

TAKING TO THE STREETS



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Grant Zinnecker, above left, protests Wednesday morning with other residents of the Retama Village in front of the U.S. Postal Service branch located on Business 83 in Mission. The residents say the post office refuses to deliver mail to the individual boxes inside their retirement community. Kathleen Adams, below, points to her mailbox at the Retama Village that the post office refuses to deliver mail to.

» RETIREES PROTEST POST OFFICE



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MISSION — E. H. Cary eyed the protesters with distaste.

"I've never seen this kind of thing at the post office," the Winter Texan said, nose wrinkled. "They should be taking (their complaint) to the proper authorities."

He stopped, out of curiosity, to take a flier from the picket line. Nearby, one protester with a neatly lettered sign on white poster board reminded another not to trample the Mission post office's grass border.

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PROTEST

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About 20 retirees from the Retama Village subdivision, on the southwest end of town, staged a protest at the post office Wednesday morning, demanding that the U.S. Postal Service reconsider its decision to classify their neighborhood in the same category as RV parks.

They say they will return to protest — politely — every business day until the decision is reversed.

"We're all standing as one community, saying, 'This is stupid,'" said Kathleen Adams, the group's spokeswoman and herself a retired mail carrier and supervisor.

The "transient" classification given to Retama's RV-friendly lots means mail is delivered to all the residents in a bulk drop, unsorted, while each of the more traditional homes — the "stick and brick" kind — gets a sorted packet of bills and letters delivered to its box at the subdivision's central facility.

The RV'ers say they own their lots, are year-round residents and have small "efficiency bungalows" built on their land beside their wheeled residences.

Once the subdivision's builder, Rhodes Enterprises, finishes construction on all the lots, responsibility for managing the mailboxes will revert to a homeowners' association — which will have to hire someone to sort

the mail, Adams said.

A small concession, but it rankles those who had hoped to establish themselves as permanent residents, not just "winter visitors," while holding onto the freewheeling lifestyle represented by their massive RVs.

Retama Village was built specifically to cater to this compromise: Newer structures going up on the backs of the lots feature high-roofed covered spaces for RVs, connected to small houses.

The residents and the developer went through the proper channels, appealing the local postmaster's decision up the ladder and asking U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, for help. But the Postal Service stood firm.

"Postal policy provides for single-point delivery as the prescribed mode of delivery for recreational vehicle parks where the lots are temporarily occupied or rented and considered transient or seasonal, even though some families may live in them for an extended period of time," Austin USPS spokesman Jim Coultrress wrote in an e-mail.

"The presence of small permanent buildings does not change the situation since those structures are not designed to be a permanent residence, but are small buildings designed to complement the living space of the RV."

Coultrress did not respond to a follow-up e-mail, asking whether the

fact that the properties were owner-occupied, not rented, had been factored into the decision.

Back at the protest, a generation of men and women in their 50s and 60s who sat out the social upheavals of the 1960s got their first taste of what they had passed up.

"My son said, 'Call me if you need to be bailed out, Mom,'" Gail Gurksnis said with a laugh. "We did decide we weren't going to burn our bras."

Adams researched all the relevant rules for a peaceful sidewalk protest, ensuring the group did not need any city permits. On Wednesday morning, she carefully reminded her neighbors to stay off the post office property, including the grass.

Gurksnis' husband, Tom, offered passing motorists fliers explaining the group's position but said he would not force them on anyone.

"There's a whole lot to it," he said. "You can't get it all out in a five-second spiel."

David McCarron marched with his sign high above his head and a friendly smile on his face. But he said he felt emotionally involved in the issue.

"(Mail) is like water," he said. "You turn the tap on and you expect water. ... They made a dollar decision instead of a service decision."

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