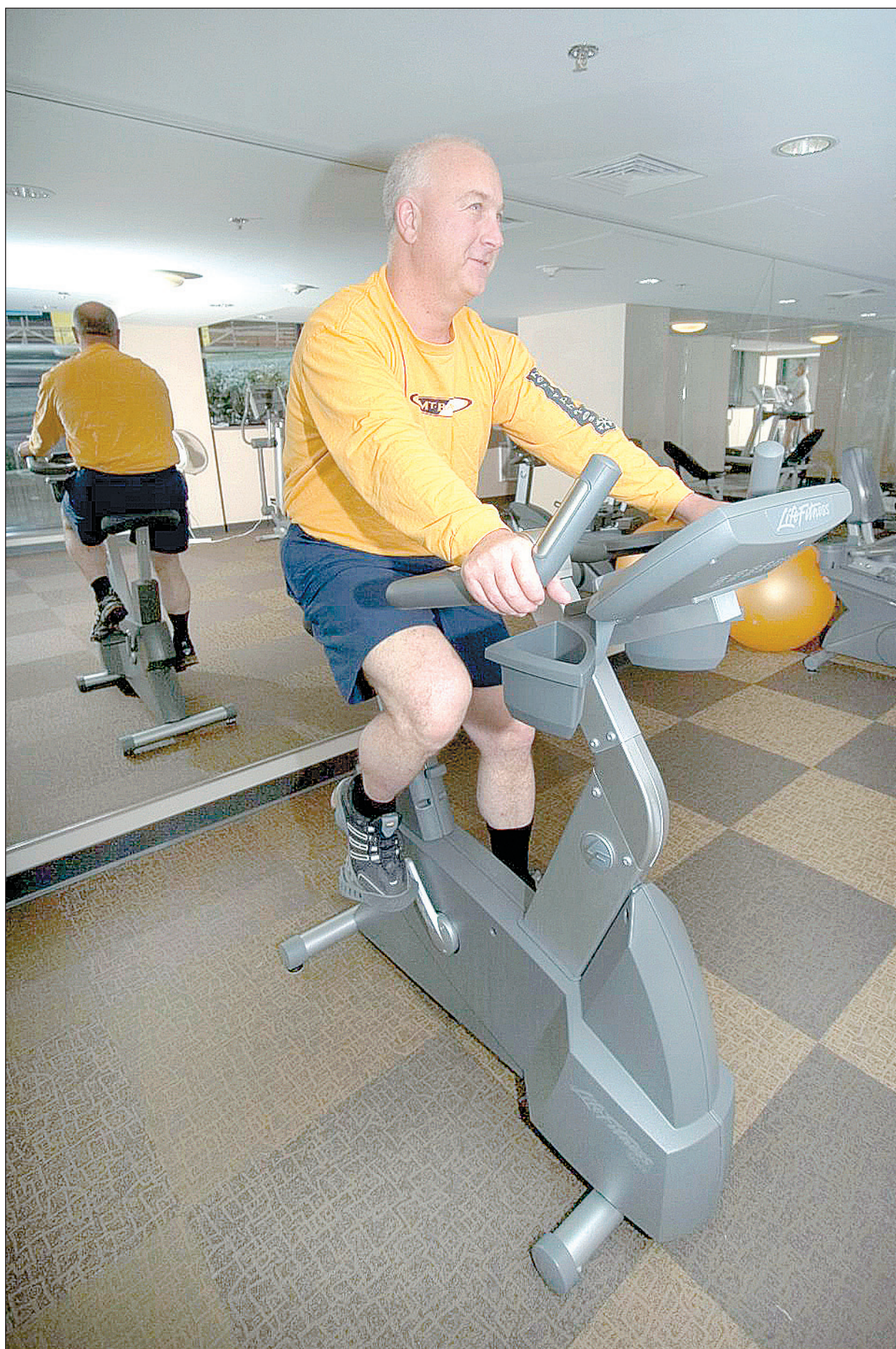


Condo living is 'carefree, not cost-free'



Ron Bahrey, a realtor who specializes in condos, says the well-equipped gym is his favourite amenity at his downtown condominium. As well as the gym, Bahrey's monthly \$255 fee covers garbage collection, water, a parking space, home insurance for all but contents, elevator maintenance, landscaping, resident caretaker and security system with 24-hour recorded video surveillance.

The freedom of owning a condo comes at a price — the fees for everything from landscaping to roof repairs

STORY BY KATHERINE DEDYNA • PHOTOS BY DEBRA BRASH
Times Colonist staff

Ron Bahrey used to drive to the Y whenever he had time for a quick workout. Now he takes a 60-second trip from his ninth floor condo and hops on state-of-the-art equipment with a view of St. Ann's Academy grounds.

"Since you're at home, it's easy to pop in," says Bahrey, 49, who notes that almost every condo development completed in the last year has a similar facility.

Among Victoria condominiums' escalating amenity packages, The Juliet, going up on Blanshard Street, will offer rooftop telescope and cinema as well as complimentary car co-op membership, while Shutters at Songhees boasts an outdoor swimming pool and spa.

The \$10,000 worth of equipment at the Belvedere is Bahrey's favourite amenity among the many covered by his \$255 monthly condo fee at the high-end project on Humboldt Street. He gives a quick tour of a spacious main floor that boasts a large activity room with flat-screen TV, fireplace and pool table and comfy contemporary furnishings; a soon-to-be yoga studio, a workshop and convenient bike storage room.

Bahrey, a realtor who specializes in condos and serves on the Belvedere's strata council, knows the freedom of condo life starts with the f-word: fees. It's how unit owners underwrite all the work that residents escape — from landscaping to roof repair — along with deluxe services few homeowners could afford on their own.

Bahrey's fees for his two-bedroom are comparable to city taxes he also pays of about \$300 a month. And, members know that, like taxes, every year fees go up. "I haven't seen any that go down," says Bahrey, who has lived in a lot of condos and says he gets good value at the Belvedere.

His fee covers garbage collection (now \$150 per year for a single-family home in Victoria), water, a parking space, home insurance for all but contents; resident caretaker and security system with 24-hour recorded video surveillance. Elevator maintenance and rock landscaping with a waterfall are also covered.

About 10 to 15 per cent of fees go into a contingency fund for future expenses at the Belvedere. Unlike Ontario, future costs are infrequently reflected in B.C. condo fees. Instead, B.C. stratas tend to deliver a big whack with a special levy when the work has to be done, says Tony Gioventu, executive director of B.C.'s Condominium Home Owners Association.

In contrast, Ontario fees are set by condo owners within provincial parameters that require mandatory reserve planning.

"There, the strata has to have a depreciation report for the next 25 years done for what the future costs are going to be and they have to contribute that money to the reserve," Gioventu explains.

Please see CONDO, D6



Condo fees cover the cost of maintaining the common property that all owners enjoy, such as the rock landscaping and waterfall at the Belvedere on Humboldt Street.

No complaint necessary for strata to act against bylaw violators

Dear Condo Smarts: Our strata council has been dealing with an owner who we suspect, over the past years, has never thrown out a thing, including their garbage.

We suspected there were problems because the owner has always been a shut-in, but no one ever complained until a medical emergency a few weeks ago, when a neighbour needed to get 911 assistance and access the strata lot.

The conditions are unbelievable to say the least. The papers are piled higher than the windows. There is garbage everywhere, and feces from rats and pests in every corner.

The owner is refusing access to clean it up. We contacted the local health board



TONY GIOVENTU
Condo Smarts

and it won't intervene. The owner's family members have told us to mind our own business.

We're frustrated because we have found, over the years, that enforcing bylaws is just a waste of time, so what do we do?

Mrs. C.M. Findlay

Dear Mrs. Findlay: Many strata councils have a misconception that they need a written or verbal complaint from someone before they enforce a bylaw.

Not so. If a strata prohibits pets and a council member sees a cat in a residence window, or a bylaw prohibits barbecues and there's a barbecue on a deck, the council member can file the complaint.

Don't wait for things to get out of hand — act when you're made aware of the problems.

Annual suite inspections are also incredibly valuable. The strata can inspect plumbing and window systems for maintenance requirements, and at the same time, you might become aware of conditions that place your building at risk, other

bylaw violations, grow-ops or unauthorized alterations to the building structure. If an owner has created a disaster in his or her suite, you can start the process before it gets out of hand.

Bylaw enforcement takes time and organization. The strata can remedy bylaws, including work on a strata lot, and require the owner to be responsible for the costs. Enforcing bylaws is not only about fining people, but ending the violations.

A provincewide pilot mediation program for strata bylaws is now available through the B.C. Arbitration and Mediation Institute. For a fixed fee of \$350, plus travel costs and taxes if any, the parties get a two-hour mediation for a bylaw dis-

pute. A mediated settlement often quickly and economically solves the problems, and maintains goodwill between the parties who still have to live there when the dust settles.

For more information on the program, go to the website www.bcami.com.

Tony Gioventu is executive director of the Condominium Home Owners' Association (CHOA). Send questions to him c/o New Homes, Times Colonist, 2126 Douglas St., Victoria, B.C., V8T 4M2 or by e-mail at tony@choa.bc.ca. Contact CHOA toll-free at 1-877-353-2462. The association's website is www.choa.bc.ca.

**SILHOUETTE WINDOW SHADES
LUMINETTE PRIVACY SHEERS**

\$200 MANUFACTURER'S REBATE

HunterDouglas
WINDOW FASHIONS

- **SAVE \$200** FOR EVERY 4 UNITS OF SILHOUETTES
- **SAVE \$200** FOR EVERY 2 UNITS OF SKYLINE
- **SAVE \$200** FOR EVERY 2 UNITS OF LUMINETTES

FREE SHOP AT HOME SERVICE

2745 BRIDGE STREET

40% OFF

CELEBRITY
One-Inch Venetians

RUFFELL & BROWN
INTERIORS

384-1230

www.ruffell-brown.com

"INTRODUCING"
SKYLINE GLIDING PANELS

Condo: Owners should be prepared for future costs

• From D5

In B.C. that would result in a “huge impact” on monthly fees, namely making them much higher, he says.

B.C. strata councils are not required to keep a minimum amount in a contingency fund. But if the council kitty gets below 25 per cent of the value of the council’s operating account, owners then must kick in 10 per cent of the next fiscal year’s budget.

Gioventu notes that there are “really great features” built into condos these

days, but reminds future owners that there’s a cost to them. Upscale amenities such as exercise rooms and indoor swimming pools can add up to 20 per cent to the monthly fees even though a pool, for instance, may be used by no more than five per cent of the members, he says.

Buyers should also be aware that water features and unusual landscaping, such as gardens atop parking garages, last only so long. Future repairs to some of these amenities can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars if not more.

“Strata owners need to be prepared to pay those kind of costs as they get down the road,” he says.

For condo developments with golf courses or marinas that generate revenue, Gioventu warns that tax rates will vary accordingly.

“Buyer beware,” suggests Gioventu, “because in a lot of circumstances, people are finding out that those revenues are taxable and the tax status of the strata corporation, which is generally non-taxable, is changed.”

It’s “extremely rare” for people to leave the condo market because they can’t foot their fees, says Gioventu.

Still, many people think condo living means “somebody else” will take care of everything.

“The big reach for all of us is that, yes, condo living can be carefree, but not cost-free,” says Gioventu. “You still have to pay your \$200 to \$300 a month to make sure that everything is serviced and everything is maintained.”

He warns against a common habit of strata communities: Using small surpluses at the end of their fiscal year to offset the next year’s inflation. To avoid unpleasant



If you’re in the market for condo, you should know that condo fees are factored into the calculation to determine how large a mortgage a condo buyer can qualify for.

Debra Brash/Times Colonist

surprises, “strata fees should always reflect the rate of inflation.”

More than 60 per cent of new home starts in the capital region are now attached housing, meaning many more people have accustomed themselves to paying monthly fees. But what they might not know is that condo fees mean condo buyers qualify for less of a mortgage than non-condo buyers.

Many condo buyers are first-time own-

ers putting five per cent down. Buying a \$300,000 house, they would qualify for almost \$293,000, but only \$286,000 for a \$300,000 condo, says Maria Dominelli, an Invis mortgage broker in Victoria.

That’s because condo fees of \$150 to \$225 a month are factored into buyers’ ability to pay their mortgage.

The upside is that some condo fees cover heating and repairs, and offset other expenses such as house insurance.

“If you normally pay for gym membership when you have a house, versus a condo with all the amenities there, then you’re actually saving by paying into the pot (and) having the luxury of those amenities,” she says.

Victoria real estate lawyer Craig Young has never seen condo fees become a deal breaker. But sometimes fees cited before a project is built go a lot higher after people have purchased the units and taken over as the strata council.

For new condos, developers must file disclosure statements that include an interim budget of projected costs including an estimate of monthly strata fees.

“There have been cases where the courts have found that there has been misrepresentation there,” says Young. “If there is a large discrepancy, developers can be held liable for that misrepresentation.”

Each complex is different, Young says. “The buyer definitely has to make themselves aware of what exactly those fees are going to cover.”

Back to the Belvedere. Even though Wayne Carlow’s condo fees underwrite full-time landscaping, after 30 years in a house, he’s got some ingrained outdoor habits.

“I’ve taken up doing a little of the gardening, just to keep my fingers dirty.”

Budget Blinds
a style for every point of view™

Custom Window Coverings
Shutters • Draperies • Blinds

Delicious Views
Whip up a brand new view with custom woven wood shades from Budget Blinds!

Call 381-6238 • 858-2546
FREE In-Home Consultation & Estimates
Professional Installation • Low Price Promise
Each Franchise Independently Owned and Operated
www.budgetblinds.com

YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Showcase of Homes

SIDNEY

Jean Dunn
Your Real Estate Expert
ROYAL LePAGE By the Sea
655-1816

SIDNEY TOWNHOME – \$595,000
Largest of 5 units in this sought after adult complex. A short stroll to the ocean and Beacon Avenue. 1523 sq. ft. 3 bedrooms, 3 baths 2 level townhome. Master on main, French doors to west facing patio. Large single car garage. A must see!

ROYAL LePAGE **1-800-326-8856**
By the Sea
www.jeandunn.com

DEAN PARK

Jean Dunn
Your Real Estate Expert
ROYAL LePAGE By the Sea
655-1816

DEAN PARK ! – \$ 950,000
Quality thru out this 1 owner 2821 sq. ft. residence extensively reno'd in 2003. Bright & cheery with attention to detail. Oak floors, kitchen with granite & maple, in floor heat & crown moldings. Pleasant outlook of valley, mountains & ocean. Convenient to Rec. Centre, bus, ferry, airport, Sidney & Victoria. A great place!

ROYAL LePAGE **1-800-326-8856**
By the Sea
www.jeandunn.com

Mike Boorman
“Serving Victoria for 4 Generations”

Expansive Views! 1,695,000
Fabulous waterfront home with top of the line upgrades. Over 1/2 acre conveniently located in Gordon Head and very private. This family home boasts Ocean, Shoreline and Mountain views from Sidney to the San Juan’s across Haro Strait and provides almost 2800 sqft with 4 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. Features include a spectacular kitchen with deluxe appliances, Pulla windows, heated floors, granite and custom cabinets. Formal living and dining space featuring views. Full basement with bedrooms and family room, ideal for the kids. Walk out to the fenced yard. Beach access. Contact Mike.

BOORMAN'S
595-1535
www.mikeboorman.com

VIEW ROYAL
Kevin Koetke Brett Jones
Newport Realty

200 Anya Lane – \$749,900
Open House Saturday 1-3
Lovely home in a quiet subdivision with a pastoral setting waiting for the perfect family. If you like attention to detail, this is the home for you. Vaulted ceilings, custom kitchen, craftsmanship throughout, and a terrific floorplan await. You will love the open and flowing floorplan, with family room off the kitchen and a beautiful west facing backyard to watch the children play. Upstairs are 4 great bedrooms, including large Master with walk-in-closet and ensuite. This home truly stands out in the details: wainscoting, gorgeous cabinetry and mouldings. This is not your standard home - come see the difference! MLS 235901

RE/MAX Camosun **Kevin Koetke & Brett Jones** **Newport Realty**
381-1345

FEATURE YOUR AD IN THIS SPACE IN FULL COLOUR

IN THE
YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Showcase of Homes

ON ANY WEDNESDAY

Call: **Diana Stefaniec**
380-5262
email: **dstefaniec@tc.canwest.com**
or **Dennis Nazar**
380-5243
email: **dnazar@tc.canwest.com**
for more information

HIGH QUADRA
PATRICK ACHTZNER
Your Real Estate Expert
Address Realty Limited
391-1893

ELEGANT LIVING
Terrific family home on a quiet cul-de-sac in desirable Lakehill. Elegant formal living room & raised formal dining room. Sunny kitchen has breakfast area & adjoining sunken family room w/ gas fireplace and sundeck. BONUS - garden level 2 BR suite. \$659,900 CALL TODAY!
www.addressrealty.com
FREE BROCHURE

Address Realty
391-1893
LOW LOW COMMISSIONS

Aluminum Furniture • Cast • BBQs
SPECTACULAR SUMMER SAVINGS
Full Selection of Patio Furniture IN STOCK NOW!!

RICHMOND DINING SET
- Cast aluminum
- Rust free/ maintenance free
- 10 year structural warranty
- 3 year paint warranty

\$799
REG. \$1214 SALE

FOCUS PATIO
2070 Keating X Rd. (next to Home Hardware)
Visit us on the web @ www.focusonpatio.com

Acrylic • Wear • Jackson Grills • Balau Wood • Cushions • Wrought Iron • Repairs • Solaria Heaters

Helen Chesnut
Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday
in the TC

CanWest Raise a Reader
TIMES COLONIST

University of Victoria

Valerie S. Kuehne, Ph.D., Vice-President External Relations at the University of Victoria, and her son Nathan (9 years old)

“Raise-a-Reader is such an important program for our community. As a parent, I recognize the key role families play in supporting and inspiring young readers. We also know that early investments in reading with our children and encouraging their interest in language and literacy have lifetime benefits. At UVic, we see how those young readers can develop into tomorrow’s leaders.”

CanWest Raise-a-Reader Day
Wednesday, October 3
1-866-637-READ
www.raiseareader.com

Assante WEALTH MANAGEMENT
7 ELEVEN
Microsoft
THE FAIRMONT EMPRESS VICTORIA
MAYFAIR Shopping as it should be
Global
SERIOUS COFFEE
CHEK NEWS
RE/MAX Outstanding Agents Outstanding Results
WOODGROVE CENTRE BIG ON the island™
CheapTicketsCanada.com
AMJ CAMPBELL VAN LINES
University of Victoria