

CHEYENNE APARTMENTS

Tenants, kids, vandals blamed for the mess

A Free Press reporter and photographer toured common areas at the Cheyenne Apartments with owner Elijah Elieff on Wednesday. Following are observations of property conditions and his explanations:

By Greg Van Moorzel
The London Free Press

Outdoors: Yard dirt-bare between buildings, pockmarked by large holes; parking lot unpaved with deep potholes; sidewalks crumbled or missing; boundary fence falling apart; garbage strewn across lawn.

Elieff blamed "lazy" children for the garbage and said the crumbled sidewalk, broken fence and dirt yard — he doesn't provide a playground — are their work as well. He was filling a huge pothole in the parking lot with bits of crumbled concrete taken from elsewhere on the site.

Laundry facilities: Two coin-operated washing machines serving one building were inoperable, their water hoses cut and coin-boxes missing. One machine had cobwebs inside.

Elieff said vandals destroyed the machines but he plans to buy replacements.

Halls, stairways and entrances: Outside doors unlocked; tiled floors in some landings water-stained and lifting; overhead lights missing in places; ceilings bowed by moisture; paint chipped or peeling in sections; some stairway windows replaced by thin plastic; graffiti on some walls; garbage and lawn debris in entrances.

Vandals — tenants, their friends, "someone from the street" constantly break windows, steal lights and write on walls, Elieff said. He complained that he painted common areas in one building earlier this year only to have the job spoiled weeks later by destructive tenants. Extra improvements, including security doors at entrances, aren't needed, he said. "Again, you're asking me to spend money, all this money."

Elieff said the buildings get a once-weekly "general cleaning" in common areas, but tenants wouldn't appreciate anything more. "Do you keep this kind of garbage in your home? I think not. So, these are (a) different kind of people than you or I are."



Free Press file photo

Elijah Elieff says to a reporter about areas needing improving: "Again, you're asking me to spend money, all this money."

THE CHEYENNE APARTMENTS

What: Two problem-plagued 20-unit apartment buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. in London, home to many recent immigrants from Cambodia and Vietnam.

Owner: Elieff Investments Ltd., a holding company for Elijah Elieff of London, who bought the property five years ago. He also owns the Richmond Subs restaurant at 398½ Richmond St.

Problems: The apartments have a history of complaints ranging from bugs to broken plumbing and general disrepair. Records from the Middlesex-London health unit show 24 complaints between August, 1988, and September, 1989. Last month, health officials ordered the buildings evacuated to spray for cockroaches.

Charges: Elieff has been convicted twice in the last year for not complying with 1987 city orders to bring his buildings in line with London's property standards bylaw. He paid a \$1,000 fine on the first conviction, in December, 1988, but has vowed not to pay a \$6,000 court fine levied earlier this week. The work orders remain in effect.

Next steps: City and public health inspectors will tour Elieff's buildings Monday to prepare for a property standards hearing the next day, after which new repair orders may be issued.

THE WEEK THAT WAS

Monday: Elieff Investments Ltd., owner Elijah Elieff's holding company, is found guilty on two counts of not completing 1987 city-ordered repairs to buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. The firm is fined \$6,000.

Tuesday: Elieff says he won't pay the fine, largely blaming his tenants — mainly Asian immigrants — for the condition of the property. "They're like little pigs. They think they're still living in the jungle."

Wednesday: Church and community leaders join tenants outraged by Elieff's remark to organize an official protest with Ward 3 Aldermen Pat O'Brien and Bernie MacDonald, whose ward includes Elieff's property.

Thursday: About 50 protesters — tenants and supporters — demonstrate outside Elieff's Richmond Subs restaurant on Richmond Street, followed by a city hall conference to denounce his remarks. Organizers to ask London's race relations advisory committee to investigate whether Elieff has violated the Ontario Human Rights Act.

Building fixtures: Lack fixtures common in many apartment blocks, such as bright entrance lights and interior garbage chutes, but there are emergency hallway lights and fire extinguishers — items required by law.

Elieff said he fights a constant battle to keep the extinguishers in their hallway holders and emergency lights in place. "They're not coming from the sky. I've always got to pay" to replace stolen fixtures.