

Sunnyvale authorities help cure landlord blues

Life is tough without a working bathroom. Ask Sharon Webster, a tenant at Sunnyvale's complaint-plagued Del Prado apartments on Acalanes Drive.

Webster narrowly escaped unlawful eviction last week after wrangling with her landlord over conditions at the apartment she shares with her two teenage children. "These people are just unbelievable," Webster said shortly after receiving an eviction notice that followed a complaint she made to the local housing authority.

"I had been trying for months to get them to fix the shower," an outraged Webster recounted shortly after receiving the five-day notice, which was subsequently revoked. Webster has rented the unit since 1984.

The eviction notice arrived just days after Webster, a Section 8 federal housing subsidy recipient who is currently unemployed, called the Sunnyvale Housing Authority to report her landlord's inattention to her family's sanitary needs. "It was my last resort," she says, adding that before blowing the whistle, she re-

searched her rights at a nearby library. "I found out that no matter what these people tell me, my family has a right to a decent place to live," she says.

Moments after Housing Inspector Craig Murphy arrived on the scene, he realized that Webster had a point. "Our office cited the Del Prado management right away," Sunnyvale's Housing Officer Dyane Matas confirms. He added that conditions at the Del Prado have resulted in numerous complaints being lodged in his office against Webster's landlords. "It's one of the most persistent problems we have" in Sunnyvale, Matas says of the relatively inexpensive apartments owned by DKM, a group of investors, mostly doctors, from Redwood City. DKM also owns apartment buildings in Mountain View and Palo Alto.

Webster's apartment managers, who claim she never alerted them to the problems before contacting authorities, quickly agreed to comply with the repair order and then turned around and—within days—handed her an eviction notice, charging that the portion of her rent paid through Section 8 of the Federal Housing Code hadn't been received on time. "That was just a lie," Webster says.

"They wanted to get rid of me the way they have gotten rid of other people who have complained."

After Metro contacted one of DKM's prominent investors, Dr. Sidney Marchasin—who writes an occasional guest opinion column for

subsidies might have been paid to DKM—and other local landlords—on behalf of evicted tenants, in violation of state and federal laws. Webster says her experience is not unusual. "They do this all the time," she charges.

"Doctors always make the worst businessmen and in this case they were incompetent, they hired incompetent management and now, like the absent-minded professor, they are trying to fix it quickly."

the *Peninsula Times Tribune*—and informed him that federal records show that Webster's Section 8 rent check had already been cashed by the time his managers attempted the eviction, the obviously upset physician fumed, "There is no excuse for this." Webster's eviction notice was withdrawn shortly thereafter.

Webster, however, may have stumbled onto a larger issue. Officials at the housing authority seem relatively unconcerned that Section 8 rental

“If we are presented with evidence that we have overpaid them,” the Housing Authority's John Thompson says, “we will bill them or withhold future payments.” He added that it's difficult for his office to conduct follow-up activities on all Section 8 recipients to ensure that the housing his office has paid for is in fact used.

“It's conceivable,” Thompson says when asked whether unscrupu-