

William Stamper and a visitor, Claudine Trout, have a bird's-eye view of the Tazewell Avenue Southeast neighborhood he's lived in for 51 years. "It's a mess," said Stamper, a retired Roanoke City Mills worker. "When I moved here, people had bought places and kept them up. People kept their grass mowed. They died out."

## Tazewell Avenue: From thriving to decaying

Story by S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS

THE ROANOKE TIMES

From his front porch on the hilltop of the 700 block of Tazewell Avenue, William P. Stamper can see rows of empty houses where railroad and mill workers once lived.

Stamper, a retired full mill foreman who has lived here for 52 years, peers along sidewalks now overgrown with weeds and littered with burger wrappers and broken beer bottles.

"I've seen it all. Lordy, Lordy," he said, a cigarette in his hand and his asthma inhalant on the rail in front of him.

"I've never seen a place change as much as Tazewell. It was one of the nicest places to live. But in the last 25 years . . ."

His voice trailed off, as if he were wondering where to start.

Tazewell Avenue and the Belmont neighborhood boomed into existence around the turn of the century — after the Norfolk and Western Railway and American Vacuum Corp., a rayon mill, drew thousands of blue-collar workers into Roanoke.

Tazewell was close to the rayon plant and railroad yard — not prime real estate, but ideal for those who toiled at those places. They were used to the soot and smells.

The Roanoke Land & Development Co. subdivided the land into 25- to 50-foot lots. Speculators built rows of bungalow and smaller versions of the foursquare wood-frame houses found across town where the railroad and mill managers lived.

"We didn't have any rich people over there. Everybody worked, made their own money," said Marie Hazelwood, who was born in Belmont in 1923. Her family lived in a rented

### OUR SERIES

**1** The lines of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profiles of historic Day, Gilmer and Stone's avenues. The plight of vacant houses.

**2** The business of landlording and some of the people who are in it.

**3** What other cities do about decaying neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

duplex on Fourth Street Southeast, one block from Tazewell.

Her father was a painter for NW until a strike in 1917; he later started his own painting business. Her mother, who died in 1958, never worked outside the home.

The lower blocks of Tazewell were thriving in Hazelwood's younger days, and she can still remember the businesses in the neighborhood.

Around the corner from Hazelwood were Aladdin Cleaners and an Esso service station "run by Mr. Dorsey," Hazelwood said. His wife was a teacher at Jefferson High School.

Further down the street was Tazewell Pharmacy, where Hazelwood's brother, Andrew, worked.

"We bought my mother's medicine at that drugstore," she said.



## THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

PLEASE SEE TAZEWELL.44

It's too early to speculate on causes

## Pané crash touches 3 area families

The shattered Cessna 210 spread over a hillside in Elliston carried three men to their deaths.

By MATT CHITTON and LUCAS WALL  
THE PHOENIX TIMES

Norma Wells waited and waited at Roanoke Regional Airport Tuesday evening.

Her husband, Cliff, should have been back already. She had dropped him off for an hour of flight training to keep his pilot's license up to date. Then she did her shopping and came back to the airport.

She waited an hour, and another hour. Still, he did not return. An airport official confirmed the first of what must have been a list of fears. A small plane had crashed somewhere near the Roanoke County-Montgomery County line.

David Smith was supposed to pick up his grandmother Tuesday evening for dinner, when she called the news. Smith's father, Randy, had heard of the crash earlier, but he dismissed the news. There was no way his 22-year-old son David, a trained flight instructor with Hillman Aviation, would have gone up in such a soupy condition, he figured.

Nora Sprinkle heard that news, too. But someone said the plane that crashed wasn't a Hillman Aviation plane, so she rested easy. Her 23-year-old grandson, Timmy Sprinkle, who worked for Hillman, must be safe, she assumed.

But by late Tuesday, all of their hopes and assumptions were laid waste. The shattered plane

spread over a hillside in Elliston had carried all three of their loved ones to their deaths.

The crash of that one small plane touched the lives of three prominent families in two communities.

Wells is a founder and president of James River Limestone Co. in Buchanan. It was one of Botetourt County's favorite sons, known for his religious and charitable work in the area.

Sprinkle is the son of Ray Sprinkle, a well-known Botetourt County developer and 21-year School Board member whose family ran one of the biggest orchards in the county.

Smith's father is Salem's City Manager.

Randy Smith.

Wells, 70, had been a licensed pilot since 1952, said Roger Wells, one of his two sons. He was certified to fly in "instrument conditions" — visibility so low it forces pilots to fly by their gauges. But he had to log hours with a

PLEASE SEE PLAN.46

## Court examines civil rights law Brzonkala case might set precedent for nation

Women's groups and legal scholars are watching closely to see what the federal appeals court does.

By JIM VERTEFILLO  
BRONKALE TIMES

RICHMOND — A law that makes gender-motivated crime a civil rights issue got its first review by a federal appeals court Wednesday, as a three-judge panel heard oral arguments in the case of a former Virginia Tech student who sued the school and two football players she says raped her on campus.

The judges grilled attorneys on both sides about whether Congress had the authority to pass the Violence Against Women Act, which created a federal law allowing victims of gender-motivated crimes to sue their attackers for damages.

The law was used by Christy Brzonkala when she sued the players, but it was ruled unconstitutional by U.S. District Judge RELEASEE SEE BRONKAL.48

## U.S. attorney seeks death penalty Prosecution describes suffering to McVeigh jury

In the final phase of the trial, victims recounted the horror of the bombing and its aftermath to jurors.

THE BOSTON GLOBE

DENVER — All day the suffering stacked up, from a rescue worker who held the hand of a woman as she died beneath the rubble to a 5-year-old boy who misses his grandfather so much that he asked his parents to crash their car so he "could be with

## Leisure activity grows with hectic pace, study says Feeling hectic? Relax, you've got lots of time

The controversial study says Americans have more free time than at any point in the past 30 years.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Hey! Yeah, you, running out the door, late for work, got to drop the kids off at school, pick up groceries, make dinner and clean the house.

Relax. You've got more free time than you think. Two acclaimed time-management experts studied the daily routines of 10,000 Americans during the past 30 years and

How the average American spends his or her free time each week:			
ACTIVITY	HOURS	ACTIVITY	HOURS
Watching television	15.8	Adult education	2.2
Socializing	6.7	Recreation, sports, outdoors	2.2
Talking on the phone, conversing with family members	4.4	Other organization	1.1
Reading	2.8	Cultural events	0.9
Volunteering	2.7	Religion	0.9
		Radio, recordings	0.4

came up with a controversial conclusion: The average American has more free time than at any point in the past three decades. John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey describe in their new book, "Time for Life," that in contrast to recent studies showing a decrease in free time, Americans enjoy an average of close to 40 hours of leisure a week — up from 35 hours in 1965.

"We knew people felt more rushed. We knew that stress levels seemed to be going up," said Godbey, a professor of leisure studies at Penn State University. "We thought more free time would slow down the pace of life, but what we're finding is free time is increasing as the pace of life increases."

The bad news is that all this lazy time is usually available in only short bursts scattered

PLEASE SEE LEISURE.46

# THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

## FROM A1 Tazewell

Across the tracks was a barber shop owned by "Mr. C.E. Galimere, who went to my church," she said.

Hazelwood used to walk two blocks to Clover Creamery — where Franklin Square is now — for ice cream. Up the street were Good's Grocery and the G.G. Board Plumbing & Heating Co. In the 1950s, a small shack — built into the side of a hill across from the city cemetery — housed a shoe repair shop. In the '60s, that shop became Lyle's Radio & Television Service.

William Stamper, who worked for 32 years at Roanoke City Mills and later worked with Wells Furniture, said most of his neighbors on the 700 block of Tazewell owned their homes when he moved there in 1945.

"Murphy was a brick mason," Stamper said pointing to a vacant house next door. A few doors down from Stamper lived a city fireman and a blacksmith. Across the street lived a barber and a fireman for the city street department.

"I could just tell you almost everybody up Tazewell Avenue," Stamper said. "We used to sit on the front porch and talk and mingle with the neighbors."

In the 1950s, the jobs that had been the foundation of the neighborhood started to disappear.

American Viscose Corp. closed its factory in 1958. Nearly

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them. If you have something you'd like to say call Inteline at 881-0100 or go to mailbox 7824. Our plan is to publish some comments during the course of our series. The Inteline team: Greg Powers, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods.

neighborhood grocer, closed his store in 1960.

Tazewell Avenue Methodist Church stopped growing as families left for the suburbs. In 1962, it moved to Salem. Most of the businesses along Tazewell have been demolished. The shack that used to house the TV repair shop is boarded shut. The plumbing business at the corner of Eighth and Tazewell has given way to a thrift store.

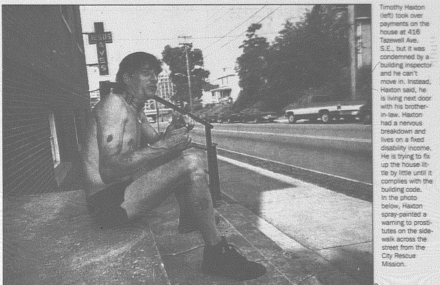
With property values depleted, some of the lowest rents in the city and no one willing to reinvest in the neighborhood, Tazewell Avenue became a magnet for the poor.

U.S. Census data from 1990 show that, in a 22-block area of Belmont including Tazewell, 47 percent of the children were living under the federal poverty level. The typical annual income was less than \$17,000; more than a third of the 185 households relied on less than \$10,000 a year.

The Rescue Mission bought the former Methodist church in 1966. Today, the mission shelters as many as 212 homeless men, women and children a night.

It has become an integral part of the Belmont neighborhood. Dozens of residents walk several blocks for a free hot meal there.

"This is the K&W of Southeast," mission supervisor Tim Mays jokes.



STEPHANIE HAZWOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Timothy Haxton (left) took over payments on the house at 418 Tazewell Ave. S.E., but it was condemned by a building inspector and he can't move in. Instead, Haxton said, he is living here until he has his brother-in-law, Haxton had a nervous breakdown and lives on a fixed disability income. He is trying to fix up the house little by little until it complies with the building code. In the photo below, Haxton spray-painted a warning to prostitutes on the sidewalk across the street from the City Rescue Mission.

## WHY IT MATTERS

*"Tazewell Avenue is literally 10 minutes away from South Roanoke. The town is so small, you just can't help being affected by all that. It affects the economic stability of the whole community. It increases the cost of fire and police and welfare. It's a deep and malignant social problem and Roanoke hasn't escaped it."*

WARNER DALHOUSIE

RETIRED CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF FIRST UNION NATIONAL BANK OF VIRGINIA



PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY HAZWOOD  
Andrew Hazelwood worked at the Tazewell Pharmacy at the corner of 13th Street and Tazewell Avenue Southeast during the 1930s.

the Rescue Mission's Joy Sylvester-Johnson said.

At the corner of Eighth and Tazewell, Jerry Gray's wife sometimes had to chase them from the sidewalk in front of her house. Timothy Haxton — who lives across from the Rescue Mission — handled it another way. He spray-painted "HOOKERS BEWARE: 911. WILL BE CALLED" on the sidewalks.

Residents and business owners put the blast on the prostitutes by calling the police.

In 1991, police logged 29 prostitution offenses within a two-block area of the first four blocks of Tazewell.

More than two-thirds of all prostitution offenses in the city happened there. There were 10 offenses in the area in 1996, but they constituted only 12 percent of the offenses city-wide.

Most of the prostitution had shifted to Southwest.

Today the biggest problem along Tazewell is public drunkenness, Curliue said. Police have recorded 204 drunk-in-public offenses in the first four blocks



STEPHANIE HAZWOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Ati Howell, 67, (right) sits on the porch of a Tazewell Avenue house with members of her extended family, who rented the house until moving out last summer. From left are Matt Gibson, 13, Ashley Draper, 5, Alza Draper, 9, Joyce Howell and Martin Gibson, 15, William Draper, 6, is in the background.

since 1992.

The drunks may live in rental houses in the Tazewell area, Sylvester-Johnson said. They may stay at the Rescue Mission. They may be squatting in vacant houses or living on the streets.

"It's their neighborhood, too," she said.

Enth Bernard has lived in a hilltop house across from the city cemetery since the mid-1960s, and she hopes to stay.

"I can walk to church, and I can walk to town," said Bernard.

who doesn't own a car.

"This is a convenient place," she said, unwinding in a porch chair after cutting her grass on a humid day. The steep hill makes for difficult mowing, especially maneuvering around the flower bed along a stone ledge. But the 71-year-old widow does not mind the work herself.

"I mow shallow, gray ashlike," Bernard said, blades of grass still clinging to her arms.

She lives there with her sister-in-law. Her husband died five years ago.

Living off Social Security and a small pension, Bernard can't afford to make repairs to her old house. The wooden gutters on her front porch roof have rotted, as have the porch columns and ceiling.

Her insurance provider canceled her homeowner's policy last fall. She and her husband had paid into the policy for 38 years. The insurance agent told her the slope of the house was too bad to insure, she said.

She could have tried to get insurance through another company. "With what income we had, we couldn't afford a higher premium," Bernard said. So she is risking it without insurance.

A city building inspector gave her a repair order in February. If she doesn't fix her porch roof and gutters by June 20, she can be taken to court.

A few houses in the neighborhood have been fired up or are being renovated by landlords. But just as many have been milked for income. They are maintained just enough to be rented legally. A combination of tenant abuse and landlord neglect often leads to eventual condemnation.

The boarded-up houses at 617 Tazewell have been a sore spot with a number of the street's residents — especially John Underwood, who lives next door.

The gray, shingle-sided house was rented as a duplex for years, then was turned into three apartments when Jack Richards and

Bill Emory bought it in the early 1980s.

Underwood said his family had to endure loud all-night parties, prostitution and drug dealing from the house.

Swen planters adorn Erith Bernard's porch overlooking Tazewell Avenue Southeast. The porch roof and gutters need to be fixed, but she can't afford the repairs, Bernard's insurance provider canceled her policy last fall.

Erith Bernard's porch overlooking Tazewell Avenue Southeast. The porch roof and gutters need to be fixed, but she can't afford the repairs, Bernard's insurance provider canceled her policy last fall.

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**A snapshot of the first four blocks of Tazewell Avenue:**

- More than half of its housing has been lost in the last 50 years
- 17% of houses have been cited for building code violations since 1985.
- Median assessed property value is \$13,100, compared with \$60,000 outside the urban core
- In the last 5 years, there have been:
  - 204 drunk in public offenses
  - 40 larcenies
  - 38 assaults
- In the neighborhood:
  - Median household income: **\$16,771**
  - 47% of children live below poverty level
  - 26% of the families are headed by female
  - 95% Black; 5% White

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990; City of Roanoke, 1996; Roanoke Area Office, 1996; Roanoke Area Office, 1996.

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PLEASE SEE TAZEWELL/AS



# THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

## FROM A4 Tazewell

Some of the tenants were good, he remembers. But they didn't stay long.

Dee Whitaker and her husband rented a two-bedroom apartment there in 1988. The place was crawling with roaches, said Whitaker. "One night I caught 12 mice. I had rats under my sink. It was a dump."

In 1990, building inspectors found 12 code violations in the house. The foundation, front and back porches, ceilings and walls needed repair, among other things. The house also was infested with bugs and rodents, the inspection sheet shows.

Emory and Richards split up their partnership, but Richards eventually made the repairs to the house.

Richards did not return phone calls to his home and rarely company.

But Emory says that many of the problems were caused by tenants they had to evict.

In 1994, a lender foreclosed on the house when Richards fled.

### WHO TO CALL

Need help? Information? Want to get involved?

- Richard Nichols, President, Southeast Action Forum, Home 962-2945
- Presbyterian Community Center, 962-2911
- Homeless Housing Department, 963-1208 or 953-2222
- Rozelle Neighborhood Partnership, 954-8250

will have suffered. Five Southeast churches formed a coalition with the Community Center last summer to help.

They offer classes on how to be good parents. They have started a family literacy program. They are working to make child care more affordable so low-income parents can work. And they are trying to recruit a sense of community.

But activism among residents along Tazewell is limited.

There is no neighborhood watch program. Yet, few from the neighborhood attend meetings of the Southeast Action Forum — a group of activists, mostly elderly, who live in the more stable areas of Southeast.

Yet, some of the struggling residents at Tazewell's future with optimism.

"Give this area five to 10 more years," says Timothy Haxton, who is trying to pay off a \$16,000 mortgage on 416 Tazewell, which sits across from the Rescue Mission. He works odd jobs, he said, but most of his income is from a disability check for a nervous breakdown he suffered a few years ago.

A building inspector had cited 416 Tazewell for 23 code violations when he took over the payments on the house. He can't live in the house, so he stays with his brother-in-law next door. He uses his funds for storage and he can bring it up to code.

Haxton, 39, says the neighborhood has improved since he moved there four years ago.

"Eventually, all this crap will get weeded out and become good," he says.

Other residents say an abundance of children has kept parts of the community alive.

After school, a lot of the children gather at the Salvation Army's community center on the corner of Eighth Street and Dale Avenue. There, they can play basketball or video games or shoot pool.

It keeps a lot of these kids off the road," said Tracy Delp, a mother of two.



STEPHANE KLEIN-BOIS / THE PHRYANNE TRIBUNE  
Carolyn Palmer and her spouse, Charlie, found a better life when they moved from a substandard rental house on nearby Dale Avenue Southeast into a renovated duplex owned by William Whitworth in the 700 block of Tazewell Avenue Southeast.

But for most folks along the lower end of Tazewell, there's not a lot of interaction like residents remember from the neighborhood's heyday.

Since his wife died in 1988, William Stamper doesn't get around to socialize with his neighbors much. That suits him just fine, and it may be one of the reasons he has stuck around the neighborhood.

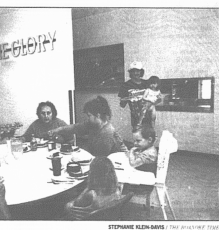
"I just like it here," he said. "I don't get involved much."

It turns out that Eric Bernard knows of William Stamper. But she was surprised when a reporter told her that he still lived right across the street from her.

"It's less neighborly," she admits.

S.D. Haxton can be reached at 963-2232 or shaxton@presnet.com

**Saturday Readers** have been reading to talk about what's happening in Rozelle's old downtown neighborhood. Saturday's installment of "The Invisible Inner City" will be in the next issue. **Saturday's** installment of "The Invisible Inner City" will be in the next issue. **Saturday's** installment of "The Invisible Inner City" will be in the next issue.



STEPHANE KLEIN-BOIS / THE PHRYANNE TRIBUNE  
Cecilia Summitt (center) eats lunch with her daughter, niece and grandchild, at the mission at least once a day. This is the K&W of Southeast, Tem Mays, the mission supervisor, said.

## ONLINE

"The Invisible Inner City" covers crime and drugs in the Rozelle's oldest neighborhoods" is on line at [www.roanoke.com/realities](http://www.roanoke.com/realities)

into financial troubles. Richards' son and nephew — Jack Richards Jr. and Taylor Stone — bought the house at a foreclosure auction for \$4,750.

They rented it out again. A little more than a year later, Underwood and his fiancée complained to city building inspectors and it was condemned.

Building inspector Dave Hatcher found a gaping hole in the foundation, crumbling walls and a broken pipe jutting from one wall.

Asked about the problems last spring, Stone hired his tenants. He and they trashed the apartment and broke into the other units when he tried to evict them.

Stone and Richards sold the house last summer, and it has changed ownership again since then. It's still vacant, but being renovated.

Negrofit groups such as the Presbyterian Community Center are fighting the problems that Southeast streets such as Taze-

## FROM A1 Brzonkala

Jackson Kiwer in Roanoke last year.

Kiwer dismissed Brzonkala's suit against Tech and the two students, and she appealed. She hopes to have her suit reinstated.

The issue of whether the rapes occurred as Brzonkala says "is not before the judges. For purposes of the appeal, they assumed that all her allegations were true."

Two issues were heard Wednesday in matters. Observers believe VAWA will be the next test of how far the Supreme Court meant its ruling to go.

The second issue is whether Kiwer was correct in dismissing Brzonkala's claims against Virginia Tech under Title IX, a federal education law that prohibits sex-based discrimination on the basis of sex.

A campus judicial panel found one of Brzonkala's players Brzonkala accused of raping her, James Crawford, not guilty.

The appellate judges expressed concern at how Tech handled the discipline proceedings for the other player, Tony Morrison. Morrison was found guilty of sexual assault by the panel. Tech was granted a second hearing after Tech determined that its sexual assault policy hadn't yet been distributed to students in September 1995, when

Brzonkala alleges the rapes occurred. Therefore, the school said, Morrison could not be found guilty.

In the second hearing, he was found guilty of abusive conduct. Both times, he was given a two-semester suspension, but the university proved ruled that too lenient, because his consent to attending a sensitivity class.

"And it's Virginia Tech's position that is an adequate response to a rape?" U.S. Circuit Judge Diana Motz asked Tech attorney Jay Heidreder.

Heidreder said the university believed punishment was sufficient, because his consent to attending the case as one of abusive conduct, not rape. The abusive conduct, the panel found, was Morrison's reported comment to Brzonkala after sex. "You better not have any f--- diseases."

Brzonkala says that she feared retribution if she reported the rapes. Crawford and they were allowed to remain on campus and the Tech failed to take prompt action in response to the sexually "hostile environment." She also says Tech discriminated against her in its "unfair and ineffective" judicial proceedings.

Michael Luttig said he believed Tech was protecting members of its championship football team during the proceedings.

"That's a compromise in America, and I don't doubt that it happened here," he said during his dissent. "They aren't that a hostile environment."

This is the first case in the country in which the Violence Against Women Act has been heard by an appellate court and is being closely watched by women's groups and legal scholars. Attorneys for advocacy groups on both

## Judges hear Violence Against Women Act debated

Congress found courts don't treat female victims fairly.

BY AN VERRELLI  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Wednesday's arguments before a federal appeals court in the case of Brzonkala rape case prompted friend-of-the-court briefs from a number of advocacy groups, both for and against the Violence Against Women Act of 1994.

The self-described women's groups filed briefs opposing the law.

One of them, the Women's Freedom Network, argues that even though most victims are female, the law isn't based on sufficient evidence that sexual and domestic violence is gender-based.

The group cites studies that found rapists are more likely to assault women because they are not as likely to be injured or have a lack of impulse control.

Morris argued the case instead of sides argued and Brzonkala's attorneys. A Justice Department attorney would be any limit to Congress on behalf of the 1994 civil rights law.

VAWA's constitutionality is being questioned in light of a 1995 Supreme Court decision curbing federal expansion of powers into local matters. Luttig repeatedly asked the attorneys whether there would be any limit to Congress' reach if the law making gender-motivated crime a civil rights issue is upheld. More crime is considered an issue for local and state lawmakers, with Congress regulating crimes considered federal under the Constitution.

"Why is [gender-motivated

Violence against women is a problem for local police, the group said, and does not call for federal intervention any more than random crime does."

In passing the Violence Against Women Act, Congress found that state courts have failed to treat female victims fairly, so a federal civil rights law was needed — just as it was when discrimination against blacks was ignored by state courts in the past.

Congress found it had the authority to do so under the constitutional clause that gives it power to regulate interstate commerce. Fear of crime keeps women from participating fully in the economy and thus affects interstate commerce, proponents of the law say.

The Women's Freedom Network argued in its brief that it is so-called "date rape" that feminists believe isn't treated seriously by the courts, while rapes by

strangers are. And it is the fear of stranger rape that keeps women from working late at night or venturing out by themselves in certain areas. That, the group said, undercuts the economic basis for the law.

"The Women's Freedom Network also opposes the Violence Against Women Act because we believe that the act perpetuates harmful stereotypes of men as brutal aggressors and women as passive victims."

Supporters of the law maintain that Congress also had the authority to pass it under the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection.

"The VAWA, in short, provides a federal forum that affords victims of gender-motivated violence, with a means of securing the vindication, unavailable in state courts," the Justice Department said.

Another brief supporting the law was filed by the groups.

Act provides federal money for local police departments to hire domestic violence and sexual assault officers, training for judges and court personnel on such cases, and money for better lighting around public transportation. It also set up a Violence Against Women office at the Justice Department and funds studies of women's issues in American courts.

Those sections of the law are not being contested, however. What is in dispute is the section that makes it a civil rights violation to commit a crime because of hostility toward the victim's gender. Only a handful of cases have been brought so far using the law.

including the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Jewish Women International, the Anti-Discrimination League and the Women's Legal Defense Fund.

"Just as it did in the context of Reconstruction-era civil rights laws, in the face of inadequate responses from state laws and legal systems, Congress here sought to remedy the devastating effect of bias-motivated violence," the brief says.

But the Independent Women's Forum, which describes itself as promoting "individual responsibility" and limited government, says Congress overstepped constitutional limits on its authority to regulate conduct of private citizens.

"The law, in effect, is unconstitutional, because it is a federal law that is not based on federal legislation."

Jan Verrelli can be reached at 961-3336 or jmv@verrelli.com

Wherever the appellate court decides in the Brzonkala case, it's only binding in the states in the 4th Circuit — Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina and West Virginia. And if the appellate courts around the country split in deciding whether the law is constitutional, it likely will have to be decided by the Supreme Court.

Crawford, one of the players Brzonkala said raped her, is awaiting trial in Montgomery County on an unrelated rape charge. Morrison was dismissed from the football team earlier this year.

Jan Verrelli can be reached at 961-3336 or jmv@verrelli.com

**THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY**  
A SPECIAL REPORT

# Readers respond to "The Invisible Inner City"

or five days this week, the conditions of Roanoke's old downtown neighborhoods were described in our series, "The Invisible Inner City."

Stories documented the growth of poverty, transience and housing deterioration in seven neighborhoods surrounding downtown and explained how they decline affects the region. Other articles profled Day, Gilmer and Tazewell areas.

We asked for reader response and heard from about 70 people from the Roanoke Valley, the New River Valley and Bedford and Botetourt counties. Some called with ideas for how to help the neighborhoods; some thought we were unfair in our depictions of these communities.

Most people expressed concern and outrage about what they learned in the series.

The series continues Sunday through Thursday with stories about rental housing in Roanoke's poorest neighborhoods and profiles of some of the people in the business.

Our series concludes the following week, June 15-22, with stories about things other cities are doing to transform their declining neighborhoods and about what Roanoke city government and neighborhood groups are doing.

Each day of the series, we'll be asking for your ideas and reactions. Here's some of what readers have had to say so far.

— MARY BISHOP AND S.D. HARRINGTON

● I feel that Virginia state law should be changed so that you pay a tax where you seek, and some whose income tax. This would put more money in the coffers of the city, because that's where the jobs are. They pay the police. They pay the fire protection. They have the traffic. That also affects the business people. This would also help by making other places want to put in places of employment.

● That in turn would draw some of the poor people into the other areas.

— JIMMY R. STEVENS, THURVILLE

● Years ago, there was an article in Reader's Digest about a town somewhere in the United States that started a reverse taxation program. As properties were newer and in good condition, they were assessed less, and as they became older and particularly dilapidated, the property taxes went up substantially, and this caused a great many people, particularly absentee landlords,

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them.

● If you have something you'd like to say about the "Invisible Inner City" or any of our series, please write to: **ROANOKE**, c/o **THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY**, P.O. Box 17824, Roanoke, VA 24017-0824.

to either demolish them or bring these properties back into the condition they should be.

— ALEX MARTIN, ROANOKE

● Programs to help rehabilitate housing, and help low-to-moderate-income individuals purchase homes through the City of Roanoke should have continuous supervision and follow-up.

The proposed solution is to use the city's employees. Roanoke already have weekly or monthly contact with properties — for example, water meter readers or sanitation or working class — and our police department.

— SUSAN BOTTENFIELD AND SHAROL STONEBURNER, ROANOKE

● I want to take Roanoke to this article that you got here, specifically to most of the renters are poor or working class. I don't understand what poor or working class has to do with each other. As a matter of fact, these are middle class means that you're speaking of were to be working-class people, as you call them.

— TODD MITCHELL, ROANOKE

● I believe when a city rents at the core, everybody suffers. . .

But my primary goal in calling was to maybe make a suggestion that when it would be worked out that people who own houses in that area of Roanoke could get structural help.

finances. . . I would like to see an ordinance that would give advantage to people who would come in and buy one of these homes, and clean them up.

— DORIS REIS

— ROSEMARY KLEIN EGGE, ROANOKE

● I had read something earlier about how some cities are doing something called Operation Bed. They are taking red paint and painting the owners' names on the houses and the decrepit houses — so it embarrasses the owners into fixing up the houses.

— KIM EUBANK, BUCHANAN

● The police tolerate prostitutes, drugs, and S&B. We have drunks running the streets freely. We have gangs of kids after midnight on Main Avenue. If we would use existing laws and a little effort from the police department to clean this up, it would be a great deal to increase the quality of life in this area. And that alone would do wonders for rehabilitating the area.

— BRENT MILLER, ROANOKE

● I think when neighborhoods begin to run down, the city should step in. They no longer clean the streets or trash bins in places they normally would. They don't enforce the laws. . . curfewing, curfewing, curfewing. I don't maintain sidewalks, they don't maintain the streets. The city actually helps these neighborhoods that are already on the skids, they help them slide further and further down.

— HAROLD BOWMAN, ROANOKE

● It's pretty obvious the problem lies on both sides — both the tenants and the landlord. On the tenants' side I see an abundance of ignorance of people sitting. I understand some of these people are disabled but I don't think it takes a whole lot of mental capacity to clean up a latrine. As far as the landlords go. . . I just find it hard to believe that some of these people can't afford to keep their rental properties a little better than they do based on their lifestyle and the standards of living that they enjoy.

— KAREN BARNHILL, ROANOKE COUNTY

● I'm highly ticked off about the Day Avenue story because all you put was the bad things. I don't put any of the good



The Belmont section of Southeast Roanoke as seen from Tazewell Avenue. Mill Mountain is in the background.



A child's bare feet hang off the slider at his grandmother's Day Avenue Southwest apartment.



A Gilmer Avenue Northeast house, in one family for more than 50 years, is now vacant and condemned, its yard strewn with litter.

things that anybody said. . . I think there needs to be an apology to the people that live on Day Avenue."

— BOBBIE OVERSTREET, ROANOKE

● I felt a little disturbed at the fact that the article's portrait of Day Avenue in a more negative way, to be full of trash, where I feel that a lot of us are doing a lot to clean up the neighborhood and make things try for everyone.

— LISE MARTIN, ROANOKE

● If the tenants don't want to keep a clean house or a clean yard, there's very little that a landlord can do to emphasize how important it is to keep the house clean. . . I mean, if they didn't want to live that way they would clean it up. So I'd just like to see something about that idea.

— GINGER GILMORE,

● I appreciate the newspaper taking the time to look into some of the problems, but from the start I've seen on the articles you've done nothing but humiliate a lot of good, hard-working, honest people who have lived through the crime, who have helped fight the drugs, who have helped clean up the streets, who go to work every day, pay their taxes, and have done the very best they can to try and rehab and save some of these old houses.

— AUBREY HICKS, ROANOKE

● To me the real truth is that there's a good, middle-class, and hard tenants, and the same goes for landlords. . . Agreed, most low-

should landlords feel guilty about it? I think the city is negligent, as is the case for vacant-house landlords. And I've noticed that there's always a sort of emotional action, following an article like yours, but it dwindle in the face of "lighter issues" like higher wages for city officials, if you know what I mean.

— ROSEMARY HAWKINS, ROANOKE

● If Roanoke got down on the landlords, we would have every very nice Roanoke city.

— REGINA NELSON, ROANOKE

● The city manager, the City Council should spend a little more time on the Southeast and Northwest projects instead of worrying about pay raises.

— MILTON EDELMAN, ROANOKE

● One of the things that might help the depressed neighborhoods in this area would be to tax some of these individuals who work in the Roanoke area, but live outside of the Roanoke area. . . That way the city would be able to benefit from those who work here but who do not pay property taxes or any other type of taxes to the city of Roanoke, and might alleviate some of the despair and destruction in our inner city.

— JAMES ALLEN, ROANOKE

● When they destroyed the school for Gilmer Avenue, they destroyed part of the institution that kept that neighborhood together. Currently, there is no school for that whole area so the children are bused all over town. Since most of these are renter children, they also get transferred from school to school when they leave that area. These poor children are going all over town, and their problems also circulate all over town.

— ROSE MOTLEY, ROANOKE

● I think it's unfair for our city officials to say people from the suburbs that have never conversed about us, because from all outward appearances, our own city officials don't appear to be concerned. . . Let's hope that (the series) will either make people angry enough or rebuked enough to do something. I hope it will be a clear call to action.

— EVELYN BETHEL, ROANOKE

● You've done a fine job of portraying the worst of downtown. I'm the 40 percent that's lived here and raised a family and refurbished an old house. . . Maybe you could do another article, do something a little more positive, as opposed to making

the situation worse by only portraying us as looking our absolute worst.

— DOROTHY PHILLIPS, ROANOKE

● I really feel like the inner city is disappearing, and that maybe the city should purchase the property, fix the property up, screen who they put in. Not necessarily people that are rich and have a lot of money, but see how they live before they give the property to them. They then put that money back into the city to buy more property."

— MICHELLE DAVIS, ROANOKE

● My mother rents out houses, and some of the renters, they tear up the houses. They have no consideration for where they're living. They have no pride. It seems the renters have more rights than we do, because they can live in these houses for months and months, even years, without paying any rent. . . It is a sin, and I hope that you will write an article, and comments about the landlords, and what are their rights, and who's there to help them.

— TAMMY ABOTZARENA, BEDFORD

**OUR SERIES**

1. The lives of Roanoke's inner city centers. Profiles of historic Day, Gilmer and Tazewell avenues. The plight of vacant houses.
2. The business of landlordism and some of the people who are in it.
3. What other cities do about inner city areas and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

● There's definitely two sides to this issue. I think that if somebody would do something concerning people constantly destroying the buildings, when you keep renovating them, and not paying the rent or whatever, then people would have more money to put into these buildings and keep them up. . . We put smoke detectors in, and they tear them out and they take the batteries out and use for other things. . . They break down doors instead of using keys. I really think there's definitely a sad situation as far as the rental business goes. But I think that the only people that end up owning rental property are people that don't care, because the good people are afraid to do it because they just can't afford to stay in it.

— MELANIE GRACZYK, ROANOKE

Transcriptions by Anthony S. Clair and Diane Pritchard

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CLUBBY  
37% chance  
of rain.  
High near 68.  
Low near 53.  
Details on A2.

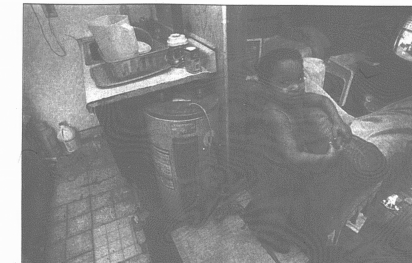
# THE ROANOKE TIMES

Homes B1  
Classified B2  
Local B1  
Sports C1

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

www.roanoke.com

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1997 \$1.50



Brandon Bryant, 2, and his mother, Lisa Bryant, lived in this makeshift apartment at the back of 1018 Jarrison Ave. S.E. for two years. Former owner Bill Emory said he rented it to them while they waited for a federal housing subsidy. City building inspector David Mitchell discovered the unit last summer and condemned it. "There's so much wrong with that unit it's hard to write it all down," he said. Among other building code violations, the apartment was too small. Owner Gerald Myers is repairing the house and says he will not re-rent the apartment.

Roanoke County zoning request brings accusations of conflicts of interest

## Plan spins tangled web of interests

Should a county supervisor vote on a plan involving a former employer with whom he was recently locked in a legal battle?

By CHRISTINA NICHOLS

Shows of temper and conflict of interest accusations aren't typical of zoning cases in Roanoke County. But Shenandoah Homes proposed to develop a retirement village near the Roanoke Regional Airport is an unusual zoning request.

It reviews hostilities between Supervisors Chairman Bob Johnson and HCMF Real Estate & Housing Management Corp. — his former employer — just six months after the two had settled a pair of lawsuits. And it raises ethical questions about the actions of Johnson and Ed Natt, one of the most prominent land use attorneys in the Roanoke Valley.

Here are a few of the issues:

● Should Johnson vote on a zoning request involving his former employer?

● What if HCMF and one of Johnson's current business associates are in the same business — in this case developing retirement villages?

● Should Natt, the attorney for the Industrial Development Authority, which helps to finance commercial and industrial projects, represent a developer interested in obtaining IDA bonds?

● What if Natt is also the personal attorney for Johnson? These questions have never been raised in a public meeting, but some of them almost were two months ago. Shenandoah Homes, which is affiliated with the General Assemblies of Church of God of Virginia, wanted to rezone 17.5 acres for a retirement village that would be operated by HCMF. Supervisors rejected the request

because the development would have been church-owned and tax-exempt, even though a for-profit real estate company would have operated it.

Keith Green — CEO for HCMF — pulled County Administrator Elmer Hooge out of the meeting for a listening exchange in the hallway. Green threatened to return to the meeting and publicly accuse Johnson, a former HCMF employee, of a conflict of interest for voting against the rezoning request.

Green didn't make good on

*The attorney for Shenandoah Homes is Ed Natt, who was Johnson's lawyer in the suit against HCMF, the company that was his former employer and that would operate the proposed retirement village.*

that threat and later declined to discuss the issue, but court records show Johnson's departure from HCMF was anything but congenial.

The break came in January 1995. Johnson, who had worked for the company for more than five years and was responsible for residential real estate sales, met with Green and Bill Crawlwell, the sole stockholder in the company. In a later lawsuit, HCMF officials said the three men discussed Johnson's performance, and that Crawlwell indicated "that Johnson needed a situation in which he was

PLEASE SEE INTERESTS A12

## Landlords: Gambling on inner-city housing

Story By S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS  
THE ROANOKE TIMES

The big-screen TV showed a gray, wood-frame house with one side entrance to its four apartments. The Dale Avenue Southeast house was one of 30 up for sale at an auction held by Hall Associates, Inc. last summer at the Holiday Inn Civic Center banquet room.

"You can really milk this one," said auctioneer Barry Cole, trying to draw the 30 or so landlord/bidders' attention to the "cash cow." He said the house supplied \$1,035 a month in rental income. Much of it subsidized by the government.

The bidding started, and auction assistants whooped or jumped with each subtle nod or twitch by the bidders.

This is Roanoke's tax-income rental housing market in action, a market fed by a supply of several thousand aging houses in neighborhoods such as West End, Old Southwest, Southeast and Northwest. The houses include bungalows in Southeast where the city's laborers lived and dilapidated mansions on Patterson Avenue that executives once owned.

Landlords can buy the houses cheap, make cosmetic repairs, perhaps split the properties into units, then rent them out for up to \$400 a month.

In about a two-mile radius surrounding Roanoke's polished City Market, more than 60 percent of the roughly 3,000 houses are either vacant or being rented. Since 1985, building inspectors have condemned nearly 300 rental houses within that circle. They issued another 320 repair orders. In all, they have found more than 8,700 building code violations including crumbling foundations, leaking roofs, outdated electrical systems and rat and roach infestations.

You don't need a license to be a landlord. And until a rental inspection program began last year, the only regulation was a minimum-standards building code that usually was enforced only after a complaint.

The worn-out houses often get stuck in an unhealthy cycle.



Hall Associates Inc. auctioneer Barry Cole works the crowd at an auction held last summer at the Holiday Inn Civic Center. More than 30 houses were auctioned, most of them rentals in the old neighborhoods surrounding downtown. Auctions are often a source of bargains for landlords.

Landlords looking for quick profits milk the properties for rent money and put little or none of it back into maintenance. Some landlords don't get building permits and illegally divide properties into more units than city zoning laws allow.

Under state and city codes that are designed to force landlords into compliance, judges give landlords one- to three-month extensions to fix their properties. For the worst cases, judges sometimes levy fines of \$100 to \$300 — far short of the \$2,000 maximum fine for failing to repair a house.

The problems don't always lie with the landlords. Irresponsible tenants fill their landlords out of thousands in rent money. Some renters kick holes in the walls and leave trash scattered when they are evicted.

"When a neighborhood starts out with rentals, you get a lot of people that just won't take care of it," said Gene Wirt, a property manager and former member of Roanoke's Building Maintenance Appeals Board.

Stories in today's Horizon section look at both sides of the issue. One is about landlords who make profits off substandard housing. The second story is about landlords who went into the business expecting easy income, only to be victimized by irresponsible tenants.

S.D. Harrington can be reached at 952-3238 or sharrington@roanoke.com

**Monday: A profile of Frank Roanoke, one of the inner-city landlords whose properties are cited most often for building code violations.**

### OUR SERIES

- WEEK 1:** The lives of Roanoke's inner-city renters. Profits of historic Day, Garner and Tazewell avenues. The blight of vacant houses.
- WEEK 2:** The business of land hoarding and some of the people who are in it.
- WEEK 3:** What other cities do about decaying neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

'Floss or die,' researcher says

## Bad gums could cost more than your teeth

Studies suggest bacteria that live around the teeth may contribute to diseases that eventually do you in.

By DANIEL Q. HANEY

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Floss this morning?

Not exactly!

Anybody who's ever been to a dentist has heard it already: Flossing and brushing keep the gums healthy so your teeth don't fall out, etc., etc., etc. etc. But not stop reading.

This story won't be here with the standard lecture about why flossing is good.

No, the news here is something the hygienist probably didn't say. It turns out more could be at stake than mere teeth. Maybe your heart, for instance.

Scientists are investigating the idea — odd as it sounds — that bad gums create mischief in places far from the mouth. Indeed, they say



Dr. Paul Garcia of Boston flashed 'floss or die' at a conference.

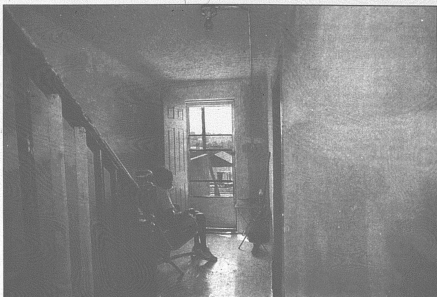
the bacteria that live around the teeth, or perhaps the body's reaction to them, may even contribute to the diseases that eventually do you in.

At a recent conference on the subject at the University of North

PLEASE SEE FLOSS A12

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1997

THE BUSINESS OF LANDLORDING



Alice Robertson sits in her rented house last August after the landlord, Frank Roupas, spent \$2,000 on repairs. The new wallboard was left unpainted and the worn linoleum under Robertson's feet was not replaced. Robertson and her son, Marshall, moved out after Roupas tripled their rent from \$100 to \$300 a month to pay for the repairs.

Some Roanoke landlords repeatedly violate building codes, yet go virtually unpunished

STORY BY S. D. HARRINGTON / PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS

See *The Record* Aug. 27  
 or 20 years, landlord Frank Roupas could count on Alice Robertson to pay her rent on his dilapidated frame house at 1509 Centre Ave. N.W. She paid him \$60 a month for the first 10 years. Then he raised the rent to \$100. Roupas had paid \$851 for the house at a foreclosure auction in 1971.

"For the whole 20 years, you didn't see him until rent time comes," said Robertson's son, Marshall, who moved in with his mother about six years ago. "He'd say, 'It'll go ahead and fix it, and I'll pay you all.'"

Roupas says he didn't think he needed to do anything because Alice Robertson never complained. According to city records, which Roupas does not dispute, the only thing he did fix was a broken water pipe in 1982.

"I told them, 'Now, anything that has to be done — if you can do it — do it yourself. Because if I have to spend the money, I'll have to go up on the rent,'" Roupas said. Last summer, a city building inspector visited the house. He discovered falling plaster, a broken wood stove, mice and rats, and a window so loose it could be pulled from the wall.

After the city took Roupas to court, he made the minimum repairs required. The Robertson got new linoleum in the bathroom and new wallboard on the walls, but no paint on it — only white spots of plaster to cover the nail holes.

The repairs cost Roupas \$2,000, according to building permit records. After making the repairs, he tripled the Robertson's rent to \$300.

If they wanted paint, he told them, they would either have to do it themselves or he would do it and raise the rent to \$400. "Painting is not required by the building department," Roupas said. "I'm trying to keep the expenses as low as I can. If [the Robertson] want me to paint the whole house, I'll be glad to paint it. But I know they don't want to pay \$400." "They're too lazy to do a damn thing," he said.



THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods

The Robertsons took Roupas to court. But General District Judge Julian Roney said Roupas had made the necessary repairs and had the right to raise the rent. He awarded Roupas a \$700 judgment for unpaid rent. The Robertsons moved out in December.

Joel Richert, a longtime neighborhood activist with Old Southwest Inc., has spent years battling landlords who collect rent but put little or nothing back into maintenance. "They never fix anything until they are right in front of the judge," said Richert, a landlord himself. "They have no concept of managing their apartments. They don't manage them; they use them."

Some call the practice milking. Others call it bleeding. These landlords say they're providing inexpensive housing

for a population in dire need. If they made every repair asked of them, they say, they would have to raise the rent. And poor renters would be displaced. But there's more to it than that, former legal aid attorney Nancy Brock says. "In my perspective, it's wrong to the extent you're collecting rent every month and not giving back what [the tenants] are paying for," she said. The landlord is clearly breaching their obligation to the tenants.

Some argue that the procedures used to hold landlords responsible for repairs are too lenient. City building inspectors issue repair or condemnation orders to landlords for violations of the statewide building code or zoning laws (such as making repairs without a permit or renting a condemned house). The building code is designed to keep occupants safe. Wiring can't be outdated. The boiler or apartment must have enough smoke alarms. The foundation must be solid. The roof shouldn't leak.

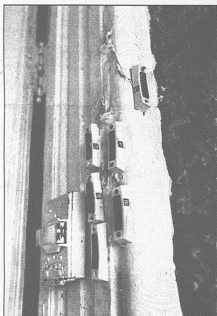
The landlords who don't comply on time can be taken to court by the city.

If convicted, they can be fined as much as \$2,500. Under a state law passed in 1993, landlords who are convicted of violating the building code three times in five years are supposed to be fined a minimum of \$1,500.

But an analysis of cases against the Roanoke landlords most frequently taken to court shows that those fines are rarely applied.

Since 1980, 20 of Roanoke's most frequently cited landlords have been brought to court on 125 building or zoning charges. There were convictions on only 24 of the charges, and the landlords' combined fines totaled only \$2,150.

Those same landlords received 44 percent of the building code citations during the past 15 years, according to a Roanoke



When homeowners left for the suburbs, landlords began buying single-family homes in Roanoke's old downtown neighborhoods and dividing them into multiple units — a practice illustrated by the multiple doorbells on a house on Day Avenue Southwest.

Times computer analysis of rental housing inspections. Many of their properties pop up in inspection files again and again. Since about 1983, more than 100 houses or apartment buildings have been issued repair or

condemnation orders at least three times. Twenty-five were cited three times. Ten were cited five times. And three were cited six times. A duplex owned by Roupas at 1018 Patterson Ave. S.W. has been cited seven times in the

**ONLINE**  
 Want to see the complete records on Roanoke's inner-city rental housing? The Roanoke Times has compiled a database that shows building code violations in rental properties from 1982 to 1996. You can search the data by address or owner or landlord at [www.roanoke.com/roanoketimes](http://www.roanoke.com/roanoketimes). Look under "The Invisible Inner City."

Expecting to make lots of quick money, some landlords get in over their heads, *Horizon* 2. Richert says repeated citations are typical of landlords who make patchwork repairs. "They put a thumbtack in it or a Band-Aid over it, but they never fix it," she said. Some landlords have been known to nail plywood on a porch to cover a hole, to replace broken windows with Plexiglas and to replace rotted decorative columns with square posts — practices that aren't illegal but, as Richert says, are temporary rather than lasting repairs.

Little financial data on private landlords is available to the public, so it's a tough to distinguish between landlords who pocket rent money while deferring maintenance and those who are being cheated by tenants who damage property or don't pay the rent. There's often enough blame for both sides.

Property	No. cited	status	amended	condemned	total fines	
Frank Roupas' 15	73	33	14	7	\$600	
Roney Family 81	61	46	23	3	\$350	
Trud Investments /Anglin Realty	17	59	13	8	3	\$150
Roanoke Properties	18	56	13	8	0	\$500
DMJ Properties	56	52	32	2	0	0
Elizabeth Conner	22	43	20	8	0	0
Joseph Medina	27	41	14	3	0	0
Ray Roanoke	30	40	18	3	0	0
Spanky Macher	10	40	8	4	2	0
Roanoke Times	22	35	11	0	0	0

SOURCE: The Roanoke Times computer analysis of more than 800 inspection records.

## THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT



David Shepard Sr.'s house at 1824 Melrose Ave. N.W. was trashed by a tenant last summer. He found a charcoal grill in the middle of the living room, mattresses left in the bedrooms, food rotting on the kitchen table and a broken window on the front porch. Shepard said the tenant moved out without a word, owing him rent.

## Some inner-city landlords find their dreams turn into nightmares — they're called tenants

STORY BY S. D. HARRINGTON

PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS

THE ROANOKE TIMES

**D**avid Shepard Sr. caught the bug in 1985. He and his son, David Jr., went to a "Financial Freedom" seminar at the Roanoke Civic Center.

Mark O. Haroldsen, a self-made millionaire from Salt Lake City, told how he had amassed a fortune in four years from rental property and said anyone with enough will could do it, too.

The Shepards got so pumped up at the free seminar that they bought \$100 in books and literature from Haroldsen.

One of the books, "Financial Genius," has a photo of Haroldsen on the cover, leaning against a new Mercedes and wearing a polo shirt, creased pants and tasseled leather loafers.

But after 11 years in the rental business, there's no new Mercedes in the elder Shepard's driveway. He and his son are still waiting for the big payoff from the 35 units they now own.

David Shepard Sr. says they have been on the verge of bankruptcy several times because of tenants who didn't pay their rent — some owing as much as \$1,000.

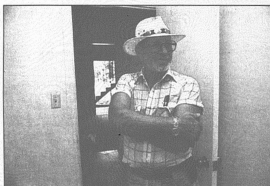
They've had to absorb thousands of dollars in damages caused by tenants. They've evicted tenants who turned out to be drug addicts or drug pushers.

"They forget to tell you about the work part," Shepard Jr. said.

As homeowners fled Roanoke's worn-out downtown neighborhoods in the 1950s and '60s, landlords snatched up the houses and turned them into rental property.

Bungalows were divided into two or three units. Some houses like the old mansions along Patterson Avenue Southwest and the huge four-square homes in Highland Park were split into as many as eight apartments.

By 1990, 63 percent of Roanoke's central neighborhoods had become predominantly rental, according to U.S. Census data. Landlords like the late Charles Kelsey amassed large empires of rental houses. Kelsey owned as many as 100 properties in Roanoke's central neighborhoods. He died in 1990 at age 94.



Leon Brown, who owns and manages an apartment complex at 602 Day Ave. S.W., said landlording is not a lucrative business for him. It takes at least three months to evict a tenant through the court system. In his office are three sets of files — each a foot thick — containing paperwork on tenants who owe him rent.

But even more landlords got into the business on a small scale, buying between one and 10 properties. Some of them ran the properties on their own. Others turned them over to management companies.

Being a landlord doesn't require a

where you work, you can own a piece of rental property on the side."

That's how McGhee got started — living in one side of a duplex and renting out the other side working another job. He borrowed money with his duplex as collateral

*"The dream for everybody is to have their own business. Well, that's probably the number one business in the United States. The first thing is, no matter where you work, you can own a piece of rental property on the side."*

LEON MCGHEE

ONE OF THE LARGEST OWNERS OF RENTAL PROPERTY IN ROANOKE'S OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS.

license or permit. And, before 1985, there was hardly any regulation of rental houses by city building inspectors.

"Anybody can be a landlord," said Leon McGhee, one of the largest owners of rental property in Roanoke's older neighborhoods.

"The dream for everybody is to have their own business. Well, that's probably the number one business in the United States," McGhee said. "The first thing is, no matter

and bought a second one. Now, he runs a full-on-god-bleadily business in Vinton and owns more than 100 rental units in Roanoke.

When done right, the business can be lucrative, most landlords say.

But behind the dollars and cents there can be a lot more than some landlords bargain for.

Landlords who own property in

Roanoke's central neighborhoods are often renting to some of the city's poorest residents. The landlords must know how to screen out tenants who are likely to skip, and they must monitor their properties for illegal activity.

"To me, it's not a lucrative business," said landlord Leon Brown, who owns about 35 units in apartment buildings near downtown.

Brown pointed to three sets of files in his office, each a foot thick. The files are on tenants who owe him rent.

It takes at least three months to evict a tenant through the court system, he said. Some tenants know how to stretch it out even longer. They beg judges for continuances and appeal their cases.

Brown says he has had to pay up to \$42 in court costs for an eviction.

"That's \$42 you're putting into a debt that's not easy to collect from," he said.

The Shepards learned quickly that being a landlord wasn't as easy as their how-to books made it appear.

"It's definitely not a get-rich-quick thing," Shepard Sr. said. "The numbers work out, but when you get down to the nitty gritty, it's not that good."

Until last summer, the Shepards didn't have a systematic way of screening tenants for criminal records or bad credit.

"We've just sort of taken them at face value," Shepard Sr. said.

Within one month last summer, the Shepards had tenants in two separate houses

— both behind in rent payments — move out without notice. Inside the apartments, the Shepards found broken railings, holes in walls, garbage strewn about and food left to rot on the kitchen table.

"There's not much you can do because the people you're dealing with don't really have anything," Shepard Sr. said.

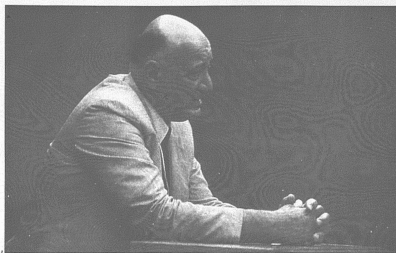
Two summers ago, a tenant on Centre Avenue asked if there were any vacancies for her elderly uncle and aunt, who were moving to Roanoke from Franklin County.

The Shepards showed them a two-story white house with a front porch at Fairfax Avenue and 10th Street Northwest. The couple immediately signed the lease and paid the first month's rent and security deposit in cash.

The next week, one of the Shepards' maintenance workers noticed the house was full of people, but didn't see the couple. The Shepards went to look for themselves. They saw several mattresses on the floor. Shepard Sr. said he counted 15 people there. When the Shepards returned to their office, the phone was ringing. It was a Roanoke vice detective who said the people who had moved in were believed to be run-

PLEASE SEE DREAMS/5





Frank Roupas, ballroom dance instructor and Roanoke landlord for 40 years, pleads for an extension in Roanoke General District Court last summer. He was charged with failing to repair his rental property at 1509 Centre Ave. N.W. "Your Honor," he said, "I'm not a plumber, I'm not an electrician, I can only dance."

## Frank Roupas: History of benign neglect

Story by S.D. HARRINGTON / Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS  
THE ROANOKE TIMES

Roanoke landlord Frank Roupas works hard to make people like him.

When a newspaper columnist asked readers what they would do if they won the lottery, Roupas, 57, responded in a letter to the editor:

"I will have a party for everyone in downtown Roanoke on the City Market, with pizza, food and everything to drink that the law will permit," he wrote.

"I will buy more cemetery spaces in Evergreen Burial Park to help the needy," he promised.

"I hope you'll include in the story that I've given nine burial places in the last four years," he later told a reporter.

Minutes before an interview with a reporter about his rental practices, Roupas drove one of his tenants to the newspaper office to say nice things about him.

Roupas, a ballroom dance instructor and Roanoke landlord for about 40 years, sprinkles his eviction notices with cordial language.

"I will be sure to tell Susa to bring your many gifts to your new home," he wrote to a tenant he was evicting in 1983 for not paying rent.

When a building official cited one of his rental houses for building code violations in 1989, he wrote back: "I received your letter of condemnation of my property, 910 Patterson Ave., today. So nice to hear from you."

But for all his efforts to avoid trouble, Roupas is often right

### OUR SERIES

**WEEK 1** The lives of Roanoke's inner-city series. Profiles of historic Day, Garner and Hazelwood avenues. The plight of vacant houses.

**WEEK 2** The business of land lording and some of the people who are in it.

**WEEK 3** What other cities do about recycling neighborhoods and what's being done — or not done — in Roanoke.

in the middle of it when it comes to his rental housing.

According to city records, he's had a higher percentage of rental properties cited for code violations than any landlord in Roanoke. Eleven of the 12 properties he owns or manages have been cited for repairs at least once. Building inspectors have found more than 380 violations in his houses during the past 11 years. He has been fined by Roanoke General District judges on 14 building or zoning charges in the past 10 years.

Three times, he has been charged with renting a condemned house. In one case, Roupas was accused of tearing a yellow condemnation notice from the doorpost of a Day Avenue duplex. He denies ever doing it.

"The wind is very strong and can tear them off these houses very easily," he said.

PLEASE SEE RQUPAS-A4



## THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest-neighborhoods

Report: Hate groups usually not at fault

## Church fires not a racial conspiracy

The president's National Church Arson Task Force says church burnings were not part of a larger plot.

**KNOX-ROBERTSON/STAFF**  
WASHINGTON — In Houston, a 10-year-old bank child set fire to an African-American church in Virginia Beach, Va., two white teenagers, 16 and 13, burned an inter-racial church. In Bartlett, Tenn., a white pastor burned his own white church in Johns Island, S.C., a black pastor torched his black congregation's church. Three church fires in Kentucky and the Carolinas were set by volunteer firefighters.

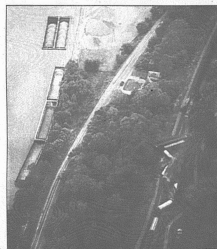
A frightening rash of church burnings in recent years is not the

result of a racist national conspiracy, a presidential task force declared Sunday in announcing that 150 of 429 cases have been solved.

Small bands of friends and accomplices were occasionally identified as suspects, yet many of the fires were set by individuals acting alone. In a majority of the cases the perpetrators were members of hate groups.

"While there have been blatantly racist defendants who were prompted to start the fires because of their racial hatred," said Treasury Department Assistant Secretary James Johnson, "there have been a range of motives that have included financial profit, out-and-out vandalism and revenge."

PLEASE SEE FPRES-A2



Two CSX trains collided and caught fire Saturday at Scary, W.V. In this aerial view, W.Va. 35 runs parallel to the tracks and the Kanawha River is on the left.

## 1 train worker killed, 2 injured Fiery train crash blamed on signal or human error

A train carrying hazardous chemicals rear-ended a coal train and burst into flames near Scary, W.Va.

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**

SCARY, W.Va. — Hundreds of people shut themselves in their homes for hours on Sunday and others stayed in emergency shelters after a train carrying hazardous chemicals rear-ended a coal train and burst into flames.

One train worker was killed and two others were injured late Saturday when the eastbound CSX Transportation freight train rammed the eastbound CSX coal train. Thirteen cars and two engines derailed.

One chemical tank car continued burning Sunday near a residential area in a hollow about 10 miles west of Charleston. Officials said they would let it burn itself out.

The crash was caused by

human error or signal failure, said Mike Martino, an investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board.

A signal that should have told the conductor of the freight train that the coal train was ahead on the tracks was damaged, he said. Investigators don't know if it was working before the crash or was damaged in the crash. The signal has not yet been tested.

Martino said neither train should have been traveling faster than 15 mph. Investigators will look for the trains' event recorders, similar to an airplane's "black box," which record the train's speed, brake performance and other mechanical information.

Martino also said that the crew of a westbound CSX freight train on a separate track stopped at the scene long enough to rescue the two injured workers. Derailed cars blocked the train's path on the westbound track and

PLEASE SEE TRNAA-2

## Flight 800: searching for answers

## Report says fuel tank explosion caused crash

The initial explosive force occurred between two structural beams near the tank's center.

**REUTERS**

Deep inside the center fuel tank of the Boeing 747, beams more than 6 feet high divide the cavernous living-room-sized structure into narrow compartments. An obscure access door with a hatchlike cover is used only rarely, when mechanics need to walk from one cell to another.

This, investigators now know,

is where the disintegration of TWA Flight 800 began. The access door blew off its beam. Another beam crashed forward. And a third beam was forced into the cargo hold.

That, according to a 150-page draft report, was the beginning of the end.

Like detectives in a crime novel, investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board have pieced together an astonishing detail the last moments of TWA Flight 800. Using microscopic metallurgical images, debris field diagrams that

PLEASE SEE TWA-A2

## DOWN THE HATCH



MARIMUTH GAUD administers a yellow paste of medicinal herbs on a live sandrine to an asthma sufferer Sunday in Hyderabad, India. The medicine, which some regard as a miracle cure for asthma, is given out by the Gaud family once a year. Half a million patients showed up for the treatment. Story on A8.



# THE INVISIBLE INNER CITY

A SPECIAL REPORT

## FROM A1 Roupas

In a 1992 file note, a city building inspector said Roupas was an owner-city landlord for 60 years: his wife, Jane, is carrying on in the business.

His properties are not properly maintained and if and when repairs are made, he invariably fails to get permits. [and] has the cheapest most unprofessional people he can find do the work in the most corner-cutting, unworkmanlike manner possible," the inspector said. "And in as many instances as he can, he passes off the repairs on the people renting the property which are not qualified and can't afford it in the first place but he thereby escapes the expense of the repairs and benefits from the expense of others."

Building Inspector David Hatchett couldn't remember who wrote the note. But he said it was accurate.

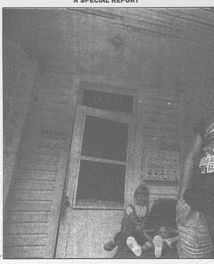
### WHO TO CALL

- Need help? Information? Want to get involved?
- Roanoke Housing Department, 853-1208 or 853-2222
- Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, 344-2080
- Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, 345-8250
- Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority, 883-9251
- Blue Ridge Building Corp., 774-7408

Roupas, the son of a Greek immigrant, was 19 when he bought his first rental property from a landlord who wanted \$6,500 for a condemned house on Bullitt Avenue Southeast.

"I told him I'd do him a favor. I'd give him \$1,000. And I said, 'Your troubles are over.' That's the day my troubles began," Roupas said with a chuckle.

He likes buying bargains. After reading a newspaper auction on the Roanoke court-



STEPHAN KLEIN-DAVIS / THE OKLAHOMA TIMES

### THE LANDLORD

**Frank Roupas**  
Age 57  
Occupation: Ballroom dance instructor (retired this year)  
Address: 1841 Washington St. S.W., Roanoke

— FROM 1982 TO OCTOBER, 1996—  
Total properties owned: 15  
Percent cited: 73%  
Total citations: 23  
Criminal charges: 14  
Convictions: 7  
Total fines: \$600 and 25 hours community service  
Median value of rental properties in 1996: \$12,200



STEPHAN KLEIN-DAVIS / THE OKLAHOMA TIMES

"We have been on him literally for years and forced him to make repairs," Hatchett said. "Because of the city's enforcement, Hatchett said, Roupas' houses actually look better than when Hatchett first started."

Roupas says city officials have unfairly singled him out. "I know what the law says, but I'm not the business."

As for his accumulation of repair and condemnation orders and court files, Roupas says that's not his business.

"After you have been in the business for 40 years, it's just like a driver. When a driver has been driving for 40 years, you know you're going to be in court for something," Roupas said. "I would think almost everybody would be in traffic court when you've been driving for 40 years."

Jenice Hash, who rents 539 Day Ave. S.W. from Frank Roupas, says he's not at all that bad. She says many problems with the house herself. "I just ask Frank to knock some off my rent," she said.

house steps, Roupas bid \$1 more than the mortgage holder and bought a ramshackle house on Centre Avenue Northwest for \$851. The house has brought him an estimated \$16,000 in gross rental income.

He says he doesn't make much money off his rental property. He likes to think of his business as a means of helping poor people who need affordable housing.

"I have a heart that aches for people that are in trouble," Roupas said.

Before a tenant moves in, he says, he asks how much rent they can handle.

"I've never charged people more than they are able to pay," he said. "I've enjoyed so much helping low-income people."

Some of Roupas' tenants say we have to see killed before it pays. "I've never charged people more than they are able to pay," he said. "I've enjoyed so much helping low-income people."



STEPHAN KLEIN-DAVIS / THE OKLAHOMA TIMES

**ON LINE**  
Want to see the complete records on Roanoke's inner-city rental housing? The Roanoke Times has compiled a database that shows building code violations in rental properties from 1982 to 1996. You can search the data by address or owner or quadrant at [www.roanoke.com/realties](http://www.roanoke.com/realties) look under "The Invisible Inner City."

of Roupas changed after he offered to rent a house when she had been evicted by another landlord. She rents a green painted-brick house on Day Avenue for \$400 a month.

"Years ago, I would have told you I wouldn't rent from the man," she said.

In November, Hash fell behind in her power bill and her electricity was disconnected. Roupas paid the \$320 bill for her as a loan.

"Frank's just in a lot of ways," Hash said. "He's got a heart of gold. It's just getting him to do it in the right places."

Roupas hasn't been so gracious with all tenants. Last summer, after being forced to make

long-needed repairs, he tripled the rent on a woman who had rented his house on Centre Avenue Northwest for 20 years. She had been paying \$100 a month, and he raised it to \$300.

He put on ceiling tiles to cover falling plaster, new wallboard and linoleum in the bathroom. The repairs were just enough to bring the house into compliance with the state building code. Roupas didn't paint the wallboard.

Tenant Alice Robertson and her son, Marshall, sued Roupas over the rent increase. They lost, and Roupas evicted them.

"Everybody has to pay rent," Roupas said. "You cannot be a sissy in this business."

As much as possible, Roupas gets the tenants themselves to make repairs to his houses. In return, he says, he knows it off their rent. He has told tenants that making repairs themselves would keep their rent from going up.

When Roupas pays to have the maintenance done himself, city officials say, the work often is slipshod.

At 326 Dale Ave. S.E., he replaced a rotted porch floor with plywood and a coat of paint.

Roupas has been so generous with his tenants, says plywood normally lasts only five years. If Roupas had used pine, a sealant and a couple of coats of paint, Bevins said, the porch would have lasted about 25 years.

A former tenant of 910 Patterson Ave. S.W. wrote to

### WHY IT MATTERS

"You neglect the people who live here, pretty soon you don't have anybody to work."

JAMES LESLIAN  
BLUE RIDGE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**  
The Times wants to hear its readers' views about Roanoke's oldest downtown neighborhoods and what is happening to them. If you have something you'd like to say, call 853-1208 and go to mailbox 7824. Our plan is to publish some reader comments during the course of our series. The Invisible Inner City: Poverty, crime and decay in Roanoke's oldest neighborhood.

building officials in 1986.

"The gas company has been here three times to fix the gas heater. Each time the gas heater still won't stay on. . . Mr. Frank Roupas has no way to use my cooking stove for heat."

Roupas says building inspectors often don't allow enough time to make repairs.

"I'm just a small, little business man. I can only do so much at one time," he said.

One Thursday in court last summer, Roupas had to explain to Roanoke General District Judge Jacqueline Talbot why he had taken him more than three months to fix his house at 1509 Centre Ave. N.W.

"Your honor," he said, "I'm not a plumber! I'm not an electrician — I can only dance."

S.O. Harrington can be reached at 981-3236 or [shannon@roanoke.com](mailto:shannon@roanoke.com)

## Politicians of the faith disagree, saying he deserves to die Catholic bishops: Spare McVeigh's life

"There is a need to continue to sensitize our people to the reverence for life," says Bishop William Skylstad.

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
WASHINGTON — Catholic bishops on Sunday spoke out against capital punishment and urged that the life of Timothy McVeigh be spared. Catholic politicians, including Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating, differed, saying the man convicted of the Oklahoma City bombing deserves to die.

"Let's look at this moment as a wonderful moment of opportunity," said Bishop William Skylstad of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in arguing against the death sentence for McVeigh. "Compassion and mercy are a tremendously creative act," he said on "Fox News Sunday."

Denver Archbishop William Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, interviewed on ABC's "This Week," said church doctrine calls for the sparing of lives if "bloodless means are sufficient" to defend people against aggressors and protect public order.

Beyond that, Law said, there is the question of what capital punishment does to "a society where there is an ever greater spiraling of violence."

Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput put a statement on his Internet site Friday condemning capital punishment. "Killing the guilty is still wrong," he said.

Keating said he hoped that "I don't get driven into the sea because I am a Catholic" for supporting the death

**'Killing the guilty is still wrong.'**  
DENVER ARCHBISHOP CHARLES CHAPUT ON INTERNET SITE

penalty for McVeigh.

He said on Fox that most by Catholics would agree that the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing deserved to die. "How many babies do we have to see killed before it is justified?" he asked.

Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., a Catholic, said on ABC that he has never been a more appropriate case for the death sentence. "There has to be punishment and punishment in this case can only be the death penalty."

Skylstad, of Spokane, Wash., acknowledged that a large majority of Americans, and most Catholics, are in favor of capital punishment. But he said that "we as bishops feel there is a need to continue to sensitize our people to the reverence for life."

Non-Catholic religious leaders also have used the case to speak out against capital punishment.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, on CBS' "Face the Nation," said McVeigh "makes the toughest case for one to defend the principle" of opposing capital punishment. But he said ultimately the concept of an eye for an eye "leaves us blind and disfigured."

## St. Joseph, Mo., recovered from floods to win From pool of 30, 10 emerge with All-America City awards

Among 30 finalists, 10 cities were recognized with the prestigious honor, which Roanoke has received multiple times.

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** — Lee's Summit was named one of the All-America City award Saturday night, but nearby St. Joseph, Mo., made the cut.

"We were all winners tonight," said Ann Corley of Lee's Summit, one of the finalists along with Wichita, Kan.

Corley and other city and community leaders from 30 All-America City finalists gathered Saturday night at the Hyatt Regency Crown Center hotel in Kansas City. Ten cities won the prestigious national award, given by the National Civic League to communities that have worked together to accomplish goals or create successful programs.

(Roanoke has won the award five times. It did not enter this year's contest because of the amount of time needed to complete projects that would make the

city more competitive.)

For St. Joseph, it meant rebuilding a community devastated by the flood of 1993. About 2,000 jobs were lost, but nearly double that number have since come into the area, said residents and community leaders at the reception.

"The community worked very hard," said Mayor Larry Strobs, one of more than 200 residents who came to the awards ceremony. "This should raise the bar of pride."

St. Joseph native Frank Hood said the sense of togetherness made the city "All-American."

"It really is a hometown city," said Hood, who returned to the city three years ago.

Other winners were Asheville, N.C.; Alben, S.C.; Bismarck, N.D.; Fremont, Calif.; Stateville, N.C.; Hillside Neighborhood in Colorado Springs, Colo.; Aberdeen, Md.; the borough of Bronx in New York City; said Texas City, Texas. About 120 communities applied for the award this year.