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BREAKING TOP STORY

COURT

Lawsuit: Sterling Renaissance Festival owner demanded sex for lower rent

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Deposit Photos

A lawsuit filed in federal court Tuesday accuses the owner of the Sterling Renaissance Festival of demanding sex in exchange for lower rent at residential properties he owns in Oswego.

Douglas Waterbury, who owns approximately 50 properties in the Oswego area through Ontario Realty, sexually harassed and engaged in unwanted sexual conduct with several female tenants since at least 2012, according to the suit. It was filed by the nonprofit organization CNY Fair Housing and six women, ages 24 to 32, who claim to have been harassed by Waterbury.



Weekday top 5: Ex-Auburn cop appears in court, Cayuga County stabbing, Sterling festival owner sued

CNY Fair Housing provided The Citizen a copy of the suit with the six women's names redacted. The nonprofit investigated the allegations against Waterbury for several months, it said in a news release. It brought the suit under the Fair Housing Act, which protects renters from discriminatory practices based on their gender.



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DOJ sues Sterling Renaissance Festival owner for sexual harassment

"These allegations are obviously incredibly disturbing. No woman should have to be subjected to sexual harassment, especially at their home, the place where they should feel their safest," CNY Fair Housing Executive Director Sally Santangelo said in the release.

Waterbury did not respond to a request for comment.

The suit summarizes Waterbury's alleged M.O.: The landlord invites women to meet him at properties they're interested in renting, and often encourages them to come alone. He then offers a rental price higher than advertised or higher than comparable properties. If the woman says she can't afford it, or otherwise expresses desperation about her housing situation, Waterbury then says he would be willing to lower the price in exchange for "sexual favors," the lawsuit says. In one instance, it continues, he blocked the door until the renter complied with his demand for oral sex.

The suit says that women who reject Waterbury's "trades" are repeatedly propositioned in an effort to change their minds, hit with additional fees or left unable to rent from him.

"These women are at a disadvantage in their search for housing, as Defendants own a substantial portion of the limited low-rent housing in the area," the suit says.

One plaintiff said her boyfriend called Waterbury about an advertised property, and was told it was unavailable. When she called minutes later, Waterbury told her he had several properties available, and reiterated a previous request for "sexual favors" from her. When the plaintiff said her boyfriend would handle the transaction, Waterbury insisted she meet him alone.

Women who do acquiesce to Waterbury are subjected to ongoing sexual harassment, the suit continues.

Two cohabiting plaintiffs say Waterbury called them or visited their property against their wishes to demand sex, and used his landlord key to enter without permission. He also makes his willingness to perform maintenance tasks contingent on sex. The two plaintiffs, whose home had a broken furnace and a mice infestation, say that when they asked Waterbury to address the problems, they were told that they "were not as 'fun' as he wanted them to be, that they were not having sex with him as frequently as he

wanted, and that they should not use protection," the lawsuit says.

The two plaintiffs say in the suit that they were required to perform sexual acts with Waterbury more than 15 times each.

No one from the Oswego Police Department familiar with the suit was available for comment Tuesday evening. Chief Tory DeCaire told Syracuse.com that the office has received at least one report from a victim "alleging inappropriate or suspicious activity involving a local landlord." DeCaire did not comment further, saying the department is still investigating.

Waterbury purchased the Sterling Renaissance Festival in 2008. Along with that and his Oswego properties, he also owns Sylvan Beach Amusement Park and Santa's Workshop near Lake Placid.

His ownership of the Sterling festival has been dogged by financial difficulties. Its payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement with Cayuga County was dropped by the Industrial Development Agency in 2012 due to delinquent payments. In 2014, the festival started a crowdfunding campaign to cover a \$300,000 shortfall weeks before its July opening; it covered the gap when Waterbury secured a \$285,000 bank loan, he said at the time. Later that year, the county initiated foreclosure proceedings against Waterbury due to tax debt; he paid it months later, stopping the proceedings.

In fall of 2015, Waterbury cancelled the festival's Halloween attraction, Halloweekends (formerly Screamers' Hollow). The festival concludes its 41st season Sunday, Aug. 13.

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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK
Syracuse Division

CNY Fair Housing, Inc.,
[REDACTED], and
[REDACTED]
Plaintiffs,

v.

Douglas Waterbury, E&A Management,
Co., and Ontario Realty, Inc.
Defendants.

Civil Action No.
**COMPLAINT
JURY TRIAL DEMANDED**

NATURE OF ACTION

1. Plaintiff CNY Fair Housing, Inc. ("CNY Fair Housing"), along with Individual Plaintiffs ██████████ ██████████ ██████████ ██████████ ██████████ and ██████████ (collectively "Plaintiffs"), bring this action for declaratory, injunctive, and monetary relief against an Oswego-area landlord, Douglas Waterbury, and his corporate realty entities, E&A Management, Co. and Ontario Realty, Inc. (collectively "Defendants"), for discrimination on the basis of sex in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act ("FHA"), 42 U.S.C. § 3601, *et seq.* and the New York State Human Rights Law, New York Executive Law § 290, *et seq.*

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