

### **Mass eviction from Johnson's Mobile Home Park in Siler City**

The Hispanic Liaison was founded 23 years ago with a mission to foster intercultural understanding and to empower Hispanics to overcome the challenges they face and make their voices heard in the community. We are here in support of the more than 100 adults and children from Johnson's Mobile Home Park in Siler City who are being evicted from their homes by Mountaire Farms.

I want to acknowledge two representatives from the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh, Ms. Adriana Villareal Buenfil, the Consul of Legal Assistance and Protection and Mr. Luis McKinney also with the office of legal assistance. They are here out of concern about the fate of these residents, many of whom are of Mexican origin or descent.

As you know, Mountaire Farms is building a large poultry processing plant in Siler City. Last August, Mountaire entered into a contract to purchase Johnson's Mobile Home Park, which houses 28 mobile homes. To our knowledge, neither the town nor the county knew about Mountaire's plans to evict over 100 residents during negotiations for tax-payer funded incentives.

To make matters worse, last November, when Mountaire purchased the property they didn't think to offer any compensation to the residents for the loss of their homes, relocation expenses or the financial hardships they were about to suffer.

Instead, Mountaire served the residents with an eviction notice to vacate the property by May 7th, as is required by law. It has recently come to our attention that Mountaire's eviction notice may have been improper.

Johnson's is home to over 50 children and 60 adults; 24 of the children are enrolled in our local schools. The residents own their mobile homes and have invested an average of \$10,000 per family in the purchase and repairs.

Most of their homes were built before 1974 and cannot be moved to a new location. Even residents with newer homes are having a tough time finding mobile home parks in Siler City that will accept them.

Over 100 residents must abandon their homes and find a place to live in the next few months. All of them want to stay in Siler City. Parents are worried that their children may have to change schools. The children are also feeling the stresses of losing their home, not knowing where they're going to live and if they'll have to start over with new teachers and friends at a new school.

Chatham County and Siler City have signed agreements with Mountaire worth millions of dollars in taxpayer-funded incentives, including property tax discounts and infrastructure support. The families being evicted have lived in Siler City and at Johnson's for many years and they are tax-payers too.

Mountaire's creed states that they are "honest and fair with everyone...including community neighbors", and they pledge to "focus resources...to help communities....including providing support to....families in crisis situations".

The families at Johnson's Mobile Home Park are facing a crisis situation. Through no fault of their own, families will go from being homeowners to facing homelessness, exacerbating and exposing the serious shortage of affordable and decent housing in Siler City.

Mountaire's decision to purchase the land places these low-income families in a dire financial situation. Their median income is \$15-\$20,000 per year, and they cannot afford a significant rent increase from the \$200 they had been paying in lot rent.

Part of the Hispanic Liaison's efforts have been to encourage Mountaire to accept their responsibility to these families, many of whom are likely to be their future employees. This January, Mountaire agreed to attend a meeting with the residents to discuss this situation; the town and county managers were also present.

At this meeting, the residents shared their concerns and presented several requests, including legitimate and fair financial compensation for their losses. The company's representative stated that Mountaire "wants to be a good neighbor for Siler City and Chatham County" and pledged to "do the right thing for these families".

Since January, we have engaged in good faith negotiations with Mountaire to reach a compromise. We were close to an agreement when we reached an impasse over the amount of financial compensation. The residents have been reasonable and significantly reduced their request from an original \$46,000 per household to \$8,300 in order to reach a compromise. This is the bare minimum needed for relocation expenses and their losses. Mountaire, on the other hand, has insignificantly raised their offer from \$0 to \$5,000 per household, which led to the impasse.

The residents and Mountaire have verbally agreed that the company would not charge them lot rent as of November, which is helpful to the residents and saves the company money by not having to hire someone to collect rent. Given the delay in reaching an agreement, the residents recently requested to extend the move out date to July 31<sup>st</sup>. Mountaire agreed to the extension under the condition that an agreement be finalized this week.

Last November, the residents also asked the town and county for a list of available rentals in Siler City. Unfortunately, the list we received confirms the severe lack of available and affordable housing. This means that these families could face homelessness, severe overcrowding, or having to move out of the city and county where they have built their lives and contributed to its economic growth and prosperity. Mountaire's elimination of these residents' homes only deepens the housing crisis.

We are here to ask for your help with this community crisis. We urge you to address the serious lack of affordable and decent workforce housing in our community, and we need your leadership to find both short-term and long-term solutions to the plight of these families.

We are requesting that Chatham County help the families by allocating funds for emergency housing assistance. The Hispanic Liaison is ready and willing to partner with you to prevent these families from becoming homeless. County funds would be in addition to a fair and adequate compensation from Mountaire, which still needs to live up to its pledge of "doing the right thing for these families".

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