

Civic leaders praise new owners' efforts to renovate Terrell apartment complex

BY GARY E. LINDSLEY

If it had been up to Terrell Police Chief Jody L. Lay, the apartment complex next to the post office off State Highway 34 would have been razed.

Since a new owner acquired the complex, Lay has changed his mind.

He and Terrell City Manager Torry Edwards are pleased with the turnaround at Brownstone Apartment Homes.

"I was the biggest advocate of razing this place to ground

level before the current owner came in and began to work," Lay said. "The property stood as a symbol of lawlessness, stemming back to 1980 when Terrell police officer Robert Stout was murdered there.

"For that reason alone, I was convinced this place could never recover," he said. "However, all the physical changes in appearance, as well as the quality control measures they have put in place, have seriously turned around the impression of the place."

Melissa Reeves, who manages the apartment complex

for Greensboro, N.C.-based property management company Sunchase American, said about \$1 million has been put into the 107-unit facility.

Reeves said owner Avid Acquisitions has made drastic changes at the apartment complex.

"The conditions were poor," she said. "There was significant wear and tear. It's an older property, obviously."

Texas-based Avid Acquisitions, according to its website, acquired the

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The Terrell

Melissa Reeves, manager of Brownstone Apartment Homes, shows the inside of one of the apartments at Adelaide Street and State Highway 34.

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property in September 2011.

"The crime rate [before being sold] was very high," Reeves said.

In 2011, she said, there were six bodily injury calls versus none since January. There were 33 disorderly conduct calls in 2011 versus two since January. And there were two drug violations in 2011 compared to none since January.

"All of the units have been completely renovated," Reeves said.

Renovations include correcting plumbing issues, water damage, leaks and pest infestation. There also were some units which were not level.

"We have re-leveled buildings," she said. "All those issues have been taken care of."

Windows and glass also have been replaced.

"The owner has paid attention to every detail," Reeves said.

One of those details was closet doors. Before Avid Acquisitions bought the property, the apartments never had closet doors. Now they do.

"Something as simple as that," she said. "The renovations are so extensive it is hard to put into words."

Once the apartment complex was sold, it was cleaned out and now is about 30 percent occupied.

"There were a lot of violations," Reeves said. "People were living here who were not supposed to be here."

What really grabbed Lay's attention was the 50-camera security system. The system can be accessed remotely via the Internet, even by the police department.

"Their video surveillance system is nothing short of the best we have in the entire city of Terrell," Lay said. "In short, I love it."

He said his officers have

been conducting surprise nighttime walk-through visits at the complex as well.

"The cops have nothing but good things to say about the property," Lay said. "I'm very pleased with the owner's progress."

He recently walked through the apartment complex and was not only impressed with the attention to detail regarding safety measures, including plantings in breezeways, but also the amount of money that has been spent.

"Additionally, I met and talked with the Kaufman sheriff's office deputy who lives out there at the complex," Lay said. "The deputy is a young guy and says things are going really well."

"Hiring that police officer to provide security in there was not only a masterful touch, but nothing short of a miracle," he said. "I never thought they would be able to convince a cop to live there, but they did it. I'm sure the only way they pulled it off was due to the comprehensive changes made in that complex."

Edwards also praised the changes.

"Council member [D.J.] Ory and I toured the facility today and we were very pleased," he said.

Edwards also said the criminal element had been eliminated so the complex is sustainable and livable.

Brownstone, he said, is a shining example of how to turn around an apartment complex.

Like Lay, he also commended using natural plantings for crime prevention.

"Those breezeways are a lot safer," Edwards said. "It's a great example of redevelopment. It's refreshing."

Sim Green, operations vice president of Avid Acquisitions, said he learned about the property and was determined to turn it around, especially since most everyone else deemed it a loss.

"The city had every right to close it down and condemn it," Green said. "There was no doubt in my mind it could be turned around. To me, it was a way to give back to society."

Installing a security system, he said, was paramount.

"It never was an option not to have it," Green said.

He also had the back gate fixed and hired a security officer.

"We strive to create communities that are clean and that are safe," Green said.

Turning the apartment complex around, he said, could not have been done without the city's backing.

"Although the owner still has some minor things to do out there, such as replacing tatty-looking playground equipment, they have completely turned that place around," Lay said.



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