

NEWSLETTER NO. 1
DEC 2021



**RICHMOND
TENANTS'
DEFENSE
COUNCIL**

SPOTLIGHT ON...

"L" from Sherwood Apartments

Q: How did you first get involved with RTDC?

L: I came in contact with RTDC a few years ago. I was introduced to RTDC because Mike and David came around, and asked what problems we were having in this city. And after that, we decided to start a tenants organization because there were some things in the apartment complex.

The first big campaign was a letter writing campaign [focused on predatory towing]. The towing was horrible. My car got towed, other cars got towed. So we brought attention to it, and began to have meetings on a regular basis and tenants were coming and bringing their ideas.

And once we acted on the parking issue, we noticed it began to subside a little bit. I guess they got tired of us always being out there, like "why are you towing our cars?!" We were kind of combative. And like I said, that has gotten better.

Overall, the things we have done here at Sherwood we have been pretty much successful. We've been able to write letters, do call-ins, and do really, really good work.

I would tell anyone if there's a fear of not wanting to say anything or do anything because... we haven't had any of those retaliation issues. We've had a tenant here on the first floor whose back door would not shut. But after we got organized and they had to fix it, they did. So there are successes, but you've got to keep at it, and you've got to get together collectively as a group.

Q: There's still a lot of progress to go, but do you feel like KRS has been forced to look at tenants here differently?

L: Yes. I feel that a lot of people have gotten things [repairs] done, whereas before they would just say "we'll get to it" and never get to it. Now they get to it, they have to pay attention to it. When we have a plumbing issue now, they have to get to it and we don't have to wait all week for it to happen. We just had a plumbing issue a couple weeks ago where the water was just running cold, but they sent someone out right away, and they send out an email. So they're more responsive now.

Since we've started it's been really and truly successful. It's been gradual. They've been small victories, but they've been big enough to know that this has really been a good thing. The victories have felt really good.

Q: I remember we were once meeting in the lobby here at Sherwood and the tow truck showed up while we were having our meeting and began hooking up a tenant's truck. Do you remember that?

L: Yes! And J ran up to the guy's door to let him know they were taking his car.

Q: And the rest of us ran out and started observing and filming and he dropped the truck and drove off without it. Even the more "quiet" tactics like the letters can demonstrate the power of collective action but to me nothing demonstrated it as dramatically as that. We all got together, got organized, started documenting predatory towing and we got a result right then and there.

L: Yeah, when they were towing the car they just assumed "this isn't worth it." It's a good thing, because then they knew that maybe they should stop going over there for [improper towing]. "Those people are watching their cars." So it showed how when people get together they get things done.

One person down the street or at the end of the hall can't get anything done. But when you get people together and they realize, "oh, you're having that problem too" that's when you see results.

And that's another thing-- people are worried that if we get them to fix anything they'll go up on the rent. But they'll do that anyway.

Q: Rents are soaring anyway, even without tenant organizations active in most buildings so you might as well get organized to fight back.

L: That's right, and that's one of the things RTDC gets right - we get organized. Since we've gotten organized the towing has subsided. They still come sometimes, but it's not really bad now. We were able to get lights in the hall, and we got our bat situation taken care of. They've asked for us to call if we see any more, but there have not been any.

HONEST KRS REVIEWS



Sean M.

Palm Bay, FL

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7/3/2020

Any time we had a problem, there was no communication from them. We would have to continually call them or solve the problem ourselves. They do not care about the tenant. That's why their slogan is "making property profitable" they only care about the home owner. What people fail to understand is, we are paying the mortgage for something we don't even own in return for the service of keeping the place maintained (pests, plumbing, etc.). Our second story has been 90 degrees for 2 weeks since the removed the insulation from the attic. Still counting the days. Not to mention our electric bill is through the roof now. KRS is trash.



Jeanette D.

DeWitt, VA

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1/6/2019

6 photos

KRS HOLDINGS LLC RICHMOND VIRGINIA IS A NIGHTMARE!!! These People manage alright but don't fix anything my unit has paint peeling off the walls and holes under my bathroom sink and rotting doors which I had tape up to keep the cold and bugs out. And now we have black stuff coming out the pipes in our bathtub. The list goes on and on.. the owner of the place I live in just wants Money and for us all to shut up and be quiet well I'm not being quiet I'm speaking up and out this is not acceptable what so ever no one should live in conditions unfit for a rat.its bad when the management isn't in the office during their own business hours and only shows up when it's time to have people pay their rent. I'm not taking this laying down. I would give them a zero rating but seeing I have to put something here's a one and if I grade them I'd give them below a F grade. Don't rent from the company ever! I live in the Newcastle apartments and their nightmares beware. The list goes on forever

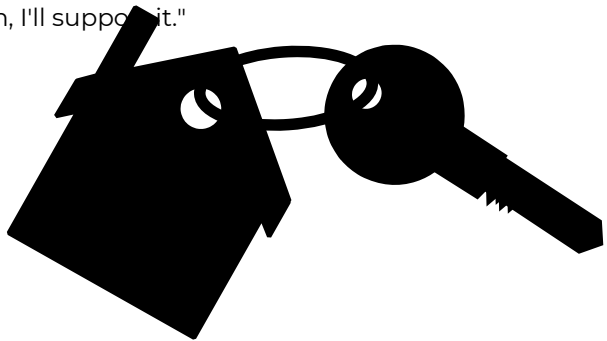
THOUGHTS ON MAINTENANCE

As working people ourselves, we understand the poor condition of our units and the inadequate service we receive are the result of business decisions made by the property manager, KRS, and our landlords. We know their focus on their bottom-line leaves their own maintenance and office workers understaffed, underpaid, and overworked. Their maintenance teams can't service all the units, especially when they are responsible for multiple properties - and they know it too. Our fight is with KRS and the landlords who make the decision to kick the can down the road with cheap temporary fixes and empty promises.

TALES FROM TENANTS

"Some things need to get taken care of still. This past weekend we had [strangers] here, doing drugs, using the bathroom, puking [in the common areas]. And other people had to clean it up. Other tenants had to clean the vomit up. There shouldn't be anyone else in here. There's elderly people here. There should be some kind of locks on the doors.

Right now what we really need is a lock on the door. The lights got fixed and my door and that stuff got fixed because of y'all, but we need a security lock on our front door. We're on Chamberlayne Avenue! You can find anything walking down Chamberlayne. You can find a monkey walking down the street with a thong on! For real! I might be talking trash, but this is for real. Chamberlayne is wild, it's wide open. But y'all have made a real difference. Whatever's going on, I'll support it."



BAT CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Every summer, tenants at Sherwood Apartments are joined by unwanted guests: bats. For years, tenants accepted the seasonal bat infestation as just one more problem that KRS was either unwilling or unable to fix. In July 2021, the bats arrived and began roosting inside Sherwood right on cue, and it seemed like one more summer of bats had begun. But this year, something was different.

At first, there were even more bats than usual. A, one of L's neighbors, remembers, "People were seeing bats in the hallway, even bats getting in apartments. It was really bad... I had a bat trapped in my apartment twice. I called Animal Control, but by the time they arrived they couldn't find it. It must have settled down somewhere. But two weeks later it popped out again and started flying around."

The bats weren't just a nuisance. Human interactions with bats pose serious health risks, including rabies. In a 2019 report published by CDC, bats were responsible for roughly 7 in 10 rabies deaths among people who are infected with the rabies virus in the United States.

This time, Sherwood tenants had enough, so they organized a Call In Day. First, tenants picked one day to call KRS's office and demand that a qualified bat removal company be sent to remove the pests from their building. Next, RTDC publicized the event on social media, inviting local supporters and tenant organizations across the country to call in too.

When the day arrived, phone calls flooded KRS's line nonstop, effectively shutting it down for the day. L recalls the Call In Day fondly: "That really seems to agitate [KRS]. It seems like they have to pay attention to it. It seems like they must say, 'after this, we need to get over there and take a look at the problem.'"

After the Call In Day, KRS finally hired a bat removal company. Holes into the building were finally plugged. The front door to the building was finally repaired so that it could be closed, denying the bats easy access to the building. This year, the bats left Sherwood, but this time tenants didn't have to suffer until the cold weather did the job.

As it turns out, KRS was able to fix the seasonal bat problem all along, but it took organized tenant pressure to force them to act. As L proudly reported, "we got the bat situation taken care of." What could you and your neighbors accomplish if you came together like the tenants at Sherwood?

WHAT TO DO IF...

Your heating, air conditioning, plumbing, or electrical breaks.

Under Virginia law, unless properly agreed otherwise, most landlords must keep in good and safe working order all electrical, plumbing, sanitary, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, and other facilities and appliances that the landlord supplies or must supply.

If something needs to be repaired that is the landlord's responsibility, you must notify the landlord in writing of the problem and give him or her a reasonable time to fix it. **If it is an emergency, such as lack of heat or water, your landlord should fix it immediately. This means within hours, or at most a day or two.** Other repairs must be made within a reasonable time. Your letter should specify the repairs needed and a time by which to fix each problem. As you must give your landlord access to your home to make repairs, you may also want to put in the letter what times of day are best for you or how the landlord can reach you for permission to enter the premises.

If repairs aren't made in a reasonable time, you can take your landlord to court with what is called a "rent escrow" case. At this point, it probably is best to get legal help.

IMPORTANT TIP: You should always notify your landlord in writing of any repairs that need to be made. Even if you speak to him or her about the problem, follow it up with a letter confirming the conversation. Mail the letter by certified mail, return receipt requested, so you will have proof of it being sent. Always make a copy for your records of each letter you send.

Beyond this, always collect photographic and/or video documentation of the issue if possible. For example, if your heat is broken, you might be able to document the temperatures in your apartment several times a day by photographing the thermostat. Always cover your bases in case you need to go to court.

From the Virginia Legal Aid Society's "Your Rights as a Tenant" - **THIS INFORMATION IS NOT LEGAL ADVICE**

RICHMOND TENANTS' DEFENSE COUNCIL

Who We Are

The Richmond Tenants' Defense Council (RTDC) is an independent alliance of tenants and community partners who are building power to fight for the interests of working-class renters in our city. We are organizing all over the city to defend ourselves from the unfair business practices and appalling conditions that private property management companies and landlords expect us to simply accept.

What We Do

We organize ourselves and our neighbors to collectively demand resolutions for unresolved maintenance problems and unfair practices. We do not build our strategies around or put our trust in non-profits or politicians to solve these issues. With enough tenant support, we can force solutions from property managers and landlords ourselves.

The more tenants get organized across the city and support each other, the more we can defend ourselves.

**ORGANIZED TENANTS
DEFEAT SLUMLORDS**

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