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## Chapel Hill parking lot now no man's land

Lousy Landlord

**JESSE JAMES DECONTO, Staff Writer**

CHAPEL HILL - As barriers go, it's unimpressive, a line of railroad timbers cutting across a parking lot off West Franklin Street. But, symbolically, it's a miniature Mason-Dixon line.

On one side is gray-haired Southern land baron P.H. Craig. On the other, Long Island Yankee Spencer Young III.

Young, 51, owns The Courtyard of Chapel Hill, home to the popular Mexican popsicle shop Locopops and restaurants Penang and Bonne Soiree, 3Cups coffee, wine and tea shop and Sandwich sandwich shop.

Craig, 70, owns most of the parking lot that serves the Courtyard. About six months ago, Craig blocked off his section with railroad ties and gravel piles. The Courtyard's parking dropped from 79 spaces to 23.

The move, which Young calls "Machiavellian," has hobbled his tenants, bothered customers and dragged public officials into a private matter.

"It's obviously a high-conflict situation that's having a negative impact on a lot of people's lives," said Town Council member Bill Strom.

Young's brick-paved "European food court," with gold-on-black awnings, outdoor seating and bubbling water fountain, has become what he calls "Dysfunction Junction."

Craig won't sell Young his share of the lot. Young won't pay Craig "a red cent" in rent.

"I really have said from the beginning, 'No, no, no,' " said Craig, who owns nearly 100 acres on 16 properties in Orange County assessed at more than \$2.6 million. "I've never sold anything I ever bought."

### Failed mediation

Tenants say Young has poured about \$1 million into renovating the property, and he has asked the town to seize Craig's land by eminent domain. A 28-year-old development permit ties the two properties together. Without the parking, The Courtyard is out of compliance.

"There is no dispute," Craig said. "He just won't pay his bill."

Young calls the conflict "a donnybrook of magnanimous proportion."

Public officials have tried to help. They bagged 35 parking meters on nearby Cameron Avenue for Courtyard employees. The Orange County government has offered 60 nearby parking spaces for a low-cost lease, but only for valet parking.

Business leaders have intervened. The Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership even paid for legal mediation, to no avail.

Meanwhile, the impasse over parking is driving away customers.

The Town & Others  
Have Tried To Help

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Carrboro resident Jerry Levit, who spends nearly \$100 a month on wine, coffee beans and tea leaves at 3Cups, said there have been occasions when he abandoned a trip there when he couldn't find convenient parking.

"If I can't do it pretty quickly, I'll take another trip in a day or two," he said.

In October, Courtyard tenant Lex Alexander pleaded with the Town Council for more help.

Mayor Kevin Foy said the situation is beyond the Town Council. "This is the type of dispute that the Superior Court would handle," he said.

### E-mail arsenal

Feuds With Everyone

A longtime New Yorker, Young worked on Wall Street for Morgan Stanley and bought an East Durham strip mall about the time his oldest son enrolled at Duke in 2004. In 2005, Young moved to Chapel Hill and bought The Courtyard for \$3 million.

Over the course of their two-year battle, Young has blamed Craig for a sewer backup that flooded the former Stock Exchange clothing store, charging him and others with sabotage. He has accused Alexander of staging burglaries and threatened to break his nose. He has demanded the resignation of town development coordinator Gene Poveromo and vowed to sue him for conspiracy. He has threatened similar actions against building inspector Maggie Bowers.

Civic and business leaders have read about the matter in Young's "communiques," or e-mail messages "of utmost gravitas." His characters include slumlords, deadbeat tenants, drug dealers, global finance agents, incompetent plumbers and "scurrilous" newspaper reporters -- all based on real people to whom he gives nicknames such as "Pernicius Hector" or the "Accidental Amish Woman," along with Young himself, "The Anti-Bully."

"Despite the ... feckless parasitic attempts by such Scum Droppers as P.H. Craig ... to undermine the vision contemplated for The Courtyard of Chapel Hill, I and many others will ABSOLUTELY GUARANTEE ITS RESOUNDING SUCCESS," Young wrote in one communique.

Craig has responded publicly with only an occasional formal news release defending his position. "The problem is not with town building inspectors and town planners, which he blames, but with himself," Craig wrote in his most recent news release.

Young has banned Craig from Courtyard property. Neither speaks to the other.

Craig's friend Bob Page acknowledges that both men are strong-willed, but he thinks they could work a deal if Young would come to the table.

"Maybe there's a difference between the way the people from the New York area do business and the way people from the South do business," Page said. "Once they got sort of ticked off at each other ... they just haven't talked anymore."

(News researcher Brooke Cain contributed to this report.)

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