

## ARAPPED. STUDENTS AND THE HALIFAX HOUSING MARKET BY ARIELLA PAHLKE

t was still the week before school started, and Gerard Murphy and Susan Powell, two students from St. John's, Newfoundland, had checked into the Dalhousie Housing Office every day for two weeks.

"We started off looking for rooms, but there was nothing. You'd have to share a kitchen with thirteen people and a bathroom with ten. So we went from rooms to bachelors, and now we're onto two- and three-bedroom apartments and houses ... whatever!" They were willing to pay \$300 each for a convenient location; they wanted to live in a 'good' part of town.

Students outside the Housing

**DELTA GOLD** 

Office this year are complaining about the high rents and inconvenient locations of the accommodation on the boards.

This comes as somewhat of a surprise, considering the increasing vacancy rates and the relatively large amounts of money students are willing to dish out for rent.

This is the hardest time I've ever had," said a woman who had been looking for three weeks. She was willing to pay up to \$325, and wanted to live in the south end. Someone else was appalled at some of the prices for the listings on the boards.

"Most places are not set up

'They've been saying for the

last year or two that things are

getting easier, but they're not.

"Most places are not set up for a student budget. I mean \$700 for a single room ... that's ridiculous!" This room was undoubtedly located in the south end.

The south end, whether it's on the Dalhousie campus in a residence or off campus, traps students into paying high rents that accompany a 'good' neighbourhood with the convenience of being so near the universities.

"If landlords know they have a captured market, which they do, they will charge as much as they can get for it," says Sally Irskine Doucette, market analyst for the CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation). "The south end is the most competitive and the most expensive in the Halifax area, and the vacancy rate is lowest there."

April's rental market survey puts the average rents in Metro Halifax at \$400 for a bachelor, \$464 for a one-bedroom unit, \$556 for a two-bedroom unit, and \$676 for a three-bedroom unit. In the south Peninsula area, the average rent for a three-bedroom unit was almost one third higher at \$976 (up from \$905 in April 1987).

Despite these higher-thanaverage south end rents, the majority of students still prefer living there, mostly for the convenience, but also, it seems, for security. Personal security, social security, and fear of the unknown all play large roles in these preferences. "It's a student mentality that wants to be with other students. That's why they rent at Quinpool Towers, which is a horrid place, but it's full of students and it's fifteen minutes from campus," says one student who's lived in a south end residence for a year, and who now lives in the north end.

"They (students) have a certain perception of the north end that media perpetuates, which is a vision of the north end as a dangerous area. I'm more afraid of being mugged downtown and raped on campus. I've lived in the north end for over a year and not once have I ever been hassled there," she says.

Often students have misconceptions about areas of Halifax before they arrive.

"I won't live on Gottingen Street. I wouldn't want to walk alone from that area," said someone who had nethere.

Sue Machum, a graduate student in sociology, enjoys living a forty minute walk from campus in the west end of Halifax.

"People who live on campus or in the south end have a limited perception of what the city is, and they apply their perceptions to the whole city. People often have the illusion of being in the heart of all the political issues that are happening in the city, when all they're really doing is dealing with university issues like when is the next pub. University should be a place where you're things as you can be exposed to so when you're living off available campus, or farther away, you get a much more colourful

Another north end resident cannot understand why peck cannot understand why peck says this live in the south end.

"Sometimes students are waiting

"Sometimes students are misinformed. They don't realize they can get a house for \$600.

Instead they settle for a \$600 bachelor. They don't realize they're being manipulated by the market," she says. "People also don't want to walk any distance to the university. It has a

there were vacancies in the residences from early on in the year, because students would register for rooms but not turn up if they found other accommodation.

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You can't get much closer to campus than when you live in residence, and though students are forever complaining about them, residences are popular spots to live. This year, they are already full, but Heather Sutherland, Director of Housing and Conferences at the Housing Office, advises those students who are still interested to sign up because spots in residences may become available.

Residences charged an additional \$200 non-refundable deposit this year, payable on the first day of August. Sutherland says this benefited students whose names were on the waiting lists, because "we were able to firm up our lists very quickly." In the last two years,

"If it's \$100, students are willing to forfeit that, but if it's \$300, students are not," says Dean of Women Pam

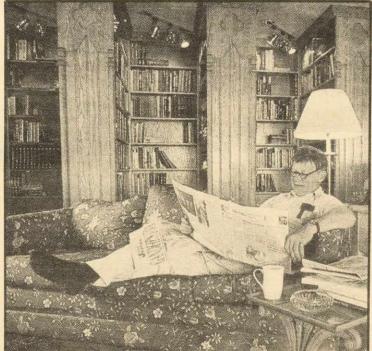
Stonehouse is convinced that people who live in residence have a good experience at university and develop friendships and a support system there. She does agree, however, that residence living is not for everyone. "Older students often want more privacy and more control over their environment. You've definitely got more control over your expenses living in the community."

The \$3,850 students pay to live in Howe Hall or Shirriff Hall (the two on-campus residences) between the beginning of September and the end of April covers a lot more than rent in the convenient south end. Security, garbage service, mail service, cleaning service (in common areas), linen

service, residence council, laundry facilities, and, of course, the Beaver Foods service, are only a few of the 'extras' that students are willing to pay for to make their lives easier.

"People are choosing to live in residence and are willing to wait to get in," says Stonehouse, who is not worried about the substantial increase in Halifax vacancy rates over the past three years. The increasing vacancy rates are affecting units and greater choice in all sectors of the retail market, Sally Irskine Doucette does not see this as being the case in Metro.

"It's not as if our affordability problem has been solved just because the vacancy rate is higher," she says. The increasing vacancy rates are largely due to the high amount of newly-constructed, expensive units that are out of most students' reach.



Lewis lounges at his home in customized splendour.

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The \$3,850 students pay to live in Howe Hall or Shirriff

everyone except the residences.

The vacancy rate in the City of Halifax rose to 3.9 per cent in April 1988, according to the CMHC rental market survey. In

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in April 1988, according to the CMHC rental market survey. In April 1987 it was 2.9 per cent, and in April 1986 it was 1.6 per cent. The Peninsula South area has the lowest vacancy rate in Halifax, at 2.2 per cent, up from 1.6 per cent in April 1987. Although high vacancy rates should lead to more affordable

customized splendour.

"There isn't as much of the reasonably-priced construction going on as there should be. Although the need may be there, unfortunately that type of accommodation does not produce a high profit," says Robins Elliot, executive director

of the Investment Property

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by the government.

Owners Association of Nova

vercome that has to be taken

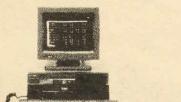
Profit is what the landowners want, and profit is what they're getting - straight out of students' pockets. Halifax Developments, a company that owns over 1,000 apartments in five Brunswick Street buildings, as well as the new Park Lane commercial complex, charges an average price of \$502 for a bachelor unit, \$600 for a onebedroom unit, and \$850 for a two-bedroom unit (all-inclusive prices). Their buildings are all for adults only, and the majority of their tenants are

"We have very few problems with students. We ask for a letter of guarantee from their parents, which affirms that if the student doesn't pay her or his rent, then the parent will," says Gloria Atkins, secretary at Halifax Developments. Atkins did not feel she was able to comment on the profits coming from their buildings which, with the exception of Cunard Courts, are all full or almost full.

Bill Lewis, owner of Apollo Management, doesn't have any concerns about renting to students either. Lewis manages seven buildings in the south end; about half of his tenants are students. The approximate rent for a bachelor unit is \$400 and a one-bedroom unit goes for \$540, furnished with everything included. Concerning profits, Lewis says, "The profits we make go back into

Obviously the housing problem in Halifax is no longer solely created by unusually low vacancy rates or overly impoverished students. As these problems appear to be fading into the background, a new and pressing set of questions emerges. How much are you paying for rent? Do you want to pay this much for convenience? And whose pockets is it going into?

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