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Courtyard businesses reopening

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Article Text:

CHAPEL HILL -- Lex Alexander, owner of 3Cups, got a call at home early Sunday morning telling him that the burglar alarm was going off at his business. When he arrived at The Courtyard of Chapel Hill minutes later, he found the doors to his coffee shop and the adjoining SandwHich shop chained.

Courtyard owner **Spencer Young** had posted notes in the windows claiming that the two businesses had failed to pay their rent to the tune of more than \$85,000. Alexander said he and SandwHich owners Janet and Hich Elbetri have been paying rent into an escrow account for about eight months, insisting that Young restore parking availability that he is contractually obligated to provide for The Courtyard.

And those aren't the only monetary disputes lurking around The Courtyard, at 431 W. Franklin St.

According to documents on file at the Orange County Court House, Raleigh-based Benjamin Construction has filed a Claim of Lien against Young, citing failure to pay for labor performed between August 2007 and January 2008.

The paperwork essentially states Benjamin's intent to file a lawsuit if the dispute is not settled, although no lawsuit has been filed. Attorneys for the company signed the documents on March 25.

The Claim of Lien states that Young owes \$256,525.64 for "labor performed or materials furnished" during property improvements on one Courtyard storefront, as well as \$297,694.84 for other work done in the shopping center.

Representatives from Benjamin Construction declined to comment for this article. Young has not returned calls seeking comment on any issue concerning The Courtyard for several months.

Fiscally Irresponsible

Property taxes

In addition to the dispute with Benjamin Construction, an Orange County tax statement shows that Spencer C. Young Investments is in arrears of real property taxes that were due in September 2007. The statement shows that Young owes \$48,811.04 for taxes on The Courtyard.

Jo Roberson, county director of revenue, confirmed Tuesday that Young was delinquent, but also said that he normally paid taxes in a timely manner. Tax bills are subject to a grace period that expired on Jan. 7, Roberson said, after which delinquent accounts may face legal recourse that can include garnishment of wages or seizure of property.

"If you hit a hard bump in the road, we will work with you," she said. That is the case, she added, with Young, who has established a payment arrangement with the county. Roberson said she thought his tax bill would be settled soon.

Feuds With Everyone

Young made a payment of \$10,024.06 on March 11. His original tab was \$58,835.10.

Meanwhile, 3Cups and SandwHich re-opened Tuesday morning. Alexander said he didn't want to go into detail about what led to the removal of the chains, but it doesn't seem likely that his ongoing dispute with Young has been settled.

Alexander said the property owner was in default on his lease based on a failure to provide 79 parking spaces as outlined in a nearly 30-year-old Special Use Permit with the town. He said there was more than \$40,000 in the businesses' escrow account, which is approximately half of what Young claims is owed in rent.

Staff writers Ginny Hoyle and Beth Velliquette contributed to this story.

Lousy Landlord

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