

# MANUFACTURED HOME COMMUNITY AND MOBILE HOME PARK NEWSLETTER

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## Ross Kinzler Retirement

A hallmark of a great leader is their zest for their duties during the inevitable ups and downs of a career. Ross Kinzler, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Housing Alliance is that great leader, personified. He is on the forefront in multiple areas, seemingly all the time. He is a founder of the Manufactured Housing Education Institute, has taken on rezoning and other manufactured housing discriminatory threats, and created valuable lease and other documents for mobile home park owners in Wisconsin. Ross seems to anticipate, every day, what mobile home park business owners want or need, even before they do. He is like the Steve Jobs of the manufactured housing industry.

Never have I known an Executive Director that is so exuberantly respected and liked by his association members and other manufactured housing industry lights, as Ross Kinzler.

Ross is retiring this year. Congratulations on a job exceedingly well done!

### How did you get involved with the Wisconsin Housing Alliance?

I was the Assistant Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. I was encouraged to apply. I took a pay cut in order to get a chance to lead my own organization. A choice I've never regretted.



Ross Kinzler

### What are two or three accomplishments at the Wisconsin Housing Alliance of which you are most proud?

When I was hired, the top issue was zoning. We successfully sued the City of Beloit. The trial was short and actually fun. Then we followed up by suing the Town of Suamico in Federal Court. In the second case, we didn't ask for a building permit but rather for lost profits. Local governments then could not get out of a case by just issuing the permit. By winning the Suamico case, there was a cost to pushing us around. In the second case, the local governments' insurance company advised the municipality NOT to get involved in cases that were not winnable for the municipality. The insurance company had a big stake in the case because they (the insurance company) paid the claim.

The second accomplishment was the people that I've mentored. Julie Patten and Amy Bliss have been with me for the entire time. I've had other successful staffers in Atty. Scot Slattery and lobbyist Luke Rollins. The people you touch are more important than any individual accomplishment.

### When were you the happiest as the Executive Director?

We passed over 20 changes in laws recently. Playing defense legislatively wasn't much fun. We finally had legislative leaders and a governor that understood us and acted.

**You are known for the quality and quantity of the work you do for both the Wisconsin Housing Alliance. Where does your energy and enthusiasm and ‘never quit, never give up’ spirit come from?**

On any given day, there is a different problem. Each member call has a new twist. I’m often heard to say, “Well, there is a new chapter for the book.” Seriously, each members’ challenge is a challenge I feel personally. It keeps things fresh for me.

**What are your strengths?**

I’m not a detail person. I am rather a visionary. I think my job is to see things six months or a year ahead. I think I do that pretty well. I am also a good boss. I have a talented team that does their jobs very effectively. It shows.

**What is your mantra?**

Stay ahead of the members.

**What have you learned from the manufactured housing business?**

Treating people well has its upside and downside, but the upside is over time worth it.

**What do you see as the most significant deficiency in the manufactured housing business, that if we could just do a better job would have the greatest impact on our results?**

At one time, the industry was a land development group. For over 25 years however, the industry has managed the communities that another generation created. The lack of land development is a major problem. Everyone loves the shiny new object. We don’t have that.

**What do you think manufactured housing industry participants waste time on?**

The number one problem is not identifying their primary jobs. For community owners, getting leases signed is not taken seriously enough. It is their number one job. Every problem with tenants always comes back to the lease. For manufacturers and retailers, listening to consumers is important. Closing is so much easier if you listened.

**What advice do you have for manufactured housing industry participants to be better influencers of legislators, city councils, and even prospective residents?**

It is not illegal to talk to them! Too many members don’t know their elected representatives. Tell them your problems. Complaining to yourself does no good. Call, sit down with your representatives. You’d be shocked how few people do that.

**What is the best advice you ever received?**

An old boss would say to me, “What have you done for the boys and girls today?” He was always focused on the members. That member focus has been ingrained in me.

**What is the best advice you have ever given?**

People work best if they have the information and tools to do the job, a boss’ job is to make sure that environment exists.

**What is a talent, ability, hobby or something that others don’t generally know about you?**

I’m self-taught on almost everything. I break things but I don’t worry about it. I want to know how things work.

**Who are your heroes (dead or alive)?**

Theodore Roosevelt. The youngest President at his time. He was an adventurer, a leader of men and a real Renaissance man.



Ross with incoming Executive Director, Amy Bliss



Ross and Barb Kinzler, with Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker



Ross receiving the Wisconsin Society of Association Executives Hall of Fame induction.

**What is your idea of a perfect weekend or a perfect vacation or both?**

I like to hang by the pool. Our Arizona home has a pool, but I'm learning that it is expensive to own one. Still, a cool dip is a great thing.

**What will you miss about your career?**

The members. Many have become friends. I will miss the Louisville Show and any other place where the members gather. The last couple of years I've started treating those events as an "attendee" because I have had a great staff that can deal with the operations of these events. That has allowed me to enjoy them so much more. I get a better chance to connect to members, which is my primary job.

**What's next for you?**

After a couple of months to transition, I'm open to projects in the industry. I think I still have ideas, that I couldn't pursue given my position.

**Any regrets?**

No, not really. It's time for Amy to lead the association in new directions. She's ready.

**Editor's Note:** The Wisconsin Housing Alliance has great employees. They have a lot of energy and enthusiasm for their jobs and the members. Ross told me Amy and Julie have "seen it all" and are prepared to help members. When Ross hired Amy and Julie, he looked for character and personality traits. Experience in the mobile home park business was not a requirement and was even low on his list. Ross was confident he could train people on what they need to know about the manufactured housing business. Another case in point is Ross's involvement in the hiring of Frank Bowman, the new Executive Director of the Illinois Manufactured Housing Association. Ross encouraged the Illinois Manufactured Housing Association to hire a new Executive Director from outside the industry. Frank is doing a great job and has really taken to the manufactured housing business, which makes Ross's point.

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### Ann Parman on Ross Kinzler

**What two words best describe Ross?**

"Problem Solver"

Ross is a problem solver. He is known for his critical thinking to find solutions to business challenges and problems facing both the association and the industry. As a result, he is highly productive and has made the Wisconsin Housing Alliance one of the most effective state associations representing the industry in the country. He is a creative executive with no fear of change, new ideas and technologies.

**How did he show initiative and leadership at MHI?**

Ross has been extremely active in MHI and on the national level. He is a founding board member for the Manufactured Housing Educational Institute, the non-profit education arm of MHI, and has served as its Chairman. He received the State Association Executive of the Year Award from MHI in 1992 and again in 2003. In 2005 he was presented with the Jim Moore Excellence in Communications Award. Over the years he has served on numerous committees, divisions and task forces of MHI to include the Government Affairs Committee, Public Relations Committee, and Federated States Division. Ross has also served as President of the Manufactured Housing Executives Council (MHEC) which is the professional alliance of state association executive directors that focuses on both association management and industry issues.



Ann Parman  
MHI Vice President

**What did you learn from Ross?**

Ross has taught me that being well informed, persistent and having a sense of humor along the way will eventually lead to success. He has led by example his entire career. I wish I could be more like him. His leadership will be missed.

## Member Quotes on Ross Kinzler

### **Pete Halverson, Investor:**

“Very helpful and smart. When you asked him (Ross) a question, he knew the answer”.

### **Scott Ryan, Heritage Homes and Realty:**

“Ross has always been on the cutting edge of every issue as it pertains to the manufactured and modular industry from day one. In the unlikely event that he does not have an immediate answer for you, the sun will not set before he gets you a good answer. Ross has had the foresight and vision on issues before they became issues. He has found very creative ways to address issues and solve our industry’s problems. There is no one in the country that knows as much about our industry as Ross. He has even trained Amy to be a fantastic industry leader. Fantastic man who has had a fantastic career”.

## Secrets for Improving the Value of your Community (Translation: The Investor will pay you a little more!)

Everyone wants the same things, generally, when selling their park or community. They want:

**Confidentiality.** A quick, seamless sale of the property that no one (vendors, residents, managers, employees) knows about until the sale has closed.

**Maximum sale price.** This is doable if the rent is at market, everyone is paying rent, the residents are paying for water and sewer, and the expenses are 40% give or take, of gross potential income.

**Employees retained.** Many owners desire assurance that the employees will have a job after the closing. Investors hire the existing manager 99% of the time.

**After the sale ownership to be hand on.** Owners want the residents to be satisfied with the new owners’ operation, and a smooth transition to the new owner. Investors rarely change the operation.

The SECRET to making the most of your manufactured home community is understanding that whoever buys your property, whether that occurs in 2015 or 2035 or somewhere in between, is that the buyer / investor has the same interests as you. Perhaps they understand even more than you how vital it is to retain residents. They understand, usually better than the present owners, the dollar value of each occupied lot and the cost of turn over if a resident and / or a home moves out. And yes, they are going to raise the rent, probably significantly and annually going forward.

One manufactured home community investor that comes to mind raised rent \$25 per year for two years in a row, and passed through the water and sewer costs, as well. The seller could have easily done the same things prior to closing but buried their heads in the sand. The reason he kept rents low (about \$100 under the market!) was because he had a personal income goal of \$325,000. That was the amount he needed to “fund” his lifestyle. Thus, why raise the rents and by doing so raise the ire of the residents? This owner visited his manufactured home community every day and didn’t want to hear the residents’ complaints about the lot rent increase.

For some mobile home park owners, deciding to sell their park / community is like drinking truth serum. An example is rent. Usually, the conversation starts out with the owner expressing pride about how their rents are under market, but that they don’t get many residents moving out. They also don’t get many homes moving in! And for whatever reason, the poaching of homes where a park owner pays to move a home from a competitors mobile home park to his or her mobile home park is abated for now. The under market rent will cost you big time in the present, in terms of lost revenue, and in the future when you sell.

Mobile home park owners are investors. It is our job to maximize today’s cash flow and the value of our mobile home parks. We do that by having our mobile home parks at market rent and passing through expenses such as water, sewer and garbage.

Many of today’s buyers / investors budget for and spend more to maintain and improve the property than the seller ever did. Thus, the need for more revenue.

## Evictions: The Seven Words You Want The Judge To Say At The Eviction Hearing

One of our managers recently won an eviction on a case we were pretty sure would involve the tenant being represented by an attorney, possibly from Legal Aid.

When the eviction was filed, the manager communicated with the tenant by showing the tenant the facts he planned to present to the court (transaction report, past due notices, court filings, etc.). At the eviction hearing, the manager presented the judge with a four bullet point cover letter, listing the number of times the tenant was delinquent, and copies of notices.

Side note: My friend Ross Kinzler recommends also submitting photos of the residents home, if appropriate. Even though the case may not be about non-compliance of the home, it gives the judge a non-verbal message about the tenant, to bolster the evidence about the case.

There were only seven words spoken at the eviction hearing, and those words were from the judge:

**“And when do you want them out?”**

**Here are some characteristics of long-term mobile home park owners. If you recognize your practices, try thinking about what you can do to start producing more cash flow today.**

### Manufactured Home Community Owners

Characteristics of Long Term Owners / Sellers	Characteristics of Today's Buyer / Investor
1. Lowest rents, no or few expense pass throughs.	1. Greatest value and market rent.
2. Declining profit margin (low rent, vacancy).	2. Improving margins (market rent, pass through utilities, fill vacant sites).
3. Controlling / cutting costs for capital expenditures, (wages, repairs and maintenance).	3. Investing in talent and technology to maximize income, operate efficiently, and know their numbers.
4. Long for the past.	4. Jettison the past.
5. Unclear vision.	5. Big vision.
6. Worry about competitors, lack of homes, vacant sites.	6. Worry about how to handle all the business opportunities.

The buyer / investor, whether local or several states away, has the same interests as you in retaining residents and making the community as pleasant as possible.

Recently I closed on a 200 plus site mobile home park. It was half vacant and the buyer is spending money on fixing up the park (junking homes, trimming trees, fixing water leaks) before marketing to new residents. This investor wants to offer a better value than the previous owner ever thought about. The new buyers know their numbers, will increase rent, pass through water and sewer expense, AND at the same time, have more satisfied customers (residents).

## NO REAL ESTATE COMMISSION (BUYER PAYS)!

Joanne Stevens is a specialist in listing and selling mobile home parks and manufactured housing communities throughout the U.S.

With her 20 plus years of experience in developing, zoning, owning, retailing, managing, turning around and brokering parks, she can maximize your sale price.

For a **FREE, NO OBLIGATION** MARKET ANALYSIS  
(a Real Estate Review of the current value of your park or community),  
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### Want samples of mobile home park newsletters for your residents?

To borrow some ideas go to:

[www.stevenshomesandcommunities.com](http://www.stevenshomesandcommunities.com)

Click on Documents & Policies, scroll down to Monthly Newsletters.



Legionnaires Leading Parade  
Painting by Thomas C. Jackson



Cousin Jenny competing  
at the Miss Iowa Pageant.

## HAVE BUYERS! NEED LISTINGS!

This newsletter and its content are not meant as a solicitation of any property or properties that may be listed. This is a creation of Joanne M. Stevens with NAI Iowa Realty Commercial, as a resource for mobile home park / manufactured home community owners.