

16 April 2002

Dear Ed,

Well, the North Texas Health Science Center, those wonderful people who have so loudly in the past proclaimed themselves good neighbors, have finally delivered their ultimatum. I must take their offer of \$95,000 for my property or else. Strangely, they have offered the owners of the Chimney Pot \$120,000 for their land which is much smaller than my lot. Our two buildings are really of no consequence. It is the land they want. They also want to replace our retail space with retail space of their own, which in my opinion violates the spirit of Eminent Domain.

Like all large corporations who want the public to accept the illusion that they actually possess real human values like compassion and a sense of fair play, the North Texas Health Science Center proves yet again that it is just another big bully. It has made no sincere attempt to help the neighbors it claims to value, whose lives and businesses have been uprooted by its unhindered appetite for more land. Not even the costs of moving and the possible storage of possessions have been offered. In the place of real ethical considerations they cite laws and regulations, largely of their own making, that permit them to pay no more than the appraised value of the property they are seizing. Forget any attempt to restore their displaced neighbors to situations roughly equal to those which they are losing.

I have enjoyed and operated a successful business at 902 Boland Street for almost twenty-five years. Across its threshold have passed many of the most important people in the social, cultural and business life of our city. And not just Fort Worth, but state and national leaders as well, including our current First Lady, Laura Bush. For that quarter of a century my brother and I have benefited from a location in the Cultural District that for artists is almost unrivalled. Nobody doubts that my property today would have been prime real estate if it had not been for the ominous, or should I say omnivorous, presence of my corporate "good neighbor" up the hill.

That they should profit from the situation that they themselves created is simply wrong. And there is also something wrong in allowing a small retail business like mine to be forced out only to be replaced with retail spaces belonging to the North Texas Health Science Center, no matter how lofty their professed motives may be. And wrong too is the fact that they are not required in any way to address the other financial losses that their dislocation of our small businesses attends.

Being very sensitive to their carefully nurtured public image, the NTHSC people want me to go quietly, with the appearance

of willingness, and definately without any messy public squabbling. With all their desire to appear acting ethically, I wonder how they can rationalize that their offer of \$95,000 will be enough to restore me to anything close to my status quo ante. If they really wanted to act in good will - and ethically - they would address these concerns. That they do not, simply shows the world what kind of people they really are. As I depart, which I must inevitably do, I want there to be somewhere in our official city records, in the newspapers and the minutes of the City Council, a record of the heavy handed treatment that we have received at the hands of our good neighbor up the hill.

The osteopaths and their minions are touchy about one thing, and that, as I have said, is their public image. They have always wanted to be considered the equal of MD's. In the past when the local news media have reported their costly medical blunders and the perennially low scores of their students on the state medical board exams, the hospital and its school have shied away from the public light and adopted a low profile until the news had been forgotten. This time I don't want the public to forget what the osteopaths are doing.

Although I must bow to the inevitable, I really have never wanted to give up my property or create for the benefit of the NTHSC the public illusion that this has been a friendly takeover. My brother and I do have friends on the City Council and at the Star Telegram, and we have a loyal public following as well. We have served faithfully on the boards of many of the city's most important cultural institutions and are valued members of the cultural community here. In 1999 we were honored as the official artists to celebrate Fort Worth's Sesquicentennial at a ceremony hosted by the Mayor and many city leaders. It was pointed out then that Scott and I are the only Fort Worth artists ever to have had work displayed in all of the city's major museums.

We have won international praise for our painted decorations for the Bass Performance Hall. The Museum of Science and History here owns all forty of our original bird paintings from our famous portfolio "Of Birds and Texas," and the University of Texas Press has just published the trade edition of our book to wide acclaim. My brother has just painted two portraits of the President of the United States and we both have been asked to do two important landscapes with birds for the White House. In the course of our work for the President and Mrs. Bush we have been visitors to the their ranch at Crawford and have dined privately with the Bushes at the White House.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Fort Worth Zoological Association I have had some experience speaking to the City Council. In my allotted minutes before the council I would like to warn them of the undoubted long term aims of the medical facilities. They will in the years ahead continue their matastasis like a malignant tumor until they have taken

to the north

over all the land bordering the Cultural District, between Camp Bowie Boulevard and West Seventh Street. Their officials deny this but refuse to put their denial in writing. They intend to Disneyfy the area by tearing down the old familiar shops and replacing them with new "old" buildings of their own design. Even the most casual glance at the dreary institutional structures they have already imposed upon the neighborhood should give our citizens a warning of what is to come. What a sad architectural complement they are to the brilliant designs of Kahn, Johnson and Ando whose buildings have made our city's Cultural District admired and envied throughout the world. Do we really want a huge hospital and its related institutions to completely dominate the entire north side of the Cultural District? Don't we have higher standards than that? Especially for the one area of our city, despite Billy Bob's honky tonk, that has made us really respected internationally.

And, again, don't we recognize at least some measure of fair treatment for those of us who are forced to move to make way for this juggernaut, some attempt to ease the unfair economic burden that has been imposed upon us. It's as if your neighbor had invited himself into your living room then declared that you must sell him your property or else. He then throws money at your feet to pay for your house and orders you out with no reasonable offer to pay your moving and storage costs or concern that you will ever be able to replace your property losses with the money they have forced you to accept.

If they really wish to claim the moral high ground that their public relations efforts ceaselessly aim to promote, then now is the opportunity to prove themselves. Until now, however, as far as their unlucky neighbors are concerned, they haven't even measured up to the standards of their Hippocratic Oath to "First do no Harm." But, then, I guess that oath is only for real doctors.

Sincerely yours,

Stuart W. Gentling