

lous landlords might be able to occasionally—and illegally—pocket federal housing subsidies after evicting tenants. "It's a bookkeeping problem," he says.

Webster, meanwhile, is convinced that the books are being cooked and not kept. "I know of other instances where these people [her managers] have used similar excuses to harass people who have complained," she says, adding that this week she will file a formal complaint with the county District Attorney's office in hopes of prompting a full scale investigation into the property management techniques employed by Del Prado's owners.

"They have victimized me, and they have victimized others," she says. "We are just tenants, but that can't excuse crimes committed against us." A spokesperson from the DA's office says Webster's complaint will be investigated as soon as it is received.

Webster's problems seemed compelling enough to Mountain View attorney Clinton Alley that he—after being contacted on Webster's behalf by the San Jose Housing Service—took on the case without charge. "This is the worst tenant-landlord case I have ever seen," Alley says, noting that DKM's owners are—in the final analysis—responsible for living up to their contracts with tenants like Webster.

"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," Alley says.

Alley adds that a lawsuit for punitive damages is an option open to Webster. "There have been some significant recoveries in cases like these," he says, adding that Webster may be entitled to some compensation for having been the victim of an unfair, illegally attempted eviction. "I'm really hoping the doctors will make good on their promise to provide her [Webster] and her children with another apartment while her paid-for unit is undergoing the mandated renovations," Alley says. "This woman has a contract for rental housing and I want that contract enforced."

"We're going to do everything in our power to make sure this is resolved fairly," says property owner Marchasin, who is looking into the details of the case and hints that management changes at the Del Prado apartments might be in the offing. "Obviously, this is a problem," he says, noting that the new managers, hired six months ago, are being grilled about how a simple complaint involving plumbing problems could result in a citation by the housing authority, a possible lawsuit and a pending investigation by the District Attorney.

—Hal Plotkin