

Former 'Parade' home now family's nightmare

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A block away from New Albany Country Club in a Parade of Homes showplace house, something was wrong.

Andrew and Michelle Hunt came down with asthma. Their two boys were getting sinus infections. Michelle felt burning in her sinuses. And for a year and a half or longer, she lost her voice.

They couldn't see anything but they could smell it — an odor so strong in an upstairs bedroom that Michelle said it brushed her back from the doorway.

Then the dog died.

The county has since reappraised the house the Hunts bought for \$690,000: It's worth \$200.

Mold, they say, ruined their health and everything they owned.

One day last May, the Hunts walked away. The 5,600-square-foot house with two kitchens, five bedrooms, five bathrooms, upstairs and downstairs laundry rooms and marble and hardwood floors is no longer their home. The Hunts left behind their clothes and their furniture, their playthings and the family pictures.

Mr. Hunt said one doctor told them: "Assume your house is burned to the ground and move out."

They rented a two-bedroom apartment in Westerville and continued to make house payments. They consulted doctors, a home inspector, an industrial hygienist and a forensic architect.

And they called upon the seller and home builder for help.

The Hunts bought the house from the Building Industry Association of Central Ohio in 1999, a few weeks after it was in the builders' annual new home show.

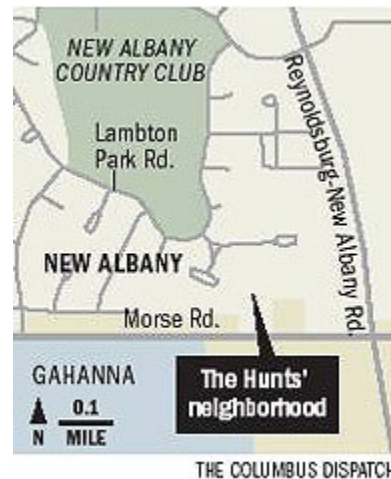
It was the BIA's Foundation House, part of a charitable program that has raised more than \$1.5 million for Children's Hospital, COSI, the Columbus Housing Partnership and others since 1983.

The BIA selected Truberry Group to build the house. Truberry lined up contractors and suppliers who donated materials to build the house for a below-market cost. The BIA donated the difference between the cost to build the house and its sale price to charity.



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Andrew Hunt retrieves mail from his New Albany home. Mold forced the family to move to a Westerville apartment, he said.



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In nine months of talks, the BIA, Truberry and the Hunts couldn't agree on what caused the problem or how to fix it. Last fall, the Hunts sued the BIA and Truberry in Franklin County Common Pleas Court, alleging faulty workmanship.

A trial date has been set for the fall.

"I can't sell it, I can't live in it," Mr. Hunt said. "The best resolution would be to see the house knocked down, taken off our hands and we move to a new home somewhere else."

BIA Executive Director Jim Hilz and Truberry owners Scott and Shelley Shively declined to comment. But in court filings, Truberry "specifically denies there was any dangerous mold growth" and says that unidentified things the Hunts did after they bought the house could be to blame.

Truberry also says the Hunts are coming forward long after their one-year house warranties expired. The Ohio legislature, however, last year gave homeowners 10 years to sue for unsafe or defective workmanship.

Meanwhile, the Hunts convinced at least one impartial observer that their home is virtually worthless.

Last year, the Franklin County auditor appraised the property at \$843,100. The Hunts contested. They submitted a doctor's letter, the forensic architect's report and a copy of the lawsuit.

Appraisers slashed \$772,100 from the value of the property.

"There were obviously problems with this house," said Tony Frissora, who heads the real estate division of the auditor's office.

The house is now worth \$200, appraisers said. The 109-by-167-foot lot it rests on is worth \$70,800, less than half of the value assigned to identically sized neighboring lots.

In January, Caroline Hunt was born and joined her family at the cramped Westerville apartment.

"I definitely know how Hurricane Katrina people feel," Mrs. Hunt said. "But theirs was an act of God. Ours is an act of negligence."

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