Developer fans cash at homeless encampment in ploy to clear site

A California real estate developer dressed in an elf outfit and a “Make Oakland Great Again” hat dropped dollar bills on a homeless encampment on Friday in an offensive stunt that drew no takers and ended with the disgraced real estate executive escorted off the site by security.

As first reported by San Francisco Gate, Oakland developer Gene Gorelik stood on a rented boom lift shouting “Free money! Free money!” at residents of the encampment while throwing dollar bills from a leaf blower and promising to give $2,000 to anyone who departed the site by 8 p.m. on Friday.

“I will rent a boom lift from Home Depot and make it rain $300 in singles to show the Citizens of Libbyland I’m serious,” Gorelik wrote on Facebook ahead of the event.

> It was a tense morning outside Home Depot in Oakland when Gene Gorelik, a real estate developer previously sued by the city, rented a boom lift and offered money to residents of a homeless encampment if they leave pic.twitter.com/ZUjD6J0JmP
>
> — Sarah Ravani (@SarRavani) July 12, 2019

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Reporters present on the scene said that none of the local residents accepted Gorelik's offer and instead shouted him down. The city is in the midst of a rising homelessness crisis as home values and rental rates skyrocket across the Bay Area. An average apartment in Oakland currently rents for $2,674 a month — a steep price tag that has driven many residents to the streets.

Gorelik arranged the stunt after learning that a local Home Depot has been pressuring the city to remove the encampment where hundreds of people live in homes, cars, RVs and tents due to safety concerns. Tensions ran high after the city voted to close a section of the road that contains the encampment for at least 18 months, which would force most of the residents to leave.

> Gene Gorelik has decided to pack up and leave after getting no response of his offer to unhoused residents to accept money and leave @sfchronicle pic.twitter.com/Ft8Lt1Xb6n
>
> — Jessica Christian (@jachristian) July 12, 2019

Many local residents were upset about Gorelik's performance and said that it showed disrespect for the residents and the affordability crisis currently taking place in California.

"It's just a slap in the face for the residents," said Candice Elder, the chief executive of East Oakland Collective, a community organization that focuses on racial and economic equity, told the Guardian. "He's not doing anything constructive right now but being disrespectful and classist."

> If you want to put it in context, Gene is offering $2,000 to each person who leaves this encampment. Offering to shower $1,000 in dollar bills over the crowd. What is market rate for a studio in Oakland these days? Barely that per month. pic.twitter.com/7lN8ZfQdvU
>
> — Vivian Ho (@VivianHo) July 12, 2019

Gorelik, who did not immediately return Inman's request for comment, is not affiliated with Home Depot. He was eventually removed from the site by officers from the Oakland Police Department. In 2017, Gorelik made news after demolishing a tenant's apartment while he was still renting it, a fact some encampment inhabitants raised when they called on Gorelik to leave.

"$2,000 would get me maybe a motel for two weeks, some food," Katy Spikes, a 38-year-old woman who has lived in the encampment for five years, told the Guardian. "You can't even use that as a deposit. There's no place in Oakland that's $1,000. It doesn't solve the issue and it sure doesn't even put a cushion under it."

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