

# benny farm tenants

association inc.

MONTREAL, CANADA

3700 Benny Ave., Apt. 315  
Montreal. H4B 3A3

20th November, 2003.

My name is Helen Guy, tenant of Benny Farm since 1966,  
and President of the B.F.T.A. since 1976.

Our Charter which was granted on May 22, 1954 reads as  
follows:

\*\* "To Promote, support and protect the common  
interests of the tenants of the housing  
development known as Benny Farm Gardens in  
the Notre Dame de Grace ward of the City of  
Montreal and the general welfare and well  
being of all residents of the said housing  
development".

This is our raison d'etre. AS the original and present  
tenants of this project, we are, of course, very  
concerned about the zoning by-law change and the  
impending re-development.

On March 21, 1991 CMHC (Canada Mortgage & Housing)  
announced the re-development of Benny Farm.

At that time there were 384 families living on the  
project.....to-day we only have 171 of the original  
families remaining, We have lost 213 families in 12½  
years. The 171 remaining families represent the  
following: 29 widowers, 99 widows and 43 couples.

Phases 1, 2 & 3 consists of 237 apartments. 171 apartments  
are occupied by original Benny Farm tenants who were

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transferred from the old site. Eleven (11) tenants from the Connaught/Westmore project have also been transferred to Benny Farm. The 55 remaining apartments in Phases 1, 2 & 3 have been made available to the public. Benny Farm has always been family oriented \*\*\* (MacLeans magazine, November 1, 1952) and this brief comes from our hearts.

For 12½ years, we have been subjected to: surveys, countless consultations, numerous meetings, media coverage, demolition, construction, unforeseen delays, replacement of familiar staff, change in landlord, traumatic and imposed moving, disruption of our lives, including an injunction which caused further stress and needless delays. BUT, WE ARE STILL HERE.

In 1999, our landlord changed from Canada Mortgage & Housing to Canada Lands.

In their strive to proceed with the implementation of the re-development, Canada Lands formed a 10 member Task Force to ensure that all needs have been addressed, and the result is the plan before you.

The Task Force, over the many months has worked diligently on the proposed plan, and for this we extend our thanks for a job well done.

#### ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!!!!!

The plan before you expresses the needs of our community. The CLSC and the Recreation/Community Center are essential, and what better location than on Benny Farm? How can you build housing for 535 families, without providing them which much needed fundamental services?

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12½ years is long enough.

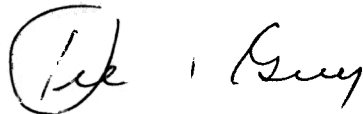
Please do not impose further stress on us, and the community by refusing this plan.

We urge you to proceed, and obtain final approval A.S.A.P.

Thank you for listening, and we understand it will be a difficult decision, but in our hearts, we know you will do the right thing.

SO LET'S GET THE SHOW ON THE ROAD.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Helen Guy". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Helen Guy, President

BENNY FARM TENANTS ASSOCIATION

Annex attached

Annex..

- \* More than 200 signatures from tenants, families & friends of Benny Farm.
  
- \*\* Although our Charter was granted in 1954, our remains the same - to support and protect the common interest and welfare of the tenants of Benny Farm. (This only refers to the tenants residing in Phases 1, 2 & 3),
  
- \*\*\* Profile of Benny Farm in MacLeans magazine in 1952, and which continued over the many years is still in existence to-day.

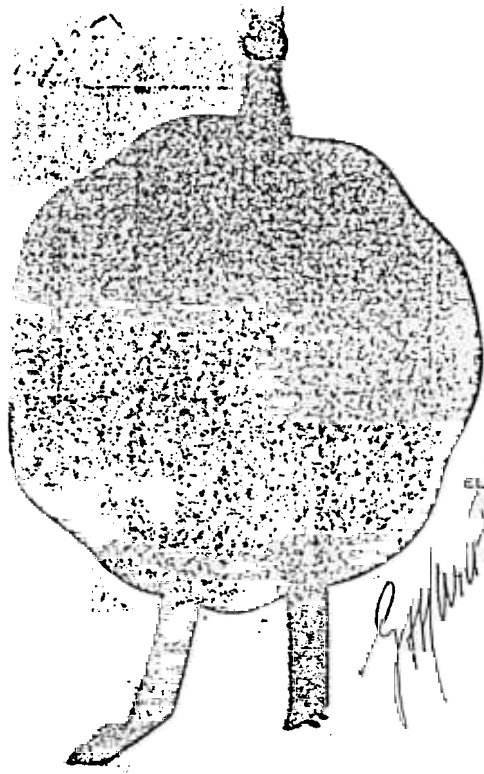
24 novembre 2003

Liste de signataires en appui du projet soumis par la Société immobilière du Canada, déposée en annexe au mémoire du Benny Farm tenants association inc.

Libellé

Nous, soussignés, favorisons le plan d'ensemble de Benny Farm proposé par la Société immobilière du Canada / We undersigned, fully support the plan for the redevelopment of Benny Farm presented by Canada Lands Company

La liste compte 239 signatures.



CANADA  
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

ELIZABETH THE SECOND, BY THE GRACE OF GOD OF THE UNITED KINGDOM,  
CANADA AND HER OTHER REALMS AND TERRITORIES QUEEN,  
HEAD OF THE COMMONWEALTH, DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

*[Handwritten signature]*

To all whom the present letters may concern or who may see them,

GREETING:

Letters Patent Incorporating  
**HENNY FARM TENANTS ASSOCIATION**  
**INCORPORATED**

WHEREAS Part Third of the Quebec Companies' Act, provides that the Lieutenant-Governor may, by Letters Patent issued under the Great Seal, grant to three or more persons, petitioning therefor, a charter constituting them a corporation for objects of a national, patriotic, religious, philanthropic, charitable, scientific, artistic, social, professional, or sporting character, or the like, but without pecuniary gain;

WHEREAS the persons hereinafter designated have filed a petition praying for a charter constituting them a body corporate and politic for the purposes hereinunder described;

WHEREAS the said persons have complied with the conditions precedent to the granting of the desired charter, and the objects of the undertaking of the proposed company are amongst those for which the Lieutenant-Governor may grant a charter under Part Third of the Quebec Companies' Act;

NOW KNOW YE, that We have, in virtue of the powers conferred upon Us by the said Part Third of the Quebec Companies' Act constituted and by these present Letters Patent do constitute the following persons, to wit:

- Robert Ward Ernst, Airline Pilot, Harry Hilliard Whittem,  
Engineer, Roderick Chrysler Carter, Banker, all of the City  
and District of Montreal,

Recorded the  
1st of June, 1954  
Libro 271  
Folio 8  
*[Signature]*  
Deputy Provincial Registrar

and any others who are or shall become members of the corporation, a corporation for the following purposes:

1. To promote, support and protect the common interests of the tenants of the housing development known as Benny Farm Gardens in the Notre Dame de Grace ward of the City of Montreal and the general welfare and well being of all residents of the said housing development.

To consider all questions affecting the interests of the tenants of the said housing development, to promote and support measures for the improvement of the physical aspects thereof and the comfort and well being of the residents thereof and the protection of children in the area occupied by the said housing development and the vicinity.

2. To promote friendly relations and mutual understanding among the residents of the said housing development and for that purpose to organize and conduct social and recreational activities and athletic games, sports and exercises of all kinds, to arrange and sponsor matches and competitions and to offer or grant and contribute toward prizes, awards and distinctions. - - - - -

4. To procure, maintain and operate suitable accommodation and facilities for meetings, entertainments, athletic games, sports and exercises and all other activities of or conducted by the corporation, to equip the same with the usual and necessary adjuncts and to permit the same to be used either gratuitously or upon such terms as may from time to time be agreed upon. - - - - -

5. To supply and render services of a charitable nature to poor and needy persons, to promote and engage in and support charitable enterprises and to raise funds and give donations for charitable, patriotic or community purposes. - - - - -



6.- To raise and collect moneys for the furtherance of the objects of the corporation by way of membership fees, dues, donations, contributions or otherwise.

7. To invest moneys of the corporation not immediately required for the purposes of the corporation in such investments as trustees may by law invest trust funds.

8. Subject to the previous consent of the Superintendent of Insurance for the Province of Quebec to establish and support or aid in the establishment and support of funds or trusts calculated to benefit the residents of the said housing development or their dependents. - - - - -

9. For the purposes aforesaid to take over the assets and liabilities of the aforesaid unincorporated body known as Benny Farm Tenants Association. - - - - -

The powers granted do not permit gambling practices of any nature and in particular the conducting or playing of any game of chance or any mixed game of chance and skill, and they do not authorize the corporation to obtain or to hold a permit from the Quebec Liquor Commission to sell alcoholic liquor.

It is ordained and declared that memberships in the corporation shall be limited to tenants of the said Benny Farm Gardens housing development and the wives and husbands of such tenants residing there with them and that any member of the corporation who ceases to be a resident of the said development shall thereupon cease to be a member of the corporation. - - - - -





It is further ordained and declared that the corporation shall be managed by a board of twenty-five (25) directors to be elected at the first general meeting of the members and thereafter annually in accordance with the by-laws of the corporation.

It is further ordained and declared that upon the dissolution of the corporation any assets remaining after the payment and satisfaction of the debts and liabilities shall be transferred to an organization or organizations having cognate or similar objects.



The corporate name of the corporation to be  
"BENNY FARM TENANTS ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED"

The chief place of business of the said corporation to be at 3985  
Cavendish Boulevard, Montreal, in the District of Montreal,  
in Our said Province.

The amount to which the value of the immoveable property  
which the corporation may hold is to be limited to five  
thousand dollars (\$5,000.00).

The following persons are named provisional directors of the corpo-  
ration, to wit: The Applicants.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have caused these Our Letters to  
be made Patent, and the Great Seal of Our said Province of Quebec to  
be thereunto affixed; Witness: Our trusty and well beloved the Honourable  
GASPARD FAUTEUX, P.C., LL.D., D.D.S., L.D.S., Lieutenant-  
Governor of Our Province of Quebec.

Given at Our Government House, in Quebec,  
this twenty-second - - day of May - - - - - in the year of  
Grace, one thousand nine hundred and fifty-four - - - - - and of  
Our Reign the third. - - - - -

By Command,

  
Assistant Provincial Secretary



# BENNY'S HAPPY FAMILY

With fourteen hundred children in four hundred apartments, you'd think life at Benny Farm would be bedlam. But these gregarious Montrealers have learned how to live under each other's feet without getting in each other's hair.

**N**EARLY four hundred veterans and their wives, fourteen hundred children, two hundred cats and dogs, scores of goldfish, dozens of budgerigars and canaries, several parrots and a monkey live so felicitously at Benny Farm, a huge apartment development in Montreal's suburb of Notre Dame de Grace, that they lay claim to the title of Canada's cheeriest community.

Peckaniffs, remarking on the swarming aspect of it, call it "just another tenement." Prudes, deploring its many spontaneous parties, have described it as Bohemia. Wits, in allusion to the almost daily addition of new babies, have dubbed it *Hunny Farm*. Many families, unsuited to the zealous gregarious life, have fled, whimpering for privacy.

Ninety percent of the occupants belong to the Benny Farm Tenants' Association whose highly organized playgrounds, sports leagues, bridge clubs, sewing circles, ballet classes, drama groups and gardening contests, library and dances have made the housing development as much a way of life as a place to live.

The tenants make money from an annual carnival which last year attracted twenty-five thousand people and spend it on their children. They give about ten thousand other Montrealers a free fireworks display every May 24. Their annual ski race round the buildings always hits the front page of Montreal newspapers.

In the buildings the stairs are steep and scarred with the scribbings of many toddlers. The rooms are so small that parties frequently overflow into adjoining homes. The walls are thin and domestic spats, through constant reduction to the flashing eye and muted hiss, have been stifled almost to the point of extinction.

When practical jokers last year reshuffled the

By MCKENZIE PORTI

PHOTOS BY DAVID BIER

snowboots and rubbers left on the landings redistribution took fourteen days. Benny is so big and busy that nonresidents have stolen the wheels off cars parked outside, robbed the coin-operated washing machines and even held up one resident for attention. But to a true Benny Farmer, the proximity of humans has far more rewards than

penalties. Many former tenants still subscribe with nostalgia to the Benny Farmer, a four-page weekly paper owned and edited by the inhabitants. Even perfect strangers with no intention of living there have expressed interest.

Two years ago Dr. Ian Dickson, chairman of the Marriage Guidance Council, in Norwich, Eng., and a well-known housing authority, wrote the Tenants' Association asking respectfully for details. His letter was typical of scores received during the development's five years from psychiatrists, pediatricians, social scientists, recreation directors, architects, builders and aldermen who want to know if it's true what they say about Benny.

With the usual allowances for local pride and hyperbole, it is.

As an example of contented, democratic, communal life Benny Farm has few equals. Its spirit rises from a close community of interests: The heads of all the families saw service during World War Two in the armed forces. Each couple has an average of three children. The great majority of the adults are between thirty and forty-five years old. Roman Catholic, Protestant and Jew, English and French-speaking Canadians and a heavy sprinkling of European war brides and Imperial veterans are proving it is possible for reasonable, tolerant people to live under each other's feet without getting in each other's hair.

Opened in 1947 Benny Farm occupies the site of, and is named after, a thirty-acre estate which had resisted the surrounding bricks and mortar of the city for more than a hundred years. It belongs to the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, a crown company. The two, three and four-bedroom apartments rent at sixty-eight, seventy-eight and eighty-eight dollars monthly, figures which, on average, represent twenty percent of the tenant's income. The apartments are reserved almost exclusively for veterans with children. The only veterans without children who may qualify are paraplegics, paraplegics or others who have been seriously disabled. Benny Farm has a small community of these. Special ramps have been built to take their wheelchairs into the buildings.

There is always a long waiting list. The turnover in tenants in the past five years has exceeded fifty percent but the high-voltage spirit of the development has remained unimpaired.

The men call themselves Farmers and the women Farmerettes. None is exactly famous but the community boasts the family of Lieut.-Col. Gaston Vallée, former CO of the "Van Doo's" in Korea, and sixteen-year-old Jean Dunkeld—sister of a Scottish war bride—who had never seen a shuttlecock till she came to this country four years ago but today, after learning the game at Benny Farm, is junior singles badminton champion of Canada.

The breadwinners once held rank ranging from commander, colonel and group captain to ordinary seaman, private and aircraftman. About twenty-five of them are still in the permanent forces. The rest are now salesmen, engineers, architects, clerks, insurance agents, lawyers, civil servants, newspapermen, advertising men, air-line pilots, shopkeepers and garage proprietors. There is one mortician.

They all knew what it was like to be fed, clad and billeted by the government. After the war they looked forward to an independent civilian life. But many were disillusioned by housing conditions which imposed on them the miseries of shared bathrooms and kitchens. Others discovered that the transition from the collectivism of army life to the self-sufficiency of civilian life could be a little frightening. When Benny Farm was opened for their benefit they found a measure of privacy in the self-contained homes plus those elements of fellowship which they had missed since leaving the service. Benny humor, company and clan spirit, most of them decided, helped to smooth the transition.

Most of them have decided that the government is a very good landlord. They organized themselves into a tenants' association as a means of self-protection. But the Benny Farm Tenants' Association co-operates with rather than fights the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

George Powell, an ex-army officer and an executive of Sheraton Hotels of Canada, is one of many former Benny Farmers who have now bought houses but who retain strong ties with the community. In the Benny Farm vernacular, which is still heavily laced with military terms, he says: "I would describe Benny Farm as a sort of holding unit, a rehabilitation centre, a place where the troops mark time before settling down to a route march in homes of their own."

Out of three hundred and eighty-four families only sixteen have remained aloof from the Tenants' Association. Colin Bowie, a former RCAF navigation officer and this year's president of the BFTA, says: "Without these dissidents we wouldn't be a proper cross section. We regard their disinterest or hostility as a spur and call them Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition."

The degree of intimacy which the multifarious activities of the BFTA has induced among the tenants varies from block to block. In some buildings the women leave their front doors open all day long and call to one another across the landings. In others the front doors are kept closed but the wives generally gather for morning coffee in one of the kitchens.

Most of the women are perpetually engaged in BFTA projects. There are cakes to bake for the cookery school contest; costumes to be made for the annual children's ice carnival; library books to be covered from plastic vegetable bags; car pools to be arranged to take the children to ballet and drama classes; monitors to be appointed for supervision of the playgrounds; news items to be collected for the Gallery Gleanings gossip column of the Benny Farmer; and outside charity efforts like blood donations, Red Cross collections and Christmas hampers for needy families.

The men are kept equally busy building or repairing slides, swings, and wind boxes, laying the ice rinks and sweeping them clear of snow; making Christmas decorations and organizing the big annual events. Nearly everyone is on first-name terms. Even those traditional enemies, the landlord and the young fry, live in something close to a state of truce at Benny. It is true that last year some of the Benny children climbed up snow banks onto the garage roofs and knocked holes in them. The year before they ferreted around the basements, removed fuses, threw whole buildings into darkness and risked electrocution. More than one Benny Farmer has felt the sting of an airgun pellet fired by some pint-sized Roy Rogers and several have come down to their mailboxes to find the contents reduced to ashes by infant pyromaniacs.

But the children, affected by their parents' ardor for organization, fight

their baser instincts with grim and systematic zeal. They are regimented into squads and under such banners as the B-Block Busy Bees, the K-Block Kleen-Up Kids and the M-Block Mighty Midgets, whirl into litter and dirt with brooms, mops and detergents every week under elected leaders. Each week the children with the cleanest block win a party out of BFTA funds plus free movies, candy and ice cream. When it was inaugurated last year the enterprise was received with mixed feelings by one Benny Farmer poet who lamented the loss of chalky literature from the walls in a stanza which ended:

Clean-up contests? Bring them on,  
They might even win my alley.  
But now how will we ever find out  
If Jimmy Brown loves Sally?

The BFTA appoints directors to each block and these, like the orderly officers of old, go around saying "Any complaints?" Frivolous complaints are spurned-- the BFTA, for example, will not back its members in hassles against paying for burst radiators or demands for redecorations at the landlord's expense. The radiator problem, said the Benny Farmer, in an admonishing column, is due solely to opening the windows with the steam turned off and redecorations, quite reasonably, are done by the landlord only every four years.

The only occasion on which the BFTA and the CMHC drew swords was over the garages. When these buildings were erected Farmers rushed to lease them. But the rent, at twelve dollars a month, sent most of them reeling back.

Cried the Benny Farmer: "Let nobody take one until we've negotiated. Anybody who does so is a scab." For weeks the garages stood empty while the CMHC demanded twelve dollars

and the BFTA stubbornly offered seven-fifty. The CMHC came down to ten dollars but the BFTA held out. Finally the landlord capitulated and seven-fifty it was.

Benny Farmers have long been capitalizing on their corporate strength. They haggled with two auto-wash outfits and members get their cars laundered for seventy-five cents instead of the regular dollar and a quarter. The Benny Farmer prints coupons entitling holders to cheap rides at the Belmont Park Amusement Ground. Attracted by the publicity potential of the Benny activities Montreal firms give household gadgets for prizes, holiday resorts offer free week end, night clubs free nights out and theatres free tickets.

President Colin Bowie says: "We play no favorites. We mooch from everyone."

A spectacular demonstration of the team spirit was given by the Benny Farmers one Friday night last June. At seven p.m., when the two-night and one-day carnival was due to open, a deluge of rain broke. Scores of Farmers poured from their homes, crossed to a nearby vacant lot, and began to rescue prizes from the Crown and Anchor, Chocolate Wheel and other booths. In five minutes the carnival ground was a quagmire and dozens of men and women struggling to hold up tents against the wind were drenched to the skin. By nine p.m., however, the weather cleared and the carnival began. Next morning, touched by newspaper pictures of the battle with the elements, thousands of outsiders flocked to the show.

They enjoyed street dancing, a leg contest by the women tenants, pony rides, guessing games and other events until far into Saturday night and they left the Benny Farmers with two thousand dollars' profit to spend on swings, library books and sports equipment for their children.

On May 24 the Benny Farmers spend three hundred dollars on fireworks. It is such a good show that ten thousand outsiders turned up last year.

Every winter they hire two hundred baby sitters, some of whom look after two or three homes, pool their cars and head out in cavalcade for a hall in the nearby Town of Mount Royal where they hold their annual dance—the Bunny Hop. Montreal City Police send special squads to guard their homes during the dance. Several would-be burglars, attracted by the publicity or the jubilant exodus, are arrested each year.

On the morning after the dance Benny Farmers run their ski race. They call it the Longloaf, a derisive corruption of the Norwegian *Langelauf*. Competitors begin by swallowing a slug of *Canadian*, a Canadian drink compounded of alcohol, red wine and maple syrup. The course is marked out by plywood pink elephants and somewhere on the way competitors must grab balloons, get their faces daubed, lose one ski and dance a highland fling to the satisfaction of the Benny piper, Rob Mackenzie. The first prize, for man and wife making the best joint time, is a free week end at a Laurentian resort.

But most of the amenities of life on the big farm in the city are designed for the children.

Most Benny mothers devote as much time to other people's offspring as they do their own. Sheila Lunan, the English war bride of Stewart Lunan, organizer of the carnival, is notorious for getting up before dawn to do her washing. She explains this by saying that sometimes a line-up forms by the machines and she "had enough queuing in England." Farmers know, however, that what with presiding over the playground committee, making Red Cross collections, running a girl-guide troop and playing for the Ice Mice the only way she can get through her day, and look after her own two children, is by rising before sun-up.

There are many like her. Pretty Toby Shore from Moose Jaw, Sask., wife of Len Shore, an advertising executive, looks after her own three children, organizes a baby-sitting service for others, helps plan the Bunny Hops, runs the cooking school and plays in goal for the Ice Mice, sometimes wearing high-heel shoes.

One of the belles of Benny Farm is Adele Macdonald, an Anglo-Canadian, whose husband, hailing from the Hebrides, acts as treasurer to the BFTA. Adele looks after the library and reads stories to the toddlers. The library was actually the inspiration of Fran Newton, from Kitchener, Ont., and wife of one of Benny Farm's several amputees. She is a trained nurse and at all hours of the day and night is called out to sick or injured children. Mrs. Newton also fills the role of community veterinary surgeon. Pets are not officially permitted at Benny Farm, but the CMHC officials winked their eyes so many times at the lesser fauna that they got a nervous twitch.

Elvira Gomez Allport, a Farmerette who studied under Michael Fokine and later danced professionally in New York, runs the ballet school. In addition to dancing lessons the children are taught music appreciation, shown special films and taken to see visiting companies. The drama group works with Farmerette Jean Low and already has unearthed much talent.

The tenants are allowed the use of plots on an adjacent lot owned by the city for horticulture. They have made such a good job of it that when the city turns the lot into a park the gardens will be incorporated and the Farmers permitted to continue cultivating them.

If it takes a heap of living in a house to make it home, Benny Farm, in spite of its five years, is already one of the oldest and happiest dwellings in Canada. ★