

## **A Look at Sun Communities Through the Eyes of a Resident**

by Mike Whitty, Director of Mr. Mike's Neighborhood

As a 12 year resident, and Director of Mr. Mike's Neighborhood in Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park, Warren Michigan, I've had the opportunity to experience Sun Communities' culture through the eyes of a resident and my Organization. The views are entirely of my own experiences, but backed up by reviews from resident in their other facilities, as well as complaints from the Neighbors within my Community who come to me with their sad stories.

### **My First Experience with Sun**

I moved to Lafayette Place to take care of my mother who needed my help. They were generous enough to give me a dilapidated home for free which I was glad to fix up. Since the grass was basically dirt, I spent my own money to kill the grass, hire a rototiller, cut out the tree roots, and order two yards of dirt to plant seed. Since I'm old, I asked if they could provide someone to help me move the dirt. This is where I heard the response that many of my Neighbors have also heard, "that's not our responsibility." Then my mother died. I asked them if I could have a little time to try and sell her home, and their response was, "no, if you don't pay her rent (they wanted her money even after she died) we'll take her home." This was my first experience with the culture that Sun provides it's residents. And there are many, many more stories just like this within our Community. This is when I realized that all they care about is rent.

### **The Decision to Stay**

At this point, I was approaching 70, really loved this Community, and had no reason to leave. Since I made the commitment to spend my remaining years here, I started to do some research on what type of company Sun Communities was. I Googled "Sun Communities Complaints" and was totally aghast at the number of negative reviews from residents at their other facilities. And most of them revolved around Management, which I continue to call "systemic." I realized that the problems they were having in their other facilities, we were having at ours. Because I felt that somebody needed to stand up against Sun to protect not only our facility from becoming like the others, but also to support our Neighbors who were having the same issues with Sun, I created Mr. Mike's Neighborhood. Sun and their Park Management hated this decision right from the start, and that hatred continues to this day.

### **It Starts With Money**

I was President of a Sales and Management training company for over 25 years, so I understand the concept of profitability. Sun is a publicly-traded company, so they also understand needing to make a profit for their investors. And after studying them for over 12 years, this is by far their number one motivation, not taking care of their residents, but buying more properties and figuring out how to get even more money out of them. As with their other properties, Sun enjoys raising rents and eliminating amenities. If a resident is not on auto-pay, Sun will charge you for writing a check, using a credit or debit card, or having to resident leave the property to get a money order. If you don't cut your grass when they say, they'll charge you \$55 for having the lawn service cut it. When they send the letter informing us of a rent increase, they always say, "we're increasing your rent to help us provide more and better services." But when asked what services they

provide, they have no response because there are no additional services. Why couldn't these additional charges come out of the increase in rent? We have many Neighbors on Social Security and/or Government Assistance where every dollar above and beyond the money they receive is hard to let go. A raise of \$30 - \$50 per month puts many of our Neighbors at a hardship. But this is not Sun's concern. If they can't pay their rent, they'll feel comfortable evicting them and bringing in someone else to rent that place. And they always will.

### **Poor Management**

I actually think that Lafayette Place Mobile Home Park is a training facility for Managers. They don't install Managers who are resident-centric, who are comfortable handling difficult situations, who are mature in their actions, and who actually want to make our Community better. These attributes are not trained by Sun Communities. They may know how to move a home in and out, sell and lease a home, and take residents to court for eviction. But not one of them knew how to handle resident complaints successfully, make decisions on their own, and help those who needed help. They are also not proactive thinkers. When they make a decision, they don't consider what the repercussions may arise from those decisions.

Yet Sun will defend their Managers even if they have to lie because other than visiting our Community once or twice a month to check the numbers, they don't know what their Management is doing the rest of the time. And honestly, as long as the numbers align, I really don't think they care who they hurt, as long as they get their money or their pound of flesh.

### **Sun Doesn't Care About Loyalty**

You could live in our Community for over 30 years, pay your rent like clockwork, keep up your property and are good to your Neighbors. But the moment something goes wrong and you can't pay your rent on time, you're treated no differently than a criminal who skipped out in the middle of the night. No appreciation for your 30 years of loyalty, no consideration for your circumstance, they'll evict you and not lose a minute of sleep. I totally understood this when one Manager told me, "if we help one, then we have to help them all." So it's easier to not help anyone.

Now, in all fairness, we have residents who are just bad. They destroy their property, don't pay their rent, and abuse the privileges of living in our Community. Sun has every right to treat these people accordingly. The problem for me is, when it comes to rent, if you have an issue, you're treated like a criminal. They'd sooner pay their legal department to kick you out, then try to understand and help with your circumstance. That's the power they wield over you.

A Neighbor came up to me and said, "Mr. Mike, we got behind in our rent and wanted Sun's help with a little additional time to make it good, so we wanted to give them a partial payment this week, and the rest next week. Sun said, "we don't want a partial payment, we want it all or we'll take you to court." They wound up scraping up the rent before the court date, but instead of Sun cancelling the date, they took them to court anyway. The case was dismissed since they made restitution, but they were still liable for the court fees. This treatment is not an isolated incident.

### **Following-Up on Requests**

This is one of the biggest issues among Sun Communities residents. If a resident has a complaint, or a request for service or repairs, Management doesn't follow-up with it, especially if it's verbal. In our Community, we have a Communication Form the residents are supposed to use. If they inform them verbally and don't use the Form, when they call to complain, Sun uses this stock answer, "we don't have any documentation that shows you filed a request." And that's how they justify not doing their jobs.

### **The Less Work the Better**

We pay a lot of rent to live here. In fact, in our area we pay the highest rent of any Community in our area. So it stands to reason that we should expect more from Sun employees for our high rent, but instead we get less. I'm still not sure what requirements Sun uses to hire our staff, but we don't get the type of service we deserve. They feel comfortable closing the office as much as they like even if it hampers our Neighbors from doing business, or talking on their cell phones as they ride around in their golf carts while they waste several hours of time before the day is finished. But Sun doesn't know this because they are not here to see it, so the office can get away with anything they want.

As like other Sun properties, the Staff either won't answer the phone when a resident calls, or send it to voicemail. They know which numbers to avoid if they know a resident is calling to complain, so they'd rather not handle it. My phone number is one of them. So if they'll do it to me, they'll do it to anyone.

Sun actually puts a paragraph in their leases where the resident is responsible to change their own smoke detector batteries, ceiling light bulbs and furnace filters. But we have plenty of residents who are old, handicapped, and don't have anyone to rely on for help. They can't call the Management for help because, "it's not their responsibility." This is just one of the many reasons Mr. Mike's Neighborhood was created, to help those that need help, and to take care of our Seniors and Handicapped.

### **The Biggest Problem**

Sun Communities, as well as other mobile home park owners, are not affected by negative reviews. The reason? Most residents who decide to live in a mobile home community will not go to the internet to review a community before they decide to live there. So the negative reviews we read are from families that are already living in that community, and have experienced the Sun Culture. The Better Business Bureau is one of the sites where Sun Communities has someone who answers negative reviews. And the one thing that stands out is that Sun is never at fault. They will fabricate a response just to make the poster feel like they're wrong, or they'll outright lie. Even with my interactions with Sun's Vice Presidents, if I complain about Management, their response is, "that's your opinion." Because they refuse to read their reviews and admit these complaints are accurate. I mean, why would they?

### **Why Mr. Mike's Neighborhood?**

Half of our Community are home owners. Home owners cannot expect any help from Sun or Management. There are things that Neighbors who lease their homes cannot expect from Sun or Management. Mr. Mike's Neighborhood was started to assist our

Neighbors with all the issues Sun Communities refuses to help. Unfortunately Sun Communities would rather not have Mr. Mike's Neighborhood to contend with, since it would be a whole lot easier for them to continue to turn a blind eye, and not work to make our Community better, safer, and our Neighbors appreciated.