

## YOUR COMMUNITY WATCHDOG



STAFF PHOTO BY GRANT MORRIS

A woman and her daughter are escorted out of their apartment by an eviction officer in Nashua.

In her job as night reporter for The Telegraph, Stephanie Hooper was constantly running into people at accidents or crime scenes who complained about the conditions of their apartments and the lack of response by landlords and the city's code enforcement division. With help from her editors, she set out on a year-long investigation of rental housing in Nashua. Her two-week series, entitled "For Rent," was published in August of 2008 and drew immediate reaction from tenants, landlords, housing advocates and code enforcement officers throughout the state.

In examining the issues facing Nashua's rental community, The Telegraph spent months digging through hundreds of rental property files at three city departments, interviewing officials in each department, as well as local landlords and tenants. We uncovered a variety of problems, including illegal apartments with unchecked construction and wiring; limited enforcement and limited record keeping of enforcement actions; a smoke alarm testing program at multifamily properties frozen because of budget cuts and staffing issues; landlords struggling to maintain properties among rising evictions and vacancies; and problem tenants ruining properties and spoiling neighborhoods.

In awarding the series first place for health reporting, the judges in the New England Press Association contest described the effort as "an unflinching look at the dangerous living conditions faced by low-income renters, a subject that could easily have been overlooked. It goes beyond the shock value of the rats and roaches, and offers a glimpse into the lives of the real people involved as well as a look at how government is supposed to address such problems."

*Only The Telegraph provides in-depth reporting that makes a difference in the Nashua area*

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