

Code: First few years of implementation will be spent educating public

Continued from page 1

"You're going to see a lot of landlords who are upset about the fact that this code went into effect. And they're going to raise their rents, and they're going to inform their tenants why they're raising their rents," Straub said.

Keystone Real Estate broker Susan Rasmussen said her company plans to pass the cost on to the tenants.

"We're just going to bill the tenants," she said. Each tenant in a Keystone unit will receive an annual bill for \$15, which will cover the fee itself and cost of collecting it, as well as a letter explaining the fee.

"They're building it into their rents," Rasmussen said. "Any landlord who says they're not is lying to you."

While the new code may affect rents, some doubt it will actually affect housing conditions.

"I don't think this is going to change things necessarily in the local market," said Straub. "We strongly suspect the landlords in our group are already meeting the

habitability requirements."

Straub says the new code closely mirrors the protections already offered to tenants under Oregon's Landlord-Tenant Act.

"This is going to make it harder for tenants to get it fixed than what already existed," Rasmussen said.

She says fixing habitability concerns is "very simple" because Oregon law allows a tenant facing habitability issues to send a letter to the landlord that says that unless the landlord fixes the problem, the tenant can have the problem fixed and withhold the costs from rent payments.

Brett Rowlett of the Eugene Citizens for Housing Standards, who helped advocate for the new code, said the existing protections were inadequate because they required a tenant to take a landlord to court in order to enforce them. This makes it difficult for those with limited resources, such as students, to take action, he said.

Rasmussen said taking a landlord to court is not necessary under the existing protections.

"They just withhold it from the

rent and fix the problem," Rasmussen said. "And it's illegal for the landlord to retaliate or kick them out."

Rasmussen said the only reason to have a new housing code is to provide more jobs for city employees.

"The good landlords don't need it and the bad landlords — there's nothing you can do to make them stop," she said. "We're just creating another level of bureaucracy."

The Rental Owners Association has sought to educate its 830 members on what the new code will mean for their business, Straub said.

Through informational seminars and meetings, its newsletter and a hotline for questions, the Rental Owners Association has tried to disseminate information to its members regarding the new code.

"Our whole goal and intent is to have the most informed, the most knowledgeable and hopefully most law abiding landlords," Straub said.

Also, the Rental Owners Association was involved in hiring the new supervisor who will oversee the rental housing code enforcement.

"While the Rental Owners Association did not support the housing code, the City of Eugene has been literally bending over backward to answer our questions," said Straub. "They've gone way beyond the call."

City planning official Stuart Ramsing spoke at the Rental Owners Association's general membership meeting last week in order to help landlords understand the new code.

"I tried to give them an overview of the new code and let them know there won't be any surprises," Ramsing said.

Ramsing says three new positions have been created in order to enforce and administer the code. These employees will also be working on other housing-related projects, not just enforcing the new code. They will keep records of how much time they spend working on housing code enforcement and how much time they spend working on other tasks.

For the work they do that is not related to the new housing code, they will be paid out of a separate fund

that is not funded by the \$10 per unit annual fee.

The system is complaint-based, which means the inspectors will not be looking for violations. Rather, they will respond to complaints made by tenants who have been unable to resolve problems by writing to their landlords.

In the early years of the program, Ramsing says he expects the office to primarily handle the dispensing information to tenants and landlords about the new code.

He said he expects between 10 and 30 cases to reach the point where an investigation is necessary.

Ramsing declined to comment on whether the bureaucracy was redundant, saying the policy decision was made back in November and the city's job now is to implement the new system as effectively as possible.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Rental Owners Association: 485-7368
Housing Code Information: 682-8282

Fischer: Joining U.S. Marines just another experience to add to his collection

Continued from page 4

"I thought it was going to land right on top of us."

The rocket landed 100 yards away, but the fear that it sparked on the base was permanent, Fischer said. From that point on he realized that the hardest part about war, and what he considers the most deserving of respect, is performing a task under conditions of possible death.

The combination of an adventurous spirit and love for traveling motivated Fischer to enlist in the Marines. At 15, he spent a year in Argentina as an exchange student. For the first two months he was in a Spanish-speaking only classroom. It was not long before he found more pleasure in traveling the country with his friend and meeting new people, which they did for the remaining 10 months.

After graduating from Woodburn high school, Fischer spent a year in

Colorado as a dogsled tour guide. Next he went to Salem to work as a lobbyist assistant for a session, and then to Greece for three months to repair yachts.

"I like to collect experiences," Fischer said.

Fischer spent a year at the University before he decided to join the military. Adventure and travel were appealing and Fischer reasoned that he would still be young enough to come back and finish college when his contract was fulfilled, so he signed on in December, 2003.

After boot camp in San Diego, Fischer received specialized training from the School of Infantry in rifle handling, assault techniques and urban combat. He then joined his fleet at Twenty-Nine Palms, just outside of Palm Springs, and trained for four months in specialized infantry assault, desert combat and warfare training.

Nearly all of the Marines in Twenty-Nine Palms were sent to Iraq. Fischer's fleet arrived in al-Qaim, a city bordering Syria northwest of Baghdad. While al-Qaim does not share the violent reputation of Baghdad or Fallujah, guarding the Syrian border is far from uneventful.

Night raids are one example of the type of task that is both repetitious and life threatening for

"I am the last person my friends thought would join the military."

JOHN FISCHER | U.S. Marine Corps

Marines. Luckily, the U.S. Marine Corps keeps Fischer and his fleet from excessively dangerous situations by going after insurgent targets at night when they are asleep. Fischer said that he was pumping with adrenaline during his first

couple night raids, but that "they went so fast and smoothly" that it became like second nature.

"We get 'em at night to reduce soldier casualties," Fischer said. He said, explaining that even in a perfectly executed raid during the daylight, 75 percent of the soldiers will be wounded.

"We're just doing a job they gave us," Fischer said, "and we do it well." He added that his unit captured about 65 percent of its targets.

Fischer admits, however, that he does not know if he fully supports the cause. "Every target captured seems to be replaced by two new ones," he said, "(and) there's nothing over there that feels like freedom or democracy."

Fischer's best friend since second grade, J.P. Elias, said that he was not excited about his friend's decision to enlist in the Marine Corps. A 23-year-old senior at the University,

Elias said he does not support the war effort in Iraq. Having been friends for 15 years, Elias said he supports Fischer as his friend, but he is not any more supportive of the cause.

"Plus, I know that he wouldn't put himself in any stupid situations," Elias said.

Fischer said he expected his friends and family to be somewhat opposed to his decision.

"I am the last person my friends thought would join the military," he said. But regardless of whether they agreed with the cause, "they all supported me."

With encouragement and support from friends and family, Lance Cpl. John Fischer will head back to Iraq in January, 2006 to complete the remaining two and a half years of his contract with the U. S. Marine Corps.

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