

Mr. Tony Casper
Guttenberg Fire Official
6808 Park Avenue
Guttenberg, New Jersey 07093

Dear Mr. Casper:

REFLECTIONS AFTER THE GALAXY FIRE OF 5 DECEMBER 2006
By Lina Arellano (Tower 3-Apt. 10C)

I requested our neighbor, Siat Ng of Unit 3-9C, to read from this letter for me at the unit owners' meeting that was held on Wednesday, 28 February 2007, because I was unable to attend. (Siat gave you a copy of this letter that night at that meeting.)

I have been reflecting on the incident wherein Wendy Burlingame and her two pet dogs perished under horrible circumstances. I pray for her almost everyday and ask for protection for our families, our home and this area.

There are still many questions in my mind, questions about the protocol and procedures that should have been in place before this tragedy. I received one official call from our Management, from the General Manager, on the evening of 11 December, informing me that I could move back to my apartment because the electrical and plumbing conditions were verified as normal. There was no mention of the air quality, health or safety issues. I later called her to say that, since everyone had masks on, I was not moving in and did not do so until after New Year's Day. The Resident Manager first called concerning the replacement of the front door on the 2nd Saturday after the fire. I was not able to retrieve that message after I moved to my sister's place in Tower I, so was unable to leave a permit to enter and a key. Hence, our door is still unchanged with a broken doorbell.

IF THE ALARM FROM GALAXY REACHED THE FIRE DEPARTMENT BEFORE MIDNIGHT, WHY WERE NOT THE FLOOR IDENTIFIED AND ALL OCCUPANTS, ALERTED FOR EVACUATION? Moreover, after my neighbors in Apt. 10B evacuated, assuming that the hallway fire alarm worked, why did not the Concierge or Management call us and everyone on the 10th floor? **ARE THERE PROCEDURES IN CASE OF EMERGENCIAS such as this?**

For my part, the first clue to the fire was the smell of smoke in the dark in our Master bedroom, way past midnight, about 12:15 a.m. I just turned off the light to go to bed when I saw thick clouds of smoke coming through the walls or hallway through my husband's dressing room, as there is no window or door from that side of the apartment. I immediately jumped from the bed, wakened my husband, and we ran outside to the living room. I called the Concierge to report the smoke and my husband confirms that, while I was still on the phone, the alarm inside the apartment came on. The faint message repeated: "Fire has been detected in your building. Stay inside your unit for further instructions." The message finally stopped but no instructions followed. **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCH INSTRUCTIONS?**

My husband, my brother-in-law and wife (visiting from the Philippines) and I were deeply grateful that the electrical and telephone systems continued to work throughout the entire incident. Had the situation been worse and there was no electricity, lights and telephone, **ARE THERE PROCEDURES OR INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESIDENTS AND MANAGEMENT TO FOLLOW?**

The firemen did bang on our door at least 30 minutes after our report – we could hear the shouts, banging and hose of water slamming against the corridor outside. After I opened the door a bit to inform the fireman (totally surrounded by thick black smoke) that we were all right, the firefight continued. While waiting with wet towels over our noses, we could see smoke entering the top and bottom of the entrance door, and water gushing from the corridor into our foyer. We opened the windows so that we could breathe. After at least an hour later, we were finally instructed by the firemen to come out and follow them into the soot-burned stairwell across our door. I cleaned my nose and found the tissue black with soot. We were not given any mask or protection and, since I was leading the group up the stairwell, I regretted not being able to go back to retrieve my wet towel to protect myself. Climbing seven flights with great difficulty, I realize that this was where we inhaled a huge amount of smoke and soot, as the fire was allowed to go through that side.

We joined the residents who were waiting in the lobby before we were instructed to proceed to the mall. TV crews captured our group moving out of the lobby, I would say about 2:30 a.m.

We were able to proceed to my sister's unit in Tower I where I caught a few winks. The next day I was unable to report for work, coughing and exhausted by the experience. When I did work, the nurse at the United Nations Medical Service noted my difficulty in breathing and low-grade fever and promptly sent me home. The next time I reported for work, the same nurse immediately made an emergency appointment with an internist that same afternoon. The doctor was so concerned that smoke inhalation could have damaged my lungs or liver – I could not puff through the tube he gave me to test my breathing – that he ordered all tests to be done: X-ray, blood tests and urinalysis. Thank God all the tests the following week were negative!

This same question I posed to you as the Guttenberg Fire Department Fire Marshall when I called after New Year: IF THE NEW FIRE ALARM SYSTEM DID FUNCTION AS IT SHOULD, AS WAS BEING MAINTAINED, WHY DID WE IN UNIT 10C – AT END OF THE CORRIDOR AWAY FROM THE GARAGE – NOT HEAR THE HALLWAY ALARM? MOREOVER, WHY DID OUR APARTMENT ALARM ONLY WORK AFTER THE FIRE WAS WELL UNDER WAY AND AFTER WE REPORTED THE SMOKE? ARE CURRENT EQUIPMENT IN PLACE INSUFFICIENT OR SIMPLY USELESS?

Why is the Galaxy Board too quick to make definitive judgments regarding the current equipment and protocol, or lack thereof, BEFORE this murder investigation is concluded?

No one from the Board or Management has checked how we are doing, or to put a human face to this tragedy. I got another call from the Resident Manager so they can again check the electrical situation in our unit. To date, the 10th floor corridor is still not fully renovated. The smell of smoke is less evident but the dust and soot continue to fall inside our apartment. We keep the ionizer going full blast daily and vacuum more often.

I hope that more and better fire and alarm equipment will be PLACED OUTSIDE EACH UNIT, not just new carpeting and wallpaper. I would appreciate receiving a copy of your fire report and am requesting that the current fire alarm system be thoroughly inspected for efficacy and its effectiveness, verified. Thank you very much.

Lina J. Arellano
Lina J. ARELLANO
Tower III, Unit 10C

8 March 2007

Copy: GALAXY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

P.S. - I have not heard from or received any reply to my letter. Thank you for your letters of concern!