

HOW SUN COMMUNITIES KILLED A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

by Mike Whitty





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**Mr. Mike's Neighborhood
Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park
Warren, Michigan**

**www.mrmikesneighborhood.org
mike@mrmikesneighborhood.org**

- Disclaimer -

All information provided in this story are accurate to the best of the Author's knowledge. The author has not embellished, and has documentation.

- Preface -

I've lived here for over 35 years, so I've seen first hand what our Community was like. I met Mike several years before he started the Association. He was funny and kind, and felt like his life didn't have the meaning he would have wanted as he grew older. He always said he needed to gain more points in Heaven. He saw a need that was missing in our Community, a Culture that he experienced as he was growing up, a real Neighborhood.

He felt that he could show his Community what it was like to be a true Neighbor, one who cared about the residents (which he refused to call them). He wanted them to know their Neighbors next door, to say HI to each other in passing, to care about someone more than themselves.

So he created the Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association, where he spent his own time and money creating signs and brochures that would make anyone want to rent here, and those who lived here want to stay. He was proud of his efforts creating a business plan any mobile home park could follow for creating their own Association. He never expected what was to follow.

I watched him take calls in the middle of the night to ask for his help, since they felt they couldn't get it from anyone else. If they needed something like changing their furnace filters or replacing ceiling lightbulbs, he didn't put them off, but instead was at their door within minutes.

At 74 years old, I saw him suffer physically as he painted several Senior homes for free, or jumped their batteries to get to work, or swept snow off their cars so they could watch the football playoffs. He suffered mentally as he cried with Neighbors who needed a cry, and sat with those who had no one. But he suffered more mentally trying to figure out why Sun would want to stop something that benefited their residents. And though Sun and Management put roadblocks in his way and pelted him with citations, he never stopped caring for us, or asked us for anything in return.

Mike gave his personal phone number to 250 families he never met just so they had someone to rely on. Even when Sun's lawyers forced him to shut down the Association, he wouldn't quit on his Neighbors. He started Mr. Mike's Neighborhood to continue his efforts. Though he complied with their legal order, they continued the citations, and even called the police on him. Many of us thank God Mike is here for what he gives us. I hope you do too.

... Linda Varee

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A Sad Story of Corporate Power

by Mike Whitty, Ex-Director Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association

“Helping others isn’t a chore, it is one of the greatest gifts there is.”

Liya Kebede

My name is Mike Whitty. I’m 74 years old and the Ex-Director of the now defunct Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association in Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park, Warren, Michigan. I’ve been a resident here for over 12 years. And throughout that time, my experiences with Sun and Management have not been all that positive. After listening to complaints from my Neighbors, and yearning to have a better “end-of-life” experience here, I started developing the Association in October 2022.

LIVING IN A TRAILER DOESN’T MAKE YOU TRAILER TRASH

People living in mobile and manufactured homes have been stereotyped, stigmatized, and labeled from the very beginning. As successful as I’ve been throughout my life, I’ve lived in 3 mobile homes now. And I would choose a mobile home rather than an apartment any day. The fact is, not everyone can afford a down payment to purchase a site-built home. So the next best thing is to gravitate toward a mobile home community. It used to be that people began mobile home living because it was affordable. But when you look at current rents that equal many home owners mortgages, this isn’t always true. But here’s the one thing that is true. The Association has met many, many Neighbors in our Community who love their families, respect their Community, and just want to live out their lives in a comfortable, productive way. They’re not always poor either. But they are all our Neighbors. I wanted them to feel good about living here, and not be given a lot of reasons to move.

WHY NOW?

When you’ve been retired for a long time, you get the privilege and pleasure (lol!) of sitting around for long periods of time reliving all the decisions you’ve made in your life, both good and bad, both right and wrong. And though I’ve had many successes in my life both personally and professionally, I found that I’ve made a lot of selfish decisions that did nothing to affect anyone but myself. Not that I was a bad person because I wasn’t. After two failed marriages of 5 years each and no children, I think I can comfortably fall into the category of selfish. So I found the Association as my chance to do something I never paid much attention to; giving of myself for a greater good.

It was important enough for me to get this right that I questioned my motives for doing this. Did I really want to help my Neighbors, develop a Neighborhood Culture, or was I just trying to challenge bad policies made by Sun Communities and make myself a valued figure within the Community? I guess only time will tell, but I have faith that good will eventually prevail.

BTW: Moving here to be near my mother in her time of need was probably the most unselfish thing I've ever done. So there is that. I guess it's never too late.

HOW I GOT HERE

My mother lived here for over 30 years. She never missed a payment, loved her Neighbors and her Neighbors loved her. And mom had one of, if not the best garden in the park. In fact, it was my mom's green thumb that encouraged me to start my garden, which I must boast, is absolutely beautiful.

I've always been a believer that "they take care of you when you're young, and you take care of them when they're old." So moving next to Mom was a no-brainer. Mom was already in her 80's and needed my help. So I was fortunate to get a home just two doors down from her, which made it very convenient to provide her elder-care assistance. They actually gave me the home for free since it was very old and needed a lot of Tender Loving Care. I put a lot of time and money into making this home a showcase both inside and out, since I was planning on spending the rest of my life here.

THAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Aside from the physical work I needed to do on the home, the grounds were absolutely dismal. It was all dirt and weeds, and according to the rules of the park, it was my responsibility as a home owner to put my own money into making the grass look good, the same grass that the park allowed to go to weed. So I did. This is also where I learned that the park will try to get the residents to pay for items the park should be responsible for. I killed whatever grass was there, hired a rototiller, cut out dozens of large roots, ordered 2 yards of good dirt, and seeded the entire lawn. Since I was older, I asked the park if they could have someone help me spread the dirt around the yard, which was a lot of dirt. This was the first time I heard the response that I think Sun teaches all their Managers,

"That is your responsibility!"

Our Neighbors have heard that statement a lot from Management, especially if you own your

home. Home owner's have no right to get help in this park. That's why Sun wants to sell as many homes as they can instead of leasing, so once the home is sold, it's out of their hands. They just want to be responsible for moving homes in and out, collecting rent, and handling evictions. Sun Communities is not a "resident-centric" company. They don't make rules that benefit the Neighbors, just rules that benefit the Management and Sun. I'm almost sure they don't provide training on how to treat their residents, because you wouldn't find the same Management abuse complaints in their other properties. This is not only my opinion, just Google, "Sun Communities Complaints" and you'll find page after page of the same systemic problems that occur in many of their properties. I saw those problems happening here and I wanted to have a say in how they affected myself and my Neighbors.

MOM PASSES AWAY

Several years later, Mom died. Now I have to get rid of her home. At the time, Sun had a program of "first rights to purchase" if you wanted to sell your home. My mom had a 1976 Holly Park in outstanding condition, both inside and out. So I took a lot of pictures and sent them to Sun Corporate. Now, Mom's lot rent needed to be paid even after she died, so I needed to sell it so I wouldn't have to come up with the additional rent. After 30 days of not responding, Sun said they didn't want the home, and if I didn't pay her rent, they would take the home. Sun wanted to get Mom's money even after she died. I begged them to give me a little more time to sell her home, but they refused. So I wound up taking money out of my own pocket to pay her rent in order to have more time to sell. She had lived at Lafayette Place for over 30 years as a resident in good standing, but it still wasn't good enough for Sun to give her, and me a break. I wound up selling the house under stress to people who didn't honor their commitment and stole her home. I hoped Mom wasn't watching.

I WANTED TO CREATE A NEIGHBORHOOD CULTURE

After Mom died, I had no reason to leave here. I created a home and property that I totally enjoyed, and I loved Lafayette Place for my final destination. Raised in Hamtramck, Michigan, I experienced the culture of a Neighborhood. We knew our Neighbors names, and were never afraid to walk across the street and get a cup of sugar, or ask a Neighbor to watch the kids while my Mom went shopping, or let the kids stay out and play until the street lights came on. It was a culture that became lost over time. Today, many people don't even know the residents on either side of their homes. They'll walk by someone and lower their heads instead of just saying "HI". I miss Neighborhoods and wanted to try and let my Neighbors experience that same feeling as I once did. So I started creating the Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association in October 2022.

WHY WAS THE ASSOCIATION IMPORTANT TO MY NEIGHBORS?

Many of my Neighbors are handicapped and/or Seniors that may not have family or friends to rely on for even the simplest things. They need someone to be there for them. Some of this help would include changing the batteries in their smoke detectors, changing their furnace filters or helping them set their thermostats, changing the light bulbs in the ceiling. These are items in their lease they, and not Management are responsible for. So, since they can't call Management for help saying it's not their responsibility, they call me. Sun normally doesn't make rules that positively affect our Neighbors. And the rules they have in place are selectively ignored.

SOME RULES JUST DROVE ME CRAZY

The Xfinity Cable Debacle

When Xfinity puts in service on a mobile home, they normally run the cables along the side of the house and through the wall. They don't take any pains to hide them, and our Management doesn't tell Xfinity how they want the cables installed in the first place. So the installation has nothing to do with our Neighbors. One day Dale sent a letter to those homes that had exposed cables, informing them to move the cables under the home and out of site. So, this is what he wanted my Seniors, my Disabled, my Single Mothers, my Neighbors to do:

- Cut the Xfinity wire coming out of the wall
- Pull it out of the wall
- Drill a hole in the floor
- Crawl under the home and install the wire
- Go to the hardware store to buy some cable ends, and
- Plug the hole in the wall.

Can you see my Seniors crawling under their homes? This demand wasn't for a safety item and had nothing to do with the renter or home owner. Likely those cords were there when they moved in, so why would it be their responsibility? It was simply park aesthetics that Dale Stokes, Park Manager wanted my Neighbors to pay for. I recommended they not comply since I didn't want them harmed, and I didn't want them paying for it out of their own pockets. Sun didn't want me bringing things like this up because they say it would cause a rift between the Neighbors and Staff. They refused to believe that this rift was created long before I ever started the Association.

The \$55 Lawn Cut

On Friday's, Management would go around the park and tag the homes with high grass that needed to be cut. In the letter they would say if the Neighbor didn't cut their grass before Monday, the lawn service would cut it and charge them. What they don't say in the letter is that they would be charged \$55, so typically they won't know this until the next rent is charged. When I asked Sun why they would punish my Neighbors with such a large penalty and not put the cost in the letter, his response was, "it's in their lease." This is the same lawn service that will charge \$17 per week to cut their grass, so why does Sun feel the need to bilk my Neighbors, the same Neighbors whom many are on Social Security or Government Aid? They also know that the Association only charges \$20 no matter how high the grass, or how big the lot. You'd think if they cared about us they would have taken this into consideration and referred us to them. But then why would they?

These are just two of the things Sun and Management try to get away with.

LAFAYETTE PLACE

Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park is a beautiful property in Warren, Michigan, just next to Detroit. It is in fact, from my estimation the most beautiful park in the area that attracts many wonderful families. With about 250 homes that houses many different races, cultures, religions, and incomes, you would think trying to serve every home would be a daunting task, and I found it was. Originally, the Association was meant to provide a fun time through events that would provide an experience for everyone. But here was my first rude awakening. You need money, donations to have events. Now don't get me wrong, I knew that when I started. What I didn't realize was how hard it was to get them. Many of our Neighbors are on fixed incomes. So it didn't take long for me to transition to a different approach. I wasn't deterred.

TRANSPARENCY WAS A MUST

As I was putting this together, I tried to give everything a professional look, a look that would shine a bright light on the park. From the business cards to the brochures to the website to the signage, they were all so beautiful that I was proud to show them. And every step I took, every change I made, every update was sent to Management and Sun so they were aware right from the start. I never wanted their to be any secrets regarding the Association. I wanted Management and Sun to work with us, but they decided to work against us. They never complained about the name or the signs and these stood for an entire year. Until Sun attempted to shut us down in October 2023. My new strategy was, instead of trying to affect 250 families all at once, I'll just try to affect one family at a time. And that was the beginning of

the many individual successes I had.

NEGATIVE REVIEWS

In order to develop a program that would work in conjunction with Management and Sun Communities philosophies, I did a Google search to see what other Sun properties were saying. The results I found were page after page of negative reviews that almost all revolved around the same issues: high exorbitant rents, eliminating services, Management not following through on requests, and the verbal abuse from Management. Well, I saw all of these happening in my Community and was hoping to keep these patterns of mis-management curbed. What I found right from the beginning was that Management and Sun Communities didn't want to have anything to do with it. Instead of doing the right thing and make the changes to better our Community, they felt it would be more productive to get rid of the Association. I named it "Association Busting."

OUR FIRST COMMUNICATION

During my first meeting with Dale Stokes, Park Manager and Marco Spadoni, Regional Vice President, I never asked for any money. All I asked was three things: - Send a mass email letting them know about the Association, and our combined efforts to make this Community the best it can be - To allow us to put our business cards and brochures in the front office foyer - and inform us when new residents arrive so we can bring them a "welcome to the community plant." They turned down the first one because they didn't want any involvement with the Association, I had to fight several more times to get our business cards and brochures in the foyer, and they wouldn't provide us any information on new Neighbors. This was the mental frame of mind they put me in right from the start. I couldn't understand why they wanted to take something that could be so good, something that would actually benefit our Neighbors and Park Management, and dismiss it so vehemently? The basic reason is, they just don't care. No matter how many times I tried to convince them this would be good for all of us, they just wanted to collect their rent and be uninvolved with anything that would benefit my Neighbors. They did not have a resident-centric philosophy on running our mobile home park.

MY NEXT MEETING WASN'T MUCH BETTER

After unsuccessfully dealing with Marco Spadoni, they sent his boss, Kevin Bennett, Regional Vice President to meet with myself and Dale. Sun defended themselves, the Association defending itself, it wasn't very productive. The one thing we did get accomplished was Bennett allowed us to put our brochures in the foyer.

What really bothered me was when I relayed my Neighbors sentiments that our rents are too high, especially in the area where our Community is located. Bennett of course justified the rents with market values etc., but when I mentioned again that the rents are still too high, his retort was, "well, someone is paying it!" Really? How insensitive to say that no matter how much Sun increases their rents, someone will pay it.

On the Lafayette Place corporate website, they talk about "taking advantage of our numerous on-site amenities", which they count as a small club house and play area. No swimming pool, no basketball court. They also tell prospective Neighbors that "Residents are never bored because we offer community events and activities to retain an engaged and neighborly community experience." Sounds good doesn't it. But none of this takes place, and not enough to charge the rents they do. But like Bennett said, someone will pay it.

SO THE RETALIATION BEGINS

Much of what comes next in this section will have no documented evidence I can produce, only information from reliable sources. But you'll see that they definitely had a scheme to make my Association's job a lot harder, if not impossible. Based on information I've received from reliable sources, Sun corporate informed Dale and Nicolette, park Office Manager that they should not Acknowledge, Endorse, or Communicate with myself and the Association. And they used those words. So, when I'd make a call, they'd see my number on the caller-Id and either not answer it, or send it to voicemail. Same with email requests, simply ignore them. When I needed to verify certain rules, policies and decisions that would affect my Neighbors, where they needed a more complete explanation, they wouldn't reply. This went on for an entire year, so you can see how my frustrations became so intense. This situation was affirmed when a large number of my Neighbors felt like they were also having their calls blocked, especially if they didn't have a positive previous experience with them, and didn't want to handle their requests. To top it all off, this is one of the same complaints residents have in their other properties, which makes these issues systemic among Sun. It was beginning to become apparent that resident-centric training was not provided to Management, or if it was, they took it upon themselves to treat our Neighbors however they wanted. They liked the power.

THEY TRIED TO TURN MY NEIGHBORS AGAINST ME

After several months of sending out newsletters, walking the park and the Smile and Wave Program, my Neighbors knew who I and the Association were. So some of my Neighbors asked Management to tell them more about the Association. Here were some of their responses:

- "We don't know anything about the Association"
- "Oh, you don't need the Association. It's not right for you"
- And my favorite "If you rent from us, you're not allowed to join the Association"

I'm pretty sure that Dale and Nicolette wouldn't act like this on their own. As you continue reading, I think you'll be able to see how Sun Communities corporate was directly responsible to how Dale and Nicolette treated us. They trained them well because for a solid year, they worked to bring the Association down.

COMMUNICATION NEEDED TO MAKE THIS WORK

I needed to communicate with Management regarding current or future activities. Wouldn't it have been nice when I started a program to help our handicapped and Seniors, Management would have sent out an email letting the Community know. Wouldn't have cost them one penny and maybe 5 minutes of time sending it. But then again, why would they want to help the Association? After all, we were doing many things for our Neighbors that Management wouldn't or couldn't do. But Management is controlled by Sun, trained by Sun, and I'm sure Sun was making all the rules on how they were to handle myself and the Association.

So, with no help from Sun, I sent the information through my monthly newsletter, where I hand delivered it to every home. The newsletter, and all updates were also available on the website where everyone could access them. By hand delivering the newsletters, Sun began accusing me of "annoying the residents," "solicitation" and "running a business." They would actually take pictures of me taping them to the door. So it continues.

JUST BECAUSE YOU CALL YOURSELF A COMMUNITY...

A simple definition of a community is, "a group of people living in the same place." But my definition of a community goes further than that.

It begins with **"a group of people that care about each other."** This, in my opinion, is the absolute core of a community. The individuals in a group are not just random strangers, they have relationships with each other. They give a damn about each other. They care more about the people in this group than about the average person they meet on the street. This is where the magic of a community happens. When people care about each other, they develop trust. And trust unlocks collaboration, sharing, support, hope, safety and much more. I wanted my community to **"feel they belong"**. Communities address one of the most fundamental human needs: we want to be loved, we don't want to be lonely and we want to know that we belong

somewhere. Real communities give us a sense of home, a sense of family, a sense of “**these are my peeps**”. This is my tribe within Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park, this is where I live and this is where I belong. In this group, I want to be accepted not only for how I feel about my Neighbors, but how I can make them feel.

It was a recipe I thought I could make. Mix a little friendship, add a little caring, top it off with a Smile and a Wave, and you have yourself the beginning of a viable community that exceeds its standard definition.

THE SMILE AND WAVE PROGRAM

Since I didn't have any money to provide some entertainment for my Neighbors, I still had to figure a way to get me known among the 250 homes and provide them something of value. Thus, the Smile and Wave Program.

The value of a smile is priceless, yet it is the cheapest, easiest, most rewarding and most sincere gift to anyone that crosses your path. A smile makes a person's day, anybody's day even a stranger's day. A smile is infectious.

Any time I'm in front of my home, or when I'm going for my walk around the park, I'll smile and wave to every car, and every person that goes by. It's like I'm welcoming them into our Community when they come home from work, or wishing them well when they leave. More importantly, no one knows what type of mood that person is in. If they didn't have a good day, you never know when that smile will be just the thing to change a persons outlook when getting ready to meet their family. Every time I smile and wave to someone and they smile and wave back, I have an opportunity to make them a friend. But if they smile and wave first, I've already made them a friend. What a powerful gift a smile can be. In fact, one of my first homework assignments I gave to my Neighbors is to smile and say hi to everyone they pass in our Community. Can't imagine why Sun and Management wouldn't want their residents to feel this way.

I ACCOMPLISHED A LOT WITH NO MONEY

Here are just some of the things I accomplished in one summer month:

- I mowed 29 lawns which helps me promote our Neighbors keeping their property up, at 74 years old.
- I have a young Neighbor who is pregnant and has cancer that gets her lawn cut for free.
- I replaced a siding piece on a Neighbors home that had been laying on the ground for a

month, free.

- I changed the smoke detector batteries on two senior homes since according to your rules, it's their responsibility and they had no one to help, free
- I fixed two of my Seniors porches that needed some work, free.
- I painted one of my seniors homes, third since we started, free.
- I painted two of my seniors porches, free.
- I drove a family to church since their car wouldn't start, free.
- I jumped a Neighbors car so she could get to work, at 6am, free.
- I took a Neighbor to the drug store to pick up her prescription, free.
- I helped several Neighbors apply for the Weatherization Program, free.
- I loaned my lawn equipment out to two Neighbors who couldn't afford to pay, but wanted to cut their own lawn, free.
- I loaned my power washer to two Neighbors who wanted to wash their homes, free.
- I held the hand and hugged a Neighbor who cried for 2 hours since she put down her dog.
- I sat with a Neighbor on my porch, comforting him because he had a water leak, couldn't afford to hire a plumber and couldn't get help from the park since he owns his home. I'm sure he feels part of the Community. (Revised: He did wind up getting help from Management)
- I gave 36 Beautification Certificates to Neighbors who made their properties beautiful and posted 93 pictures on the website for everyone to view.
- I took 17 calls from Neighbors who had a problem with Management, who needed some advice, to tell me about an important event, or just to talk.
- And I continue my Smile and Wave Program to every car that drives by and every Neighbor I see. You never know how that may positively affect a Neighbor who's not having a good day.

And this was just July. Some Seniors have already signed up for my Winter Snow Removal Program if they don't have anyone to help them, free. Can you see Sun or Management doing any of these? Like I can remember Dale telling me one time, "If we help one, then we have to help them all."

THE COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

The more calls I received from my Neighbors, which amounted to 4-6 a week, the more the Association was becoming their advocate. The Association gave them a voice. I was someone they felt comfortable talking to regarding a variety of things, ranging from letting me know about an event in their lives, to telling me their dog died and seeking a shoulder to cry on. But when they called to complain about Sun, Management or an issue in the park, I felt it a privilege to be their voice and help them in any way I could. That meant fighting for their issue with

Management and Sun. They didn't like them coming to me, and they sure as hell didn't like me fighting for them. But they never bothered to ask themselves why they didn't feel comfortable going to Management in the first place? Chances are they did go to Management first, but didn't get the results they were looking for. So they came to the Association for help.

Sun Communities feels like if Neighbor's don't complain to Management, they must be happy with the way the Park is run. But this is definitely not true. Many Neighbors are either in fear of retaliation, or Management not following through with their requests. So not filing a complaint isn't always indicative of how our park is being run. But they knew that the Association would be there for them. So they came to us for help.

I NEEDED TO KNOW SOME NUMBERS

At this point in time, I still didn't know certain information about my Neighbors since I continued to get no support from Sun or Management. How many Neighbors read the newsletter, liked the newsletter, or didn't even read the newsletter? We knew how many Neighbors utilized the Association, but how many didn't care about it, or even give it a second look? So I needed to figure out a way to get some numbers without actually asking each one of them.

One of my jobs as the Association Director was to keep up on State Legislation that affected mobile home Communities. It just so happened that there were two bills that were to be sent to our Congress that controlled the percentage of rent increases a park owner would be able to charge. These were bills that definitely affected my Neighbors financial lives. So I created a survey and sent it to all 250 homes for them to let our Congress know how they feel about these bills. Well, I was pleasantly surprised when I had 53% of my Neighbors making their voices heard. It was proof that the Association had an impact in bringing our Neighbors together. Sun, of course, didn't like the idea that I was providing their residents this type of information.

THEY TOOK AWAY MY LIVLIHOOD

For over 2 years I worked part time for a company that was contracted to paint the homes of Neighbors who moved or were evicted from our park. My work was impeccable, I was reliable and responsible. When I received a raise, I would give it to my painting partner to help him take care of his family. My employer was impressed enough that he would ask me to help with projects his company was doing in other parts of the state because he knew I would go above and beyond with my tasks.

Since I received very few donations, I used the money from painting to finance the Association. Until my supervisor, Patrick Nelson, told me and my painting partner Terrell, that Dale went to our boss Frank and said that “if Frank didn’t fire me, Dale would fire his whole crew.” Sun claimed that Frank fired me on his own, which poses the question, why would he let one of his best workers go when I’d done such excellent work? It was pure retaliation. Sun also said they had documentation from Frank which I wanted to see. They wouldn’t comply because I’m sure they didn’t have it. So after a year, they decided it was time to shut us down, to get rid of the solution to many issues instead of creating a Community that provided its residents a better “quality of life.”

AN ADVERSARIAL RELATIONSHIP

As you’re reading this, I’m sure I’ve made it clear that Sun and Management perpetuated an adversarial relationship with myself and the Association right from the very beginning. But I did some perpetuating myself. For every time they wouldn’t respond to an email, for every time they sent my phone calls to voice mail, for every retaliation and harassment I endured over an entire year, it created a tremendous amount of frustration. Some communications with Sun were met with anger on my part. I’d become very emotional, rant and rave and say some stupid crap. It wasn’t pretty. Some of my emails reflected this, as did one of my newsletters which was pretty scathing. The more I tried to bring Sun, Management and the Association to work together, the more frustrated I became, and the more we wound up working against each other. The Association was doing so much good for their residents. Why couldn’t they see that? Or maybe the better question would be, why wouldn’t they see that?

THE CEASE AND DESIST ORDER

Since I wouldn’t comply with Sun’s request to shut down the Association, they decided to provide me with some legal incentive. This is the Cease and Desist Order their lawyer sent:

“It has come to our attention that you have been acting in a disparaging manner and making defamatory statements towards the community, its personnel, and Sun Communities corporate personnel. In addition, you have involved yourself in other resident issues that the community has not been able to resolve based on your interference. This behavior is considered tortious interference with business relationships.

You also continue to use the Community’s name and logo despite being previously advised that this is inappropriate and misleading. Moreover, your solicitation of money in exchange for performing services and your solicitation for donations for your alleged organization are considered operating a

business within the Community.

Your conduct is a violation of your Lease Agreement and the Community Rules and Regulations. Further, it is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Therefore, this letter is also sent as a formal notice that you must immediately cease and desist from engaging in any of this behavior. This includes ceasing the use of the community name or logo and interfering with the Community's relationship with its residents. Your actions and words have caused harm to the Community, its reputation and its residents.

If you fail to cease and desist, the Community reserves all of it's legal rights and remedies afforded to it by law."

Wow, they made it sound like all I do is cause harm to my Neighbors. They wouldn't admit that the adversarial relationship between residents and Management started long before the Association began. And it was systemic among all it's properties. It was because of all these issues that the Association was created in the first place. They would rather get rid of the Association then fix the issues.

COMPARE THE CEASE AND DESIST ORDER TO THIS LETTER

As I stated right from the beginning, I wanted total transparency between the Association, Sun and Management so they would know everything the Association was trying to accomplish. I'd been communicating with them since October 2022, but the official rollout was in January 2023. I received a letter from Kevin Bennett on January 12, 2023 claiming his support. Keep in mind, right from the beginning, they knew about the name, the signs, the website and all supporting materials. Here's part of what the letter said. The rest of the letter was regarding handling issues I had emailed to them:

"We appreciate your efforts to further the interest of residents. As such, is your Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association registered with the State of Michigan or a less formal Association that will act as a communication group for resident concerns (example Neighborhood Watch?) We welcome any positive assistance from residents that will improve relations between our staff and the residents they serve. We do maintain a resident relations program and your group could be instrumental in growing that program." Kevin Bennett

Sure sounds like they didn't mind the Association name being used at the beginning, or the premise behind the Association. They allowed me to invest my money into it's creation, then

after a year, decided to take it away with legal action. It's just another example of the big Goliath going after the small David. It's like telling a child if they don't clean their room, they'll be punished. But when they clean their room, they're punished anyway. This is even worse. They allowed the Association to create a Neighborhood culture, to provide a feeling of trust, to create programs that benefit many of our handicapped and Senior Neighbors, then take it away without any concern for our Neighbors it would affect. They should be made to pay for this.

I NEEDED TO PROTEST

Once I received the Cease and Desist order, I was really upset and now, a little scared. I once told myself that I would not involve my Neighbors in this battle between myself and Sun. But after the letter, I wanted everyone to know. So I created a sign that said, "Dale Stokes and Sun Communities are Trying to Shut Down the Association." And I took a chair with the sign and planted myself outside the Community. I raised it high over my head to let every car that passed by see what they were trying to do. Once I got tired sitting out front, I set the sign by my house. I wanted everyone to see the good that Sun was out to destroy. I couldn't just sit around and do nothing. I was ready for a David vs Goliath fight.

OTHER EYES HAVE A DIFFERENT VIEW

After reading the Cease and Desist Order, you would think that myself and the Association are just bad people that need to be crushed. And that we were just destroying their park and their residents. But my Neighbors know the value we provide and have personally volunteered their accolades. Here's just a few I've paraphrased:

- "We appreciate you Mike. I'm glad you didn't quit on us"
- "I couldn't afford to paint my house. You gave your labor for free"
- "You were there when I needed you. That's more than I get from my family"
- "Dale wouldn't help me when I needed help. But you did"
- "When I put my dog to sleep, you were there to hold me while I cried"
- "Management said to call them first. When I did they didn't respond. You did."
- "I don't have money for a donation, but I pray for you daily"
- "They said it was my responsibility. You didn't see it that way and you helped"
- "Sun wouldn't help me until you asked on my behalf. Wish I came to you first"

I provide a service that Dale, Nicolette and Sun don't or won't. The problem became that we did so much more than Management that it was making them look bad. I was becoming the face of Lafayette Place and not Dale. And this is why they don't want the Association here. I

tried continuously to convince Management and Sun that if we did this together, it would benefit all of us. And Management would look great without having to do much.

On the Lafayette Place corporate website they state, "We value our family of residents and offer on-site customer service to ensure their needs are met and their expectations are exceeded." When you read the comments my Neighbors volunteered, does it sound like Sun is living up to their promise of a resident-centric community?

I NEEDED SOME PROFESSIONAL HELP

Though for an entire year I tried to handle all the slings and arrows our Management and Sun threw at me, it came to a point where the stress was so great, I needed someone to help me understand why a big company like Sun would take something so good for their residents, and make it so bad. I wound up losing weight and couldn't sleep thinking about the possibility they may just be able to evict me, even though, aside from the Association, I would be considered a "resident in good standing." I'm on auto-pay so my rent is paid on time, my property is kept up, and I'm good to my Neighbors. So what I, and several other credible people thought was Sun is setting me up for eviction based on breaking their rules and regulations in the park. This is where I needed someone to talk to.

After several meetings with a Psychological Counselor, I decided that as conflicted as I was, and as much as I wanted to fight it, I would shut down the Association. I destroyed all the brochures, business cards and signage, and watched all my money go down the drain. I actually tore the sign down and put it all on Dale's porch and told him since he brought down the Association, he might as well finish the job. Though I made a commitment to my Neighbors, I didn't want to find myself living in a refrigerator box under the highway. So I went in another direction.

MR. MIKE'S NEIGHBORHOOD

As I read the Cease and Desist Order, it seemed like the issues Sun were most disturbed about was the name of the Association (Lafayette Place Neighborhood Association) because it may imply that Management and Sun approved of it, and having signage on their property (which is my front yard). So, instead of an Association, I created Mr. Mike's Neighborhood, created a new sign, which I put inside my house by the front window instead of on my lawn, and new business cards, all again at my own expense. Within one day Nicolette cited me for having a sign in my window.

HARASSMENT AND RETALIATION CONTINUE

As soon as I did that, I received 5 violations from Management on my property in one month. You can see from the cover picture that my property is absolutely beautiful. But this was just pure and simple harassment. They didn't want me to feel like I had more power with the Neighbors than Management and Sun. It is because of this continued pressure, taking it upon themselves to destroy my livelihood, as well as the disrespect that they've shown me for an entire year as a resident in good standing, that I decided to research what can be done to a landlord for harassment, retaliation and mental stress.

PROMOTIONS ALL AROUND

As their reward for what I assume is following the Corporate line against the Association, both Dale and Nicolette received well-earned promotions. Dale was given a beautiful property with many amenities, and Nicolette was given the Park Managers job at Lafayette Place. The moment she was made the Manager, she let me know she was in charge by giving me another citation. Sun trained them well!

GOFUNDME PAGE

Being that I closed down the Association, but started Mr. Mike's Neighborhood so my Neighbors wouldn't think I abandoned them, I need to prepare for any further litigation and possible eviction which they've already set me up for. They can't evict me for not paying my rent, not keeping up my property, or not being good to my Neighbors, but they can evict me for breaking their "so-called" rules. On every citation I've received their is this statement:

"Take Notice that a violation of Community Rules and Regulations set forth shall be deemed a sufficient basis to initiate legal proceedings to have you evicted from the mobile home community pursuant to MCLA 600.5775."

So since they didn't have any problems taking away my livelihood and having their law firm file a cease and desist order against myself and the Association, they'll have no problems evicting me. Conscience and Compassion are not their strong points.

So I have created a GoFundMe Page to help with costs.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/lafayette-place-neighborhood-association>

Any donations will be greatly appreciated.

POOR MANAGEMENT IS A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM

As I was reading through the complaints on the internet, I noticed that the same four issues keep popping up:

- Exorbitant Rents
- Eliminating Services
- Rude Management
- Not Following Through on Resident Requests

These same issues were happening in my Community, and they continue to happen today. When Joel Shekell, Regional Vice President was assigned to our Community, I told him the issues I had with Dale. These were not just my issues, but complaints from many of my Neighbors. Each time I informed Joel of these issues, his only response was, "That's Your Opinion." Of course it's my opinion, I live here, he doesn't. He'll pop in maybe a couple times a month to I'm sure check the numbers, so he really has no idea what Management is doing when it comes to my Neighbors. And it's happening at many of their properties around the country.

Here are just some of the complaints Neighbors in other Communities are saying:

*Management by intimidation. Slow on their improvements but quick to harass residents. Don't do it.
September 29, 2023*

Stay away from Sun Community properties. Management is either advised to ignore the Mobile Home Residency Law (note Law) or take it upon themselves to ignore the law. Sun's practices clearly exploit the residents simply because they can.

October 27, 2023

Management does not care. We moved into Highland Greens in Highland, MI not even 3 months into a brand new home and it has been a living nightmare! The "management" and "maintenance" are absolutely horrible! That is no joke!! Do not buy or rent from sun.

June 24, 2023

I moved in and it was a different owner. No issues. Sun home bought it and all was good. Making improvements etc. Until they hired a new manager and now there's problems with all the residents and employees. This manager has caused so many problems.

July 2, 2023

Horrible place to live. Ignorant useless clueless management! Crime is out of hand! About time legislation passes laws to deal with monopoly places like Sun.

July 27, 2023

I live in the Holiday Park Trailer Park in Bangor ME. Sun Communities is the new owner, The management at this place is incredibly rude to everyone and should probably read the Maine Fair Housing laws because they keep violating people's rights. The people who live here pretty much all want out and a lot have already left. Would not recommend living here.

May 26, 2021

AND FINALLY!

It is appalling to read these nationwide reviews of Sun Communities. The theme is clear. Is anyone at Sun Communities! reading these reviews. As a former business owner I would be taking this stuff seriously and making an effort to improve the operation. I live in one and onsite management is deplorable. Management through intimidation.

July 11, 2022

And these are just regarding Management. There's plenty more for all kinds of issues that happen once Sun buys a property. It's systemic!! It's part of Sun's culture. We know it is regardless of what Sun says.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING DO MANAGERS GET?

They say they train their Managers in Resident Treatment and Leadership, but I truly doubt it. I'm sure they train them how to collect rent, how to evict and how to move a home in and out.

I received a complaint from a Neighbor who was being evicted. They were sitting in their car watching as the Sheriff was placing their furniture on the lawn. While this was happening, Dale and Nicolette were laughing and having a good time right in front of them. Sensitivity training?

Here's another example:

I was visiting one of my disabled Neighbors who had been here for four months. She is one of my Trash Can to the Curb Program Neighbors where I move her trash can for trash pickup that are too heavy for them. I noticed she still didn't have a smoke detector in her living room. So I informed Nicolette and she told my Neighbor, "When I checked you in, I noticed you didn't smoke, so I didn't think you needed one."

This is the resident-centric training she received. She put this Neighbor at risk when she approved move-in without one. What would have happened if a fire did start in the living room. She would have never known there was a fire until the smoke got to her bedroom.

IN CONCLUSION

I've had more Neighbors tell me they're glad I didn't quit on them. Hopefully, I'll be able to continue providing services that will benefit many of our Neighbors before they evict me, and provide a culture that even if they leave our beautiful Community, they can take with them wherever they go.

TO BE CONTINUED FOR NOW...

I'M IN TROUBLE AGAIN“

Yesterday many of you saw Linda and I cleaning up the park. We walk this park every day so we see first hand how dirty it is. We wanted our Neighbors guests to see a beautiful park when they visited for the Holidays. Neighbors have been complaining to me about the trash forever, so we decided to do something about it. We cleaned up half the park and I put the trash bags next to Nicolette's trash can so she can see how much trash is left after her groundskeeper does her cleaning. After emailing Nicolette what I did, she had several ways to handle this:

- she could have thanked us for doing a nice job and helping her out.
- she could have trained the groundskeeper on how to do a better job.
- she could have emailed me and asked nicely not to put trash by her place.
- or she could have just ignored it and allowed us to continue.

But what did she do instead? **SHE CALLED THE POLICE ON ME.** He was nice enough not to turn on his lights to attract attention, and was very apologetic, almost embarrassed. He simply said he received a complaint and had to comply, and asked me not to go near her home. But it didn't overshadow what happened to me while I was picking up trash on one of the medians. A small boy, maybe 10-12 years old, came out of his home, held out his hand and said, "I don't have a buck, but please take this." It was 35 cents. I couldn't hold back a big smile, and a strong hug ensued. No matter what Sun and Management does to me, these are the types of memories that will keep me going.



Mike Whitty

Mike has lived at Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park for over 12 years. He originally moved here when his mother, who resided here for over 30 years needed his help.

Previously, Mike was president of Michael Learning Group, a Sales and Management Training Company for over 30 years. He has been retired for 14 years.

Deciding to live out the rest of his life at this beautiful Community, Mike wanted to develop a Neighborhood Culture, to provide his Neighbors a better mobile home experience. To have them experience the type of Neighborhood that actually brings Neighbors together.

This article tells the story of how Sun Communities, the owner of Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park, along with their Managers, coordinated to destroy something that was so good, so positive, denying their residents an experience that benefited many of them. You'll see how they felt comfortable crushing the efforts of an individual that cared nothing more than to help Sun Communities residents, Mike's Neighbors.
