

Housing Justice League Newsletter October 2020

Stanton Oaks Tenants Association

by Sherise Brown

Stanton Oaks Tenant Association has been organizing and strategizing against Toxic Management and Wrongful Evictions. We are resolving some of the cases through obtaining attorneys and advocating for our rights under the HUD guidelines.

We took this outside of our complex. We sent our concerns and petitions to the Owners, HUD, DCA, NPU-V, and Invest Atlanta expressing our concerns. HUD is looking into it now and they have to produce certain documents. This is a process but we see some progress.

We also reported to the Post Office Manager that the manager at Stanton Oaks was putting mail in our mailboxes at night. This was her way of giving verbal demands and harassing tenants. This was a form of intimidation and against the law. We got the Post Office manager to come to Stanton Oaks and tell her this is illegal and to stop doing it.

This is a marathon, not sprint work. The point of the story is to stay organized and educate each other. Do your research and agitate. We address the funders and investors, asking them to oversee the properties they are giving our tax dollars to. This is poverty pimping. We are making some progress. Stay organized!

On September 30 WODA Corporate Vice President Terry Earhart of Ohio flew into town to meet with the residents and to let us know that our Toxic Manager Mrs. Chandra Ashley is no longer with us, and that

they will address the evictions and neglected maintenance orders. We are now working with a new regional manager to get our records and leases in proper order. Eviction Threats were taken off the table and emergency maintenance such as plumbing is being resolved. Although this is Progress, we are not taking our eyes off the ball. We are following up with Compliance offices. You get what you watch.





Trestletree United Tenants Association

by Natalie McLaughlin

Sign the [Trestletree Tenants' Petition](#) to show your support for their right to decent housing and to live without retaliation and harassment.

Trestletree Tenants Association has been making great strides since they started regrouping their association four months ago in June. They have increased involvement, built up new leaders, held a rally declaring themselves as the official tenant group at Trestletree, launched a petition, and done rigorous research and strategizing on how to address continued issues with their management company, Monroe Group.

Their top concerns are serious maintenance issues going unaddressed, and harassment of “problem” tenants who insist on getting repairs made and who stand up for their rights. Monroe Group has also violated their HUD contract by interfering with Trestletree tenants' right to organize in numerous ways. Monroe Group is still refusing to recognize them as the only legitimate tenant association at Trestletree. Instead they are creating a competing “Trestletree Resident Council Committee” and telling tenants that this is the “real” tenant group.

Following the tenant association's rally at the end of September, tenant organizers faced increased retaliation by Monroe Group. After the rally, Monroe Group sent a letter to all Trestletree residents changing the meeting they had scheduled with the tenants association from Zoom to an

in-person meeting, separating the tenant association meeting with two different time frames and locations.

The tenants association did show up together for the meeting and were met by an APD officer Monroe Group had sent out to meet them. At the instruction of Monroe Group, the police insisted non-tenant community supporters leave the property for the meeting. Even after tenants complied with this request, Monroe Group refused to come outside and meet with the tenants.

Following the rally, Monroe Group also posted a “criminal trespass” list on all residents' doors listing community partners including Parkside Equity Coalition, Housing Justice League, and individuals in the community who have been supporting Trestletree tenants' organizing efforts. They also put a survey on all tenants' doors asking questions about the tenants association and HJL.

As of now, Management has yet to even meet with the Trestletree Tenants Association.

Tenant leaders however have been unwavering in their organizing and are continuing to build strength and unity in numbers. They are continuing to canvas, educating tenants on their right to organize, and launching a community initiative to support the children at Trestletree with needed supplies. While they are primarily focused on building up leadership and capacity at the property, the association has also worked strategically to leverage the support of the Parkside Equity Coalition, several attorneys, and their State Representative, David Dreyer.

Housing Justice League is inspired by the leadership and tenacity of Trestletree tenants and we are very grateful to be a partner in their efforts.





Interview with Miracle Fletcher

member and leader of the Trestletree Tenants Association

by Natalie McLaughlin and Miracle Fletcher

What made you decide to get involved in the tenants association?

The reason I decided to get involved with the tenants association is because I saw the way management was taking advantage of tenants here at Trestletree Villages Apartments by not properly informing residents of their rights under HUD codes and the consistent harassment and disregard for our rights to live in a safe and healthy environment.

What has your experience been like at Trestletree?

My experience so far has been awful. Management does not take time to communicate effectively with residents. There is no partnership within the community with the leasing team. It's a very high stress environment daily due to constant harassment with unfounded lease violations. Even if residents comply with management and the rules you are consistently under pressure.

What do you see as some group accomplishments?

Collectively we have made an enormous amount of progress informing other residents of our HUD given rights. Knowing that we have the support of HJL, "Home Defenders," and our State Representative and we are utilizing knowledge as our key tools to build our tenants association gives me great pride.

What are some challenges the tenant association is facing with Monroe Group?

The tenants Association has been dealing with management refusing to acknowledge us as a legitimate tenants association even though we are following all the guidelines HUD has put in place for us. Management has refused to meet with us to discuss our concerns and demands. We are also being cut off from outside support organizations that offer resources our families need.

What are some challenges your community faces and why do you feel those challenges exist?

The community that we live in is a low income community. Some of the tenants are forced to live in apartments that have mold, mildew, pest issues and flooding. Management does not take these issues seriously, if a tenant emails compliance to follow up on issues that management are not addressing you will most likely receive a lease violation. This form of intimidation leaves residents feeling scared, anxious and oppressed.

Why is a tenant association important?

The tenant association is important because it empowers and educates residents of their rights. It is a means to not only identify problems but, away to build positive community partnerships. The tenants association creates a way for residents to come up with collaborative solutions for problems they are dealing with in their communities.



Efficiency Lodge

by Natalie McLaughlin

[Support Efficiency Lodge tenants! Sign their petition to slumlord and former governor, Roy Barnes!](#)

Former Georgia Governor Roy, and his brother Ray Barnes are killing their extended stay hotel residents at Efficiency Lodge in Decatur through negligence, neglect, and the stress caused by the constant surveillance of heavily armed, violent guards.

On Wednesday October 7 at 11:30 am Efficiency Lodge tenants and community supporters, including Housing Justice League, held a protest outside Efficiency Lodge to demand the end to the Barnes' neglect and abuse of Efficiency Lodge tenants.

In September, the Barnes brothers unlawfully evicted 11 families at gunpoint. Last week they threatened to unlawfully evict more tenants who fear they will be locked out of their rooms on October 6 and 7.

Meanwhile, Roy Barnes is attending groundbreaking ceremonies for homeless shelters claiming that "[we have an obligation as a community for those that have fallen on bad times to take care of them.](#)" Roy Barnes lives in a mansion in Marietta while his tenants face life-threatening conditions caused by mold, electrical fires, and flooding at Efficiency Lodge.

The tenants at Efficiency Lodge have started an [online petition](#) demanding that Roy Barnes act immediately. They are demanding:

1. No more evictions, lawful or unlawful, at Efficiency Lodge during the pandemic. Respect the federal eviction moratorium.
2. Compensate all residents who were unlawfully evicted from Efficiency Lodge with two full months rent.
3. Allow all evicted residents return to the property whenever they need to retrieve their mail which is being illegally withheld.
4. No curfew for tenants.
5. Cancel all late fees and overdue rent. Allow residents to pay whatever they can afford during the pandemic.
6. Hire a new manager that is held accountable to not stealing residents rent and then claiming they never paid.
7. Remove the armed guards from the property.
8. Fix the property:
 - a. Fix electrical wiring to protect residents from electrical fires
 - b. Fix plumbing and flooding
 - c. Clean up the piles of trash
 - d. Exterminate all infestations
 - e. Remediate all mold





In addition to their behavior being unconscionable, the Barnes brothers behavior is also illegal. Under Georgia landlord-tenant law, a resident and owner establish a landlord-tenant relationship if the resident (or “tenant-at-will”) considers the owner’s property their primary residence and has lived there for at least 90 days. Many of the residents facing eviction have lived at Efficiency Lodge for far more than 90 days, some even up to three years. This makes the self-help eviction practices at Efficiency Lodge unlawful. The Georgia Department of Law’s Consumer Protection Division [recognized this as recently as April 2020.](#)

For most residents, Efficiency Lodge is their last option in an exploitative and discriminatory housing market, shaped by decades of racist housing policy, disinvestment, and predatory lending in Black communities. These are some of the most vulnerable renters in Georgia—families and individuals who have, in many cases, already been deprived of other housing options and whose next stop, if forced to leave the hotel, is their car, a homeless shelter, or the street. This reality makes them particularly at risk for exploitation and abuse. At Efficiency Lodge, residents have been forced to live with dangerous living conditions and have faced retaliation (including lock-outs) when they make complaints to the corporate office.

Meanwhile, Roy and Ray Barnes make huge profits from this dangerous situation. Efficiency Lodge, Inc. is a national corporation with annual revenues of over [\\$7.5 million](#). In April 2020 they received a [\\$150,000-350,000](#) low interest loan from the federal government through the Covid-19 Paycheck Protection Program. In 1998, Ray Barnes was quoted in the [Atlanta Business Chronicle](#) stating, “you’ll always have undesirables. The question is how quick you can get rid of them.”

Efficiency Lodge tenants have had enough and will not accept continued exploitation and abuse. They are coming together to use their collective power to force a millionaire to be accountable.

Media Coverage of Efficiency Lodge Protest:

www.washingtonpost.com/health/suit-atlanta-area-housing-site-illegally-evicted-residents/2020/10/07/dc46597a-08fa-11eb-8719-0df159d14794_story.html

www.ajc.com/news/extended-stay-motel-with-ties-to-former-governor-facing-lawsuit-from-residents/V62FVAETNNAH5F5PV27I7SHRHQ/

Video from NAACP: <https://youtu.be/oS99Egye7U0>

<https://streetsofatlanta.blog/2020/10/12/women-and-children-evicted-from-efficiency-lodge-by-armed-guards/>





Forest Cove Resident Association

by Alison Johnson, Valerie Wimby, Crystal and Felicia Morris

Felicia Morris, a resident at Forest Cove reflects, "I've been living here for over 27 years and things done just got out of control. I get out here and pick up trash and clean up but I can't put together no ceiling that done fell down 6 months ago. It's been hell for us but I believe with the support of community and partnership like Housing Justice League and National Alliance for HUD Tenants (NAHT) we gone win."

Residents of the Forest Cove community are literally fighting for survival. The living conditions are despicable and unreal in a "City too busy to hate." No person deserves to be treated in this manner.

Cynthia, a long term resident says it's unimaginable that she is having to live in such conditions that continue to put her health and safety at risk. "I get up and go to work almost every day and come back to this place that I call home to be afraid of what I may see in my home. We call the leasing office to make repair requests and they continue to brush us off with comments such as, 'someone will get to you as soon as possible,' but by the time someone has come out to make the repairs 3 months later the condition is beyond the skill set for our maintenance worker and therefore we are playing the waiting game for them to hire an outside contractor to make repairs. This is unacceptable. We're fed up and tired of living in these conditions."

Valerie Wimberly, a resident for more than 30 plus years at the apartment community, agrees. "I've been here and seen a lot, but never this bad. My building's roof has fallen down next to me and no one has repaired it yet. When is this nightmare going to end?"

Residents at Forest Cove are fired up with the renovation process and the lack of concerns from all entities involved. Therefore residents formed a stronger union of tenant organizing. Residents turned up their activism and created a private FC group chat where all tenants can be engaged

and updated with the plans of the association, community flyers, block clean ups, and weekly meetings to plan and launch their campaign to hold HUD, Global Ministries, and Millennia accountable for current conditions and the relocation process.



Residents staged a virtual HUD protest by flooding the south eastern regional director's office with phone calls, emails, and written letters to turn his head and eyes to the tenants of Forrest Cove. "We called and prayed. We asked forgiveness and mercy," said Ms. Morris. "Next thing you know we got a call back to have a meeting with the big man in charge of HUD. He said I'm ready to meet and help to move this process forward. We were excited, but Millennia was hesitant about meeting with us and HUD at the same time. I didn't understand why they didn't want to meet."

Residents again used the same virtual tactic to get Millennia to the table. "And BOOM! we got them," Ms. Morris said. "We had Forrest Cove residents, HJL, NAHT, and a City Council president at the table to support us in holding them accountable. We prepped the day before and morning of the meeting and it was very productive and promising. We walked away with HUD agreeing to have Global Ministries, the current owners, to expedite pass through lease waivers, so that residents are able to be relocated expeditiously."

The waiver is currently being signed off on by HUD. Residents will soon begin receiving their 90 day notices



about the relocation process. We were also able to get GM to surrender HUD funding they receive to be used for routine grounds maintenance. We've secured a regularly monthly meeting with our HUD representative and also a biweekly meeting with Millennia, the potential new owners. Millennia has said the date of closing is now narrowed to the month of January 2021.

Crystal said, "we are a much stronger group of residents than before because we have to be. We want a community for our children and grandchildren that is a safe, healthy place where they can grow up to be proud and call this place home."

Valerie added, "well no matter how bad it is, we gone keep fighting cause this is my HOME, my neighborhood and I love my neighbors, the good and bad."

Felicia said, "we ain't gone stop fighting because we live here and we know change is gone come. If you ever drive by, stop by. We invite you to our .We are loving people that deserve respect."



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Legal Support Working Group

HJL member, Wingo Smith, has been helping to start a new Working Group in HJL for legal support. Below is a draft of the working group description. If this group is something you would be interested to be a part of, email Wingo at wingosmith@gmail.com. To learn more about Working Groups in HJL, visit

www.housingjusticeleague.org/working-groups.

The purpose of the legal working group is to support the Housing Justice League by providing legal advice and research to the organization and its organizers to further their campaigns. Its work will support other working groups and campaigns, but it will not be a source of direct representation for members or for individual employees or volunteers of Housing Justice League.

How does your group fit with the Mission/Goals of HJL?

Campaign and tenant organizers often face decisions that involve questions about what the law is and what it could be. Ultimately, the legal working group will measure its success by how well it has worked with organizers to demystify and democratize the law while responding to Housing Justice League's immediate legal needs.

BeltLine for All Affordable Housing Policy Campaign

Housing Justice League's Beltline 4 All Policy campaign took a brief hiatus for the month of September, but we are back in action! We are continuing to push our policy package at the city and state level. If you would like to tap into our campaign, join us at our next meeting on October 27 at 5 PM or email us at policy@housingjusticeleague.org.

Eviction Defense Working Group

Eviction Defense/hotline call-back team has changed our weekly meeting times to 6pm on Tuesdays and 2pm on Fridays. If you're interested to get involved as a hotline volunteer or with Eviction Defense, email us at evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org.