



Evicted: Ed's and Sunset mobile home park residents leave homes behind

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COLUMBIA — Luci Rios is 6 years old. She likes headstands. She won an award at school for running an entire lap.

On Wednesday evening, she unfolded a cardboard box in the middle of the road and jumped inside of it.

"It's a house!" she said.

She was joking. But at midnight Wednesday, her house might as well be a cardboard box.

Starting Thursday, Sunset Mobile Home Park at 4130 S. Lenoir St., where Rios lives, will become private property. So will Ed's, another trailer park nearby. The land is owned by a former resident, Ron Netemeyer, who wasn't that much older than Rios when he moved away years ago.

"Because of infrastructure problems, problems with the roads, certainly with water lines, we were operating at a loss," he said.

As a result, Netemeyer, who is now a lawyer and a managing partner at Whirlwind Properties LLC, decided to sell the land. The future of it is uncertain; a state review board rejected a plan to build a hospital on the property in July.

In the meantime, most residents of the trailer courts have already left, leaving behind a trash-strewn ghost town.

Jonny Goodman stood a few trailers away from Rios, next to his cousin and a 2-year-old pocket pit bull named Khia. Goodman said he was one of the people hired to clean up once everybody was gone, but he estimated there were at least a dozen families who had not left yet.

Goodman has a big job ahead of him: two mattresses lay by themselves in short grass. A plastic shelf missing its drawers rested on top of a pile of bulging trash bags. From a distance, a large teddy bear slumped against a porch could be mistaken for a person. Many trailers were abandoned by their owners, and insulation spilled out of holes like open wounds.

One trailer had the words "BellaVista" bolted onto it, an Italian phrase meaning "beautiful view."

Luci Rios' mother, Rosemarie Rios, watched her daughter turning cartwheels in the grass.

"Don't get too dang dirty because there ain't no shower," she said to Luci Rios, adding that the water had been turned off for the past two days. Their family will eventually move to another trailer park, but their spot isn't ready yet.

Netemeyer said water was turned off because of a combination of vandalism, a truck running over a shutoff valve and a plumber improperly fixing it, which led to water streaming across the road. He was unsure if the water was working again.

Rosemarie Rios said it was not.

"At least we know what it was like in the olden days with no water," she said.

Rios said she felt like the six months' notice residents had been given to evict was fair, and that Netemeyer had said that they could remain on the land until the weekend, if necessary. However, the loss of water and a rumor about impending loss of electricity made her feel like she was being treated like an "animal."

Maj. Tom Reddin, chief deputy of the Boone County Sheriff's Department, wrote in an email that there were no plans to have officers on the scene to assist with evictions.

"If someone remains after the closing of the parks tonight, the property owner will need ... a court order to evict someone," he wrote. "I checked with our civil process clerk and there are no pending eviction orders for either location."

On the other edge of the park from Luci Rios, Stephen Potter poured the contents of his kitchen drawers into trash bags. He owns the trailer, but he was leaving it behind.

"A home's a home ... it 'aint my home anymore, though," he said.

At midnight, his home will become a box of tin and wood. The pieces will likely be stripped apart and sold for scraps.

The teddy bear on the porch weighed 6 pounds. The shelf, 4. The mattresses were 50 pounds each. At midnight they will become 110 pounds of trash.

Netemeyer does not know what will happen with the land.

"What the future use is will be determined by the marketplace" he said, clarifying that he would be opposed to any use of the land "that would be offensive to our neighbors. I don't want to do anything disruptive or offensive to the property owners near us."

If anyone remains at midnight, they will no longer be residents. They will be trespassers.

Supervising editor is Katie Kull.