



Tenant Solidarity

News and Information from the Tenants Union of Washington State

March 2014

2014 is

Starting Out Big For the Tenants Union

This year we are:

- Actively organizing with tenants in four different buildings across the state
- Increasing capacity, hiring new staff, and bringing on new members and board
- Growing community connections in tenant leadership in Eastern Washington
- Taking action to preserve, increase, and improve housing that is safe and affordable
- Building a powerful movement of tenants...and we invite YOU to be a part of it!



Lockhaven Tenants Union members and supporters working together to keep their housing affordable

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TU members attend Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day (HHAD) to tell their stories and advocate for tenant protections



Director's Corner

By Jonathan Grant, TU Executive Director

“Wait. Just wait...”

That has been the advice from multi-million dollar developers and supply-side think-tanks to Seattle tenants struggling to afford record breaking rent increases. The drumbeat of “supply & demand” is strong in this city. Econ 101 tells us that as soon as enough units are built, supposedly rents will cool off as demand will be satisfied. It is a pleasant thought experiment, but merely increasing supply is not enough to counter the current housing crisis. Last year more units were built in the city than any other year in the last two decades. It should be no surprise that despite the surge in units, building more units with unaffordable rates does not increase the supply of affordable housing.

The true measure of success is whether we retain low-income communities by decreasing the number of people who are severely rent burdened. And these pressures are going to grow. With a projected population growth of more than 150,000 people from 2000 through 2040, many of whom are higher-income workers, a question looms over the City: can low income communities benefit from investment without displacement?

With the state ban on regulating rents, the city has limited means to systematically address the problem. However, the issue of the average rising rent is just the first layer in the problem of displacement. The deeper problem is the rampant speculation by private developers targeting Seattle's low income housing stock to flip them into high cost or luxury units. While we wait these predatory acquisitions are robbing Seattle of its housing stock affordable to its lowest income tenants, which has no opportunity to be replaced. The issue of these predatory acquisitions is the

primary concern that demands a response.

Already there are pockets of resistance flaring up from tenants unwilling to accept a displacement-only course. Tenants are organizing across Seattle to preserve their homes, from the Lockhaven Tenants Union in Ballard (read more about them on pages 4-5) to the Theodora Rescue Committee in Ravenna (pages 6-7). Take action in support of these tenants by signing the Theodora Rescue Committee petition (page 7).

Tenants in Spokane are also organizing against looming threats of displacement, highlighting the need for both rent regulation and eviction protections for low income renters (read a report from Cheney Center tenants on page 11).

I'm pleased to report that there are big things happening at the TU this year. The TU is working to build a statewide movement of renters who are working together to win safe, decent, affordable living conditions, as well as laws and policies that are just and fair for tenants. Please do what you can to support this important work! Already tenants are working together, winning victories, and building power through organizing, because waiting is no longer an option. ♦



Theodora tenants Debbie and Tim protest Goodman Real Estate with the support of TU allies, including TU board member Lynn Sereda (right)



TU Board President Corey Snelson (right) helps hand out awards at the 2013 TU Annual Meeting

Tenant Leaders, Allies, and the TU Honored at Annual Membership Meeting

Every year the TU brings together its members for updates on our work from the past year and bring in new tenants who want to get involved to help plan our future. In 2013, for the first time the TU held a full-day Annual Meeting that was attended by over 150 tenants. This year we had four incredible workshops with TU staff, lobbying expert Nancy Amidei, Mike Chin from Seattle Office of Civil Rights, and Civil Fights leader Esther Hall Mumford. Many tenants and organizational supporters received awards acknowledging their hard work, dedication, and amazing contributions to the TU in 2013. The TU was also honored to receive this year's Access to Justice Award from the WA State Bar Association, an award given to organizations working for equal access to justice for low income people.

It was a wonderful day of education, connection, and celebration for TU members and supporters. Many thanks to all the good people who worked hard to make it happen. The meeting happens every fall, so keep a look out for 2014's Annual Meeting announcement, because you are invited to be involved! ♦

Welcome to the TU

Social Work Intern Paula Wilson



Paula Wilson joined the TU in February of 2014 as a UW Sociology Major intern. Paula is our newest volunteer, working to build member retention and assist TU staff with projects, such as volunteer outreach and follow up, updating member information, building up the community resources folder, photographing events and planning the TU member movie night, where we provide films on housing inequality and answer questions about how these films are relevant to what is happening now in our community. In addition, she is learning about tenant rights and how the TU works to empower our community. ♦



(L to R) Jessica Vernaza, TU Community Organizer Stina Janssen, James Warren, Eleanor Warren, Dr. Gail Christopher (keynote speaker), Oscar Clark

TU Leaders Attend Puget Sound Equity Summit

Six members of the Tenants Union attended the Puget Sound Equity Summit in November of 2013, where community leaders from Snohomish, King, and Pierce Counties came together to discuss strategies for equity and social justice in housing, transit, employment, and beyond. Tenants Union members sported our fabulous new red TU t-shirts and left with a sense of connection to others organizing for social justice across our region. ♦



Tenants Fight Gentrification & Predatory Development

Renters in Seattle’s Lockhaven and Theodora Apartment Buildings are banding together to save their homes — and they need your help

The Tenants Union is deep into a committed campaign to resist the growing wave of gentrification sweeping Seattle and cities across the U.S. by supporting the courageous organizing of tenants in two buildings. Over the past six months, the Lockhaven Tenants Union and the Theodora Rescue Committee, led by tenant leaders at the Lockhaven Apartments in the Ballard and the Theodora Apartments in Ravenna, have been organizing to keep their homes affordable in the face of imminent eviction and rent increases. Both buildings are being targeted by the multi-billion dollar Seattle development corporation, Goodman Real Estate (GRE). GRE’s business is predatory development: buying historic affordable housing, making cosmetic renovations to convert tenants’ modest homes to luxury apartments, raising the rent, and displacing hundreds of low and moderate income tenants.

If you receive the TU’s email alerts, you know that each week, tenants are taking new, bold steps to win dignity for their neighbors and to keep their homes affordable. Tenants are fighting back.

The Lockhaven Tenants Union brought GRE executives John Goodman and George Petrie to

the table for a negotiations meeting with moderation from Seattle City Councilmember Nick Licata and followed up with a proposal. When tenants received a rejection of key pieces of their proposal, they took to the streets, holding a press conference outside Lockhaven in February and a demonstration at GRE’s corporate headquarters last week. You can offer support and follow the Lockhaven tenants’ progress at lockhaventenantunion.blogspot.com.

(Continued next column)



Lockhaven tenant Kappy Trigg speaks to the press in February’s press conference

Words of Support from City Councilmember Nick Licata

In working to keep their community intact, Lockhaven tenants see their story as part of a bigger picture. Jett, a tenant at Lockhaven who works night shifts at a Seattle hospital, says none of her coworkers can afford to live in Seattle. “The nurses drive home to Everett and Federal Way.” Only the doctors can afford to live in Seattle now.” Another tenant says, “GRE says they’re in the business of providing ‘workforce housing’. Their version of workforce housing leaves a lot of people out in the cold.”

In the Ravenna neighborhood of Seattle, a similar fate looms for the tenants of the Theodora Apartments, a 114-unit historic building housing low income seniors and people with disabilities, and one of the few remaining HUD low income housing buildings left in Seattle. Tenants at the Theodora have proactively organized the Theodora Rescue Committee, working to halt the sale of their homes to a developer they believe will have them displaced. See pages 6-7 for more information on the Theodora, and to read one tenant’s story.

As development continues to feed a housing bubble in Seattle, it is tenants who will pay unless we fight back. The temptation of profit is driving developers to take out predatory loans premised on displacing tenants and raising rents. The Lockhaven and Theodora tenants are proving that organizing and collective bargaining are important means of working for self-determination and maintaining affordable housing, as policy solutions are as yet unable to address the dramatically rising rents.

The TU is proud to be working alongside the tenants at the Lockhaven and Theodora Apartments – and we need your support! If you can come out to an action or help out in the office, please contact TU Community Organizer Stina Jansen at stinaj@tenantsunion.org or (206) 722-6848 x 102. We need all hands on deck to win. As we work together in solidarity, we build a powerful movement to win housing justice for all! ♦

I attended a press conference held by Lockhaven Tenants Union (LTU) to bring attention to their fight to preserve affordable housing in their 138 unit apartment complex. The new owner is planning on making some improvements and is increasing rents on average from \$900 to \$1,500.

I attended in support of LTU’s efforts to convince the new owner, Goodman Real Estate, to keep a number of their units affordable to the tenants who are low income. Unfortunately, the state legislature denied Seattle the right to control or moderate market rental rates.

I believe the City Council must address the concerns of the many renters that are being displaced by rising rents. For several years, the City has been debating policies requiring inclusion of affordable housing in market rate housing. The City needs to act more quickly to strengthen these policies and increase affordable housing options.

You can read Nick’s blog, *Urban Politics*, online at licata.seattle.gov. ♦



City Councilmember Nick Licata with Lockhaven tenant Andrew Ramirez at the recent press conference

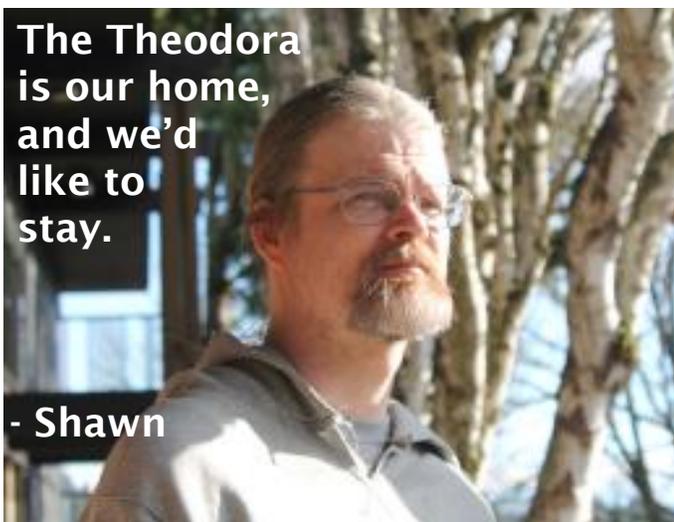


TU Section 8 Tenants Organizing Project (STOP)

The Theodora is a 110-unit building in Ravenna that is home to veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities. It has been affordable housing for tenants in Seattle for over 100 years, since 1912, and is one of the few remaining HUD buildings left in Seattle. After recent years of mismanagement, the Volunteers of America has entered into a purchase and sale agreement with Goodman Real Estate, a for-profit development company that has displaced tenants from buildings all over Seattle to cater to higher-earning tenants. Here's one tenant's story:

I'm Shawn and I've lived here at the Theodora, a facility run by the Volunteers of America, since 2011. I moved here after spending most of 2010 either hospitalized or in extended care facilities. When I moved here, I still required a wheelchair, assistance to bathe and help carrying my tray at mealtimes. Prior to my hospitalization, I'd lived in Wedgwood since 1995. Immediately after my hospitalization, I was discharged to an assisted living facility in SeaTac, where my only mode of transportation was via Access. I was in rough shape, both my legs had been amputated below the knee and had also lost the fingers of my right hand. I was three hours away round trip from anything that had been familiar to me. Fortunately for me, I was eventually accepted into a place much closer to home, the Theodora.

When I first moved in, it was as a part of the Wellness program. Along with general daily assistance needs, they administered my medication. Being able to live in my old neighborhood was a vast improvement in my circumstances and outlook. My physical condition improved from needing a wheelchair to being able to



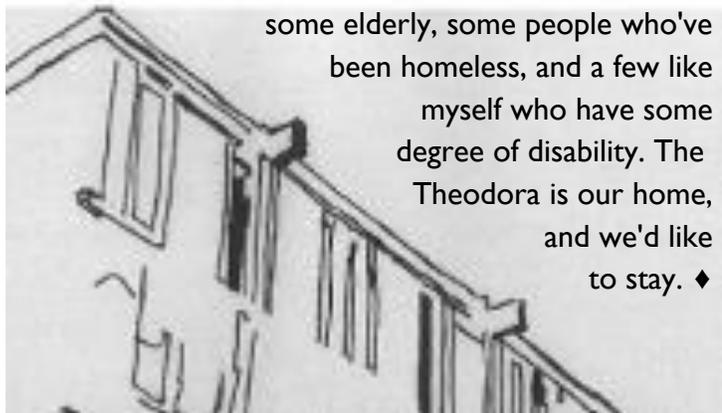
walk on my prostheses and forearm crutches, and eventually to where today I just carry a cane. I was able to start managing my own medications and dispense without any daily help, besides tray assistance and housekeeping. When the Wellness program here was discontinued and all the rest who had relied on it had been transferred to other facilities, I was able to transition to independent status and allowed to continue living here.

There have been some changes while I've lived here, and I've only been a part of the community here through the most recent events. Perhaps others



could tell better what has happened here in the past. But I've lived here through the dissolution of the assisted living services, and was here when the decision to sell the Theodora was announced. When we were first told, it was presented as the building is being sold, that we would all have to find new homes, and we'd better get on it. Much of the population here has since moved out at their own expense.

Many of the residents have been uncomfortable with these circumstances, and fortunately were able to make contact with Organizer Eliana Horn, a representative of the Tenants Union. After making our situation known, we've been informed that we are by law not required to leave, and those of us still here and with the desire to stay in our homes have joined together to form the Theodora Rescue Committee. It is our desire to resist the sale of our home and its transformation from affordable housing for a population in need to a high rent-for-profit property. The population here are a lot of veterans,



some elderly, some people who've been homeless, and a few like myself who have some degree of disability. The Theodora is our home, and we'd like to stay. ♦

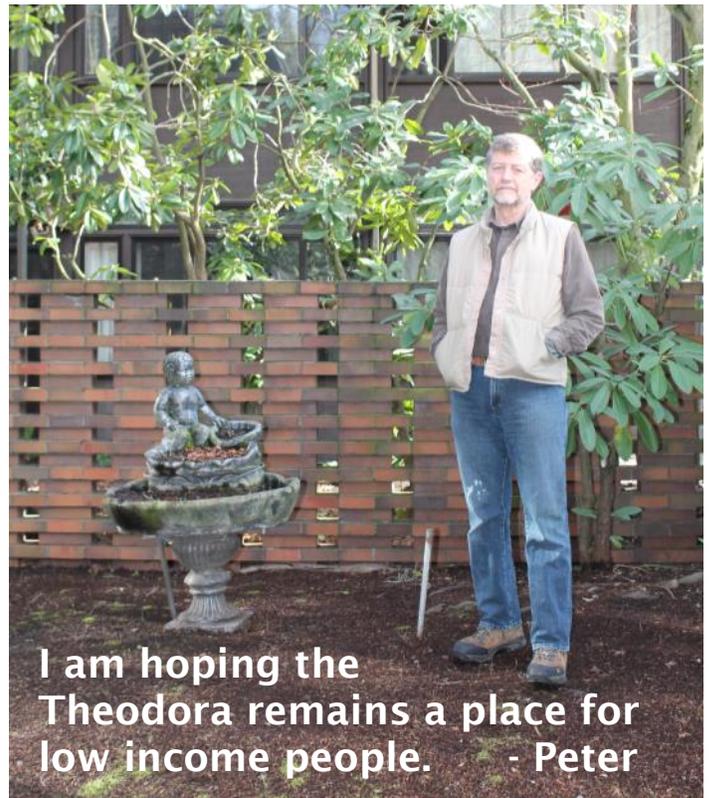


Take Action to Support the Theodora Tenants

Tenants at the Theodora are not going to stand by idly. They are organizing to save their homes and asking Goodman Real Estate and Volunteers of America to withdraw from the purchase and sale agreement, and asking Volunteers of America to commit to selling the building to an entity who will continue the legacy of affordability and dignity that tenants deserve.

Sign the Theodora Rescue Committee's petition asking the Volunteers of America and Goodman Real Estate to keep affordable housing affordable.

**To read more and support, visit:
savethetheodora.wordpress.com**





The TU & Got Green: A Growing Partnership

By Elaine Agoot,
 TU Membership
 & Operations
 Organizer and
 Got Green Leader



The TU has been collaborating with Rainier Valley neighbor and fellow grassroots organizing group Got Green on events, grants, and outreach, drawing connections between housing, economic, and environmental justice. Elaine Agoot, Operations & Membership Organizer, talks about their expanding role at the TU and being a newly elected board member of partner organization Got Green.

One of the amazing things about being an activist is that sometimes my paid work collides with my personal organizing work. Like many people who work at non-profits and organize for a living, I have

a personal organizing life where I like to spend my free time fighting for issues that are near and dear to my heart. Aside from my work at the TU, I am also involved with several organizations. I am an organizer for Gabriela Seattle (also known as Pin@Sa Seattle) and BAYAN USA, which does work to support the genuine democratic liberation of the Philippines, and I sit on the boards of both PrideAsia, and Got Green. So imagine my delight when I was asked to write about my involvement with TU ally organization Got Green (GG).

For those of you who are unfamiliar with GG, it is an amazing organization that works to ensure that low-income people and communities of color in

Seattle/King County can gain equal access to and reap the benefits promised by the green movement and the green economy: green jobs, access to healthy food, energy efficient and healthy homes and quality public transportation.

I've been involved with GG since 2009, when it was a part of the City Weatherization program, myself and other young people of color (POC) received training to conduct residential weatherizations. We quickly learned it wasn't just about getting the necessary training for folks of color to be qualified for green jobs; it also became an examination of barriers that are unique to our community, that stand in the way of getting and keeping green jobs.

What excites me about my work with GG is that it's an organization that is tackling head on issues of ageism, patriarchy, classism, race, privilege and self-determination. At the forefront of the organization is the investment in young people of color, ensuring the health and vitality of the movement.

This model ensures sustainability and renewal in ideas and energy, so seasoned organizers like founder Michael Woo are able to pass down knowledge to up-and-coming leaders. As a queer identifying, cis-gendered woman of color, I accredit my development to the positive influences of Woo and GG's Operations and Development Coordinator, Kristyn Joy. It is because of their positive influence on my life that I felt empowered to deepen my involvement in the movement. I can honestly say that I am just one in many young POC they have been very intentional about investing in. Just recently GG went through a leadership transition, two years in the making. My dear friend and confidant Jill Mangaliman, who became involved with GG around the same time, as I did, became GG's first queer POC Director.

Another thing that excites me about being a part of GG is its growing collaboration with the TU. Since becoming more involved with GG, Gabriela, BAYAN and PrideAsia, I've become acutely aware of the importance of self-determination. By that I mean, I've learned that in order to create truly meaningful and sustainable change the power dynamics have to change. We, the folks at the bottom (women, non-gender conforming folk, people of color, etc.) cannot rely on those with power and privilege to create change. We must make it for ourselves. And so I realized that my presence in an organization with a predominantly white staff is a growing effort to change those dynamics. As I move forward with my career, I am excited to put some of the things I have learned while organizing with GG to use.

The TU has been focusing lately on improving the membership and campaign organizing model. In July, the Membership and Organizing Committee was assembled and began a three month process, which included an evaluation of the current membership and organizing model, as well as creating a proposal. Included in the proposal was a call for a new position, a Membership Organizer. In December, I was approached for the position because of my growing involvement with membership. Last year I coordinated the Annual Membership Meeting, as well

as the TU & Got Green BBQ. Long story short, I have gladly accepted the promotion as the new Membership Organizer!

I know I will grow tremendously in this new role. I'm especially interested in getting to know more of the TU members and activating folks to organize for tenant rights. I am so honored to have the support from my fellow TU comrades who see my potential and have been so encouraging. My new role as Membership Organizer will not come without struggles, but I am hopeful that I will be able to learn from these struggles and make a significant contribution to the TU's long legacy of organizing those without a voice.

As we embark on this journey to build a broad base membership to support up and coming campaigns, I ask all of you who are reading to be present. Challenge the way you show up in your own life, in the lives of others and for your community. Do you show up? How do you show up? Are you just present? Are you challenging yourself? Are you challenging forms of oppression (white privilege, ableism, xenophobia, etc)? Without the consciousness of the people we cannot overcome oppression in its many forms.

To learn more about getting involved with GG or the TU, please feel free to contact me at elainea@tenantsunion.org or (206) 722-6848 x103. See GG's website at www.gotgreenseattle.org. ♦



Elaine and Got Green Director Jill Mangaliman (in green) with other BAYAN USA Members at MLK Day march

Legislative Roundup

By Jonathan Grant, TU Director



TU Intern Paula Wilson and Organizer Stina Janssen at HHAD

While last year tenants defeated 12 anti-tenant bills and passed Part II of the Fair Tenant Screening Act, the 2014 legislative session could best be described as a draw. Here is a roundup on bills impacting tenants, and the TU's position on them:

Opposed SB 6143, "The Rat Bill"

Every tenant should have a home free from infestations that are safe, healthy, and habitable. SB 6143 would have effectively gutted this right, and empowered slumlords to evict tenants seeking repairs for unhealthy or unsafe housing. This right under case law is known as the "implied warranty of habitability," and it exists separate from the state statute under landlord-tenant law. This legislation earned the name "the Rat Bill" because the industry introduced it to repeal a recent court decision that sided with a tenant suing over a rat infested unit. Because the tenant did not notify the landlord in writing, they argued the tenant failed to follow the law. The Court ruled against the landlord on this premise, and reaffirmed that they are obligated to provide healthy housing regardless.

Amazingly, the Rat Bill passed in the conservative State Senate. The TU worked hard with Columbia Legal Services to kill this bill in the House, thanks to everyone who called or wrote their legislators to stop this unprecedented roll back of our rights!

Supported SB 6291/HB 2537, Fair Tenant Screening Act (Pt. III)

Tenants in Washington State are getting taken for a ride by the tenant screening industry. At the Tenants Union we have seen families paying as much as \$600-700 in combined fees. The landlord has no reason to make the process more affordable because all costs are passed down to tenants. The FTSA would fix this problem by making the tenant the direct consumer, who could then reuse the report for a 30 day period, avoiding repetitive fees.

For the first time the affordability component passed out of the House of Representatives, which was a tremendous victory. However, the bill did not make it out of the Senate due to the mid-session conservative coup, and Senator Jan Angel (R -26th) did not bring it up for vote. TU Board Member Cory Roberts and tenant leader Thomas Green gave amazing testimony, speaking truth to power and building momentum for another attempt in the next session!

Supported SB 6292, 90-Day Rent Increase Notice & Relocation Assistance

Last year Seattle earned the unfortunate title as the city with the highest rent increases in the entire country. In response, TU members gathered for a special meeting with Seattle City Council Member Nick Licata, Senator David Frockt (D-46th), and Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles at Seattle City Hall. SB 6292 would have given tenants more time to save up money by requiring a 90 day notice in the event of a large rent increase. Currently the law only provides for a 30-day notice at the state level.

The bill also increased the income eligibility for relocation assistance in the event of displacement from 50% Area Median Income (AMI) to 80% AMI. This would have widened the pool of eligible renters who are facing displacement. Sadly the bill did not make it out of committee, and tenant advocates are now considering local options. ♦



Friends of Cheney Center Tenants

By Terri Anderson, Spokane STOP Community Organizer

A community solidarity group was formed called “Friends of Cheney Center Tenants,” created by the strong supporters of the members of the Cheney Center Tenants Association. The tenants have been participating in Eastern Washington University’s Activist Series at EWU in Cheney. Over forty students, community members, and activists have heard the stories of the tenants who are at risk of losing their Section 8 project-based housing and seeing their homes turned into college student apartments, and they are standing up to offer support and solidarity. The tenants have successfully delayed the conversion of their building through a letter writing campaign to building owner Gary Geshke. The tenants became aware of problems with the notification requirements, and requested the extended contract after meeting with attorneys willing to file a lawsuit on their behalf. As a result of the tenants’ advocacy, the owner extended the subsidy contract by one year.

Organizations in Spokane and Cheney who have committed to offer support as “Friends of Cheney Center Tenants” are Peace and Justice League of Spokane, Park Tower Tenant Association, SHAWL Society, Washington CAN in Spokane, Spokane Progress Alliance, Planned Parenthood of Spokane, Sierra Club of Spokane, and more. Numerous individuals and community members have also committed support.

The tenants will gather more support on March 7th and 8th at the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane annual conference at the Universal Unitarian Church in Spokane. The tenants will participate in workshops and staff a table to

distribute information and postcards to mail to Geshke to convince him to be a respectable community member who is not responsible for the loss of subsidized housing for the people of Cheney and rural SW Spokane County.

You can offer your support to the Cheney tenants by liking their Facebook page, “Friends of Cheney Center Tenants.” ♦



(L to R) Woody Labar (President of the Cheney Center Tenants Association), TU Organizer Terri Anderson, and Phil Smith (Park Tower tenant)

Welcome to the TU

Board Member Cory Roberts

Cory is an Intercultural Communication student at University of Washington and the former Director of the Office of the Off-Campus Housing Affairs for the Associated Students of University of Washington.



Cory is proud to call himself a Tenants Union Board Member and is interested in continuing to advocate for the growing number of community members from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. ♦



Tenant leaders and allies raise their voices at a recent protest at Goodman Real Estate to demand a stop to tenant displacement

Your Voice Matters

Get Involved with the TU

- **Save the Date:**
TU MOVIE NIGHT!
Black Coffee Co-op
April 3, 6-8pm
- Renew your membership today or make a donation to support the important work of the TU. Visit www.tenantsunion.org today!
- Sign the petition to stand with Theodora tenants against displacement at savethetheodora.wordpress.com.
- Participate in an action with tenants fighting to save their homes. Follow the TU blog at www.tenantsunion.org and sign up for email action alerts.

Visit

www.tenantsunion.org

- ◆ Stay up-to-date with the issues impacting Washington tenants
- ◆ Find answers to hundreds of detailed tenants rights questions
- ◆ Find out ways to take action to support tenant leaders
- ◆ Sign up for Tenants Union action alert emails

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