

NJEHA

Connection Story

MY NAME IS FRANK TERRANOVA AND THIS IS MY STORY. I WORKED FOR A COUNTY HEALTH DEPT IN NEW JERSEY FOR 32 YEARS. DURING THAT TIME MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE CAME MY WAY. THE ONE THAT I'M GOING TO SHARE WAS VERY SPECIAL INDEED. I WAS DISPATCHED TO INVESTIGATE AN ALLEDGED "NO HEAT" COMPLAINT. I ARRIVED AT THE LOCATION IN QUESTION, ONE OF SIX BUNGALO-TYPE COTTAGES ON THE FLOOD PLAIN OF THE BARNEGAT BAY. THE COMPLAINT WAS VALID. A MOTHER AND HER THREE CHILDREN WERE IN FACT HEATING THE HOUSE USING THE GAS FIRED OVEN IN THE KITCHEN, LEAVING THE OVEN DOOR OPEN. AFTER FURTHER INVESTIGATION I FOUND THAT THIS WAS ONLY THE "TIP" OF THE ICEBERG. THERE WAS NO WATER! THE PUMP FOR THE WELL HAD BURNED OUT. THE SEPTIC SYSTEM WAS OVERFLOWING IN THE BACK YARD, WHICH WAS EASILY DISCERABLE AMIDST THE PATCHES OF SNOW ON THE GROUND. TWO OF THE CHILDREN WERE SUFFERING FROM BRONCHITIS. THE MOTHER WAS OBVIOUSLY STRESSED. I ASSURED HER THAT I WOULD BE CONTACTING THE OWNER WITH A NOTICE OF VIOLATION ADDRESSING THE OBSERVED HEALTH VIOLATIONS.

AS I LEFT THE SITE OF INVESTIGATION, MY HEART WAS LOW. I FELT TERRIBLE THAT THIS WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN MIGHT HAVE TO WAIT SOME TIME FOR THE PROCESS INVOLVED IN ABATING THESE CONDITIONS.

THE NEXT MORNING AS I PENNED THE NOTICE TO THE OWNER OF THE PROPERTY, I GOT AN IDEA. I DECIDED TO CONTACT A FRIEND OF MINE IN SOCIAL SERVICES. I TOLD HIM WHAT I HAD FOUND, WHAT I WAS DOING AND THEN ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING HIS DEPARTMENT MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO. TWO DAYS LATER, HE CALLED BACK TO SAY THAT SOMEONE FROM HIS OFFICE HAD VISITED THE MOTHER, AND THAT ARRANGEMENTS WERE BEING MADE TO MOVE THE FAMILY TO A STRUCTURALLY SOUND AND WARM HOME IN A NEARBY COMMUNITY. IT GETS BETTER! THIS STORY STARTED IN EARLY DECEMBER. I LATER RECEIVED

WORD THAT THE FAMILY HAD BEEN MOVED TO THEIR NEW HOME IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS, AND THAT A LOCAL CHURCH HAD REACH OUT THE THEM WITH CLOTHING AND TOYS FOR THE CHILDREN. NEEDLESS TO SAY, I HAD A BIG SMILE ON MY FACE AND A VERY NICE CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR THE HEART.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DISHEVELED COTTAGE? I APPEARED IN MUNICIPAL COURT AFTER THE HOLIDAYS AND MET THE OWNER. HE HAD ADDRESSED THE ISSUES REQUIRING ABATEMENT AND HAVING DONE SO, AND BEING AWARE THAT THE FAMILY IN QUESTION WAS NOW WELL-SITUATED, I TOLD HIM THAT I WOULD PURSUE ONLY THE MINIMUM PENALTY FOR THE VIOLATIONS IS QUESTION.

WE CAME BEFORE THE JUDGE. I REITERATED THE COMPLAINT BEFORE THE JUDGE AND STATED THAT SATISFACTORY COMPLIANCE HAD BEEN ACHIEVED. THEREFORE, "THE COUNTY IS ONLY SEEKING THE MINIMUM PENALTY, YOUR HONOR". THE JUDGE RESOUNDED, "OH NOOO!", AND PROCEEDED TO "THROW THE BOOK" AT THE OWNER, ASSESSING THE MAXIMUM PENALTY FOR EACH OF THE VIOLATIONS.

LATER THAT YEAR I HAPPENED TO DRIVE DOWN THE ROAD LEADING OUT TO THE BARNEGAT BAY WERE THE COTTAGE WAS, ONLY TO NOTICE THAT IT, AND THE OTHER COTTAGES LIKE IT, HAD BEEN RAZED.

THEY WERE GONE.

WHAT WASN'T GONE WAS THE SATISFACTION THAT IN THE COURSE OF DOING MY JOB, THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ONE SINGLE MOM AND HER THREE CHILDREN WAS A LOT HEALTHIER.