

Residents sue MetroWest developer over control of the community

Lawsuit alleges that Kevin Azzouz misspent \$2.3 million in homeowners dues



Kevin Azzouz and his Veranda Partners LLC are the developers of the big mixed-use project in MetroWest called Veranda Park. (Hilda M. Perez, Orlando Sentinel / July 1, 2008)

ORLANDO - Some MetroWest homeowners are asking the court to either remove developer **Kevin Azzouz** and give them control of the MetroWest Master's Association or dissolve the entity that oversees the 1,800-acre community in west Orlando.

A lawsuit filed Monday in the 9th Judicial Circuit Court in Orlando also wants the judge to force Azzouz or his agents to hand over all the financial records for the 14,000-home development that Azzouz took control of in 2005.

At the heart of the lawsuit are accusations that Azzouz and/or his agents misspent more than \$2.3 million of the homeowners' dues, money the residents pay to cover expenses such as cutting the grass and maintaining common areas, fountains and other facilities.

The suit is the residents' strongest move yet in the year-long battle to take control of the development and its checkbook.

The battle has simmered for months, largely in closed association meetings and through e-mails.

Azzouz hasn't responded to inquiries from the *Orlando Sentinel*.

But he told the Sentinel last fall that the complaints come from a few disgruntled

residents with an ax to grind.

"We have never misspent or absconded with anyone's money," he said at the time. "This is all just a worthless rant full of misleading information."

The suit was filed on behalf of the Mandalay at Stonebridge Commons Condominium Association, as well as residents Mary Biddle, a business consultant, and David J. Rosenberg, an accountant.

Their lawyer, Philip J. Snyderburn, said residents are fearful of losing control of the current \$800,000 balance in the association's account, money that is to be used on behalf of the community.

Azzouz is battling bankruptcies, foreclosures and liens, much of it revolving around his planned \$700 million **Veranda Park** town center within MetroWest.

The suit details much of an audit done last year by Rosenberg and other residents, which alleges that Azzouz used at least \$1.2 million of the association's money to pay some of the bills and salaries at Veranda Park. It also questions spending such as \$354,700 for 10,000 rose bushes, most of which were never planted and died.

"My clients are scared that someone is going to loot the coffers of the HOA [homeowners association]," Snyderburn said.

Snyderburn pointed out that Azzouz needs to come up with \$300,000 or more to keep the lights and water turned on in the five buildings at Veranda Park, a collection of offices, condos and a restaurant, amid vacant lots.

Three of the Azzouz-controlled Veranda properties are in bankruptcy, which has stalled but won't stop the utilities service shut-off.

Snyderburn said the residents needed to make their move now, because a new developer, Carl Shakarian, of Boca Raton, has been announced by the association's management company as taking over as the developer. Azzouz is still president of the Master's Association board of directors.

Shakarian hasn't responded to messages left by the Sentinel.

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