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MILO ARTS TENANTS CAN STAY

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Illustration: Photo, Map

By Doug Caruso
Dispatch City Hall Reporter

Residents of the *Milo* Arts Center can't smoke or cook in the building, but they still have a place to live and create art.

Yesterday, Environmental Judge Richard C. Pfeiffer Jr. denied a city request to evict the tenants of the 106-year-old former elementary school at 617 E. 3rd Ave. Columbus city inspectors say the building is a fire hazard.

The Franklin County judge also denied the request of the building's landlords, Rick and Donna Mann, to lift fire-safety precautions he put in place Friday.

"What the court will do is not grant either party what it wishes," Pfeiffer said after discussing the case for more than 1 1/2 hours in his chambers with attorneys for both sides.

Instead, Pfeiffer continued an order he issued Friday that allows the residents to remain as long as there is a 24-hour fire watch and no cooking, smoking or open flames in the building. In a nod toward improvements the Manns made over the weekend, Pfeiffer loosened the restrictions somewhat: He allowed them to hire a less-expensive security company instead of off-duty Columbus firefighters for the fire watch. He also allowed limited access to the school's former gymnasium, which he had declared off-limits.

"What was referred to as the gymnasium may have people in it as long as they are there to improve fire safety," Pfeiffer said. "And, hopefully, persons will be doing that in the future."

Bill Loveland, attorney for the Manns, said the judge was concerned that the gymnasium, which serves as a studio for sculptor and welder Aaron Schroeder, was too cluttered and that the hallway outside the emergency exit was partially blocked.

The Manns, Loveland and the Manns' architect met with city officials on Monday to get a list of improvements needed to bring the building up to code. Mr. Mann said contractors already have fixed the building's standpipe, which would supply water to firefighters. Fire walls to separate stairways from the lobby also have gone up, he said. Other contractors are putting together estimates for buildingwide fire-alarm and smoke-alarm systems, Mr. Mann said.

Pfeiffer ordered both sides to meet Oct. 12 to review progress the Manns have made toward fixing the building's problems. His order is in effect until Oct. 18.

Sister Thoma Swanson, who has a studio in the building, said Pfeiffer's decision is fair.

"The city is justified in seeking compliance," she said. "The judge is requiring it, but he's doing it in a way that allows us to keep living there."

The court proceeding attracted attention from high-level city officials yesterday. City Attorney Janet E. Jackson and her chief prosecutor, Stephen MacIntosh, visited Pfeiffer's chambers. Larry Price, community liaison for Mayor Michael B. Coleman, talked with some of the artists who showed up for the hearing.

He convinced Ike Okafor-Newsum, a sculptor who has a studio in the building, that there is no city conspiracy to take the building.

"It all started when the mayor pulled up on that lot," Price said, referring to a bus tour Coleman and other city officials took last month with members of the *Milo* Grogan Area Commission. "It was an eyesore, and if it hadn't been an eyesore, we wouldn't be here."

Okafor-Newsum said the residents and the landlord need to work harder to keep the exterior of the building free of trash and weeds.

"We're going to improve that," he said.

Caption: (1) Chris Russell / Dispatch

Columbus firefighter Tom Page makes his rounds at the *Milo* Arts Center on E. 3rd Avenue. The 24-hour patrols were ordered last week by Environmental Judge Richard C. Pfeiffer Jr. Yesterday, the judge ruled the building owners can hire a private company to conduct the fire watch.

(2) Map

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