

Rough to Refined



Staff photos by Jonathan Wells

The Madison Court Apartments are garden-style units located in Monroe Township.

Apartment complex earns recognition for transformation

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The owner of a Williamstown apartment complex earned recognition from Monroe Township for the transformation of Madison Court Apartments from unkempt to upstanding.

In 2003, Jack Leonard bought Madison Court Apartments and Madison Plaza retail center on the Black Horse Pike, knowing it was more than 'a fixer-upper.' The previous landlord of the apartment complex left the property mismanaged, and with an estimated 25-year bad rapport with the Monroe Township Police Department, the township's Mayor Michael Gabbianelli said.

"They had a severe drug problem," Gabbianelli, also a former police officer for the township, said. "That was my assignment at one point. They had a cop there to babysit."

According to Monroe Township Police Captain Richard Livingston, the complex was a cesspool, falling apart with some tenants living by their own unlawful rules.

"There was the whole gambit of crimes and calls," Livingston said. "We were constantly having to respond to that area."

Strong-arm robberies and drugs were prevalent in the complex, according to Gabbianelli, but with Leonard's initiative and owner-operated business approach, unlawful tenants were forced out, and families were once again welcomed.

"Basically, when we bought it, we knew it was a rough property," Leonard said. "It was full of people who just didn't respect the property



Frank Amador checks a ceiling fan in an apartment undergoing renovations at Madison Court Apartments.

or their neighbors."

With the township's help in pushing Leonard's building requests to the front of their planning and zoning

lines, Leonard was able to quickly complete \$750,000 worth of renovations to the property including Verizon Fios, a playground, park benches, lighting, new laundry facilities, and other in-unit amenities.

"The first thing we did was start eviction proceedings, and we got rid of over 40 tenants," Leonard said.

To whittle them down to respectful tenants, strict criminal and credit checks were performed on residents within two years after the purchase.

"(The previous landlord) was more interested in filling it, than the type of qualified people," Leonard said. "Because of our criteria, we are only accepting three out of every 10 applicants."

According to eight-year resident Jacqueline Paradise who lived in Madison Court through its restoration, the management is more strict, and the neighborhood is just — nicer.

"If there are any trouble makers, they evict them. They are stricter," she said. "It seems a lot quieter now than it was five years ago."

A neighborhood crime watch is in place that meets four times a year, and hosts annual events like barbecues.

"The residents care now," which Leonard said makes all the difference. "Good residents make a good community."

Monroe Township will present the Leonard with a proclamation, Saturday at Madison Court's Family Fun-Fest, recognizing the restoration of the apartment community and adjacent shopping center to a high-standard, family-friendly community.

"This guy did do a good job as far as cleaning it up," Gabbianelli said. "You have to give it to him."