes we pay and our lives are so doggone good, I'd be willing to shell out some more. We owe these guys a whole bunch, and I'm grateful. I'm for doing whatever we can for the veterans."

The board ultimately granted the variance with only Mathis dissenting.

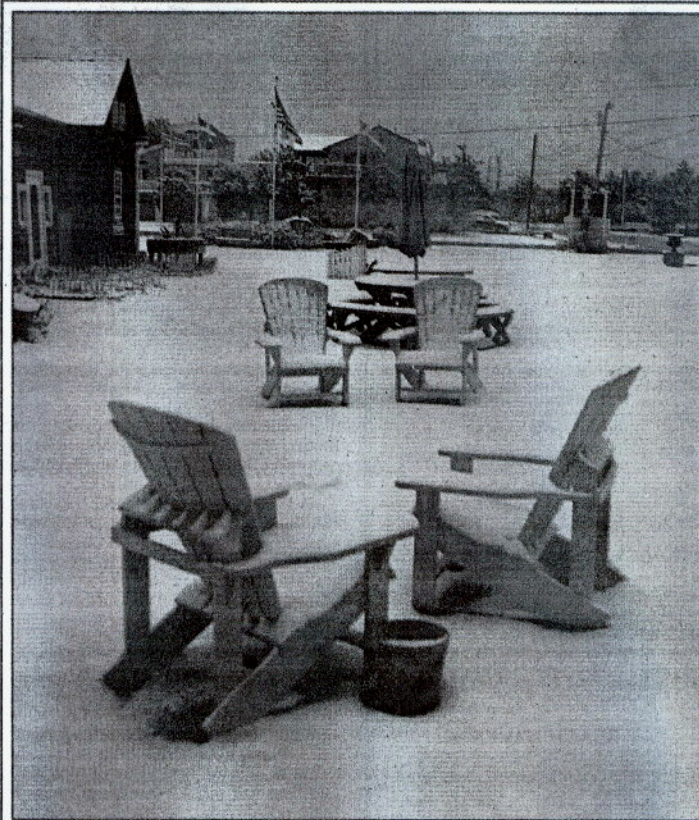
Receiving the variance was just the first step toward making the project a reality; Community Quest will come back to the board with a site plan that will include the construction specifics.

"We'll be there soon," said Kelly on Monday. "We want to move forward as quickly as possible; we hope to have people in housing by next Christmas. We don't want these people to be homeless one more day than they have to."

Questions on providing services are premature, said Kelly because they don't yet know the individual people who will occupy the housing.

"They are going to be very, very independent people, but if they need help with work or upward mobility, we certainly have these services," he said.

"It's unfortunate that when you talk about housing people with disabilities, right away



Jack Reynolds

## Weather a Viking Could Love

*Old Man Winter Throws a Glancing Blow*

**HAVE AN 'ICE DAY:** Up to three inches of snow fell last Friday morning. At Viking Village in Barnegat Light a clutch of colorful chairs stand out against the soft blanket. We're past winter's midpoint, so no need to pack them away now.

people think you are going to bring in drug addicts or unstable veterans that could murder your family at 2 in the morning. This is certainly not the case. Those are not our people; they are not who we deal with. The veterans we work with are screened. A veteran could be a Vietnam veteran, someone from the Gulf War, even older folks from (the Korean War) who are having a tough time what with the stock market going down."

Kelly said his company has serviced veterans in the past, but this project is "new and exciting for us."

"There are transitional housing programs for veterans, but this is permanent housing. As long as they stay within the guidelines, they can live here the rest of their life. This will be a success; we're definitely going to make this work and hope to duplicate it. This project will house 24 out of 6,500; there's room for plenty more projects out there."

Kelly continued, "Funding comes from a variety of sources. We get funding for construction from source A, for services from source B; and we put together the finished package.

"It's going to be a credit to the community, it's going to fit in with the environment, and when people see it, they are going to say, 'Wow, that's really nice.'"

Kelly graduated from Seton Hall in 1974 with a degree in psychology and has always worked in the helping field of social services. "I had a private practice and then I moved into the administrative end of it, and here I am.

"I've always been blessed with good health and the ability to get a good education, something not everyone has. I wanted to give back to the community, to people who through no fault of their own need assistance, someone to advocate for them."

Kelly said he was invited to look at the Southern Ocean County area by local veterans groups and Luckerton was chosen as the first of what Kelly hopes will be many such projects because

it is "a nice area and close to bus lines."

"When we found that site, we really loved it. You can take a bus to Atlantic City, to Philadelphia, anywhere really."

When contacted on Monday, June Knutson, a social worker with the nonprofit organization Network, located in Forked River, said of the 68,000 veterans living in Ocean County, each year her organization services 50 homeless veterans: men, women and families. "To meet the HUD federal guidelines for homeless, that means they are living in places unfit for habitation: cars, tents, in the woods or on the streets.

"We provide basic needs and shelter and screen them for appropriate programs and then transport them as far as Maryland to domiciliary transition programs, or Doms," Knutson said. "We work with Pierpoint, Md. a lot because they can usually secure us housing within seven to 10 days.

"I think the word homeless means a lot of different things to different people. A lot of our referrals are senior veterans whose spouses have died. They were making it on two Social Security checks, but now there is only one. Veterans lose jobs. All veterans, especially senior veterans, need affordable housing, and in Ocean County that's hard to find."

And she pointed out that Ocean County still does not have a homeless shelter. "Atlantic City does have a rescue mission, but they are strapped."

When asked, Kelly said he could not be sure if Ocean County veterans could receive priority for the housing he wants to build because Community Quest receives federal funding, and such a practice could be considered discriminatory. "I think it will be first come, first serve," he said. He also urged anyone who thinks they could benefit from the housing to call 646-5622 and ask for Kerrie Kelly (no relation) for more information.

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## Homeowners Lose Appeal in Sand Dune Case

*Attorney Hints an Appeal Might Not Be Practical*

A Ship Bottom couple found guilty last year in the borough's municipal court of tampering with dunes lost their appeal Feb. 22 in Ocean County Superior Court.

In January 2007, then-code enforcement officer Alex McEndoe filed a complaint against Ted and Dorothy Jedziniak for removing sand without a permit at their beachfront property at the end of 25th Street.

"This was the second time they had done something like this," said Mayor William Huelsenbeck. "They were convicted of a similar offense in 1993 and had to put the sand back then, and they'll have to do it again. This time they took out a tremendous amount of sand from their dunes and made a space for volleyball court and a hot tub. You're not allowed to tamper with the dunes or move sand from them."

Following the 2007 trial, Municipal Court Judge Paul Carr said that while the fine for dune tampering is \$1,000, he would have had the Jedziniaks replace the sand in lieu of a penalty. The penalty phase was stayed as the Jedziniaks' attorney, Kenneth Porro, filed an appeal.

Porro said he filed the appeal because "we claimed the borough's dune ordinance is invalid and that this was a private dune."

"The Superior Court judge, Barbara Villano, said that even though it is a private dune, the town has the right to regulate it," said Porro. "I disagree with that finding, but the judge did rule that as long as the 40 cubic yards of sand is put back, there will be no fine or penalty."

He said the Jedziniaks have 45 days to appeal Villano's ruling.

"You have to pick your battles," said the attorney. "In this case, it may be more cost effective to just, in essence, settle the case by compromising by putting back the sand. By doing this, we're not acknowledging that we did anything wrong, but it may just be easier to put the sand back since there would be no additional penalties involved if we do that."

Porro said the borough's ordinance and policies covering dune maintenance "do not make any sense."

"You have to remember that these are oceanfront property owners," he said. "When the wind blows and the sand goes on their patio and property, what are they supposed to do? You have the right to protect the property, but Ship Bottom says you have to take the sand that is on your patio, put it in a bucket and then put it on the curb. You are not allowed to touch or impact the dune in any way, even though you own the property and you pay taxes on it. The system doesn't work."

Porro said that the Jedziniaks' dune is in better shape than it was in 1993.

"It's higher, has more volume to it," said the attorney. "The borough has argued that the Jedziniaks expanded their patio, which we dispute."

The Jedziniaks declined comment, referring questions to Porro.

Huelsenbeck said the case has cost the borough between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in legal fees.

"Hopefully, the sand will be put back before Mother Nature takes a swipe at it and breaches that area they dug out," he said. "We're looking forward to getting that sand put back."

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