

Tremont tenants notch a victory as judge names administrator for neglected bldg.

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Monday, February 9th 2009, 12:41 AM

Residents of a notoriously neglected Bronx apartment building have finally evicted their landlord.

About two dozen tenants left Bronx Housing Court victorious last Wednesday, relieved that years of living with collapsed ceilings, lack of heat and hot water, widespread mold and rodent infestations should end after a judge appointed an administrator to take over care of the building.

"We came back to the building screaming and shouting, 'We won! We won!'" said LaTovia Dukes, a tenant at 808-806 E.175th St. in Tremont.

Dukes said she hopes that her three young asthmatic sons will breathe easier with the removal of mold in her apartment, caused by constantly leaking pipes.

Rafael Lara, the court-appointed administrator, will begin assessing the building's needs this week and will serve as landlord.

He will use rent money and a \$175,000 bond forfeited by the landlord to restore the buildings, which he said will take months.

In October, Ocelot Properties, the titleholder of the adjoined buildings, agreed in a settlement to make 269 emergency repairs in one month for violations determined to be life-threatening by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

Since then, many of the repairs were not completed or were improperly done, said tenants of the 43-unit, five-floor walkup near Crotona Park.

Ocelot also was accountable for nearly 1,000 less harmful violations.

Things got worse for the residents in early January when oil deliveries were discontinued because the landlord owed money to several oil suppliers.

Ocelot transferred management responsibilities to Hunter Property Management, a part of DDF Bronx Portfolio LLC, which signed a contract of sale with Ocelot for 22 Bronx properties, including 808-806 E. 175th St., although the deed has not been transferred, according to the tenants' attorney, Garrett Wright of the Urban Justice Center.

Wright said he believes Ocelot is basically defunct and said no one has been able to locate its principal owners, who moved out of their Manhattan office.

Tenants in other Hunter-managed buildings reported similar abandonment of responsibilities.

Alice Phillips Belmonte, an attorney for Hunter Properties who appeared on their behalf in court, declined to comment on the turnover or the status of the other properties.