

Landlords: Ideal tenant is older, from small town

Editor's note: This is the second article in a three-part series on apartment rentals.

By Lori Sullivan

If Lincoln landlords could create their version of the model student tenant, the plans might look something like this: an upperclassman, who pays rent promptly, does not damage property, throw loud parties or abuse any lease provision. The ideal renter also would originally be from a small town.

In the absence of perfect renters, landlords and one manager rate the real-life versions as anything from good to poor.

Dallas Whitford says he has been in the rental business for more than 12 years and has not had any major problems with students. Recently though, he said he had one group of students that he would not consider renting to again because "they were exceptionally dirty."

"Students leave a mess behind sometimes, but most leave the place clean and pay their rent on time," Whitford said.

In general, students do not cause any more problems than his other renters, he said. Problems do arise when students want improvements made after they move in that are not what he considers changes contributing to health and safety.

Getting maintenance work done is a problem for Whitford sometimes, but he usually tries to talk to his tenants about it, he said.

Giving proper notice when moving is important and may be a factor in returning a damage deposit, Whitford said.

"Some people think any 30 days are proper notice, but it has to be the first to the first," he said, referring to the beginning of a month.

Whitford prefers to rent to students from a rural background because they tend to be more mature, he said.

"I'm not making a blanket condemnation of kids from Omaha or Chicago, but kids coming from rural areas are just more responsible. I would rather take a group from Boondocks, Ne. than a similar age group from Chicago," Whitford said.

"If they can't pay rent on time, the kids from rural areas will take care of it. Somebody from Chicago would probably tell me to go to hell," he said.

On the subject of not paying rent, Whitford said many students may not know it, but if they get a bad credit record as a result of not paying rent, it will follow them around for a long time.

"If you're a tenant and you don't pay me your rent and we go to court, the judgment against you will go on your credit record," he said.

Recently, he heard of a couple who had such a credit record and who were denied a loan to purchase a house.

However, even winning a judgment does not mean a landlord will get rent that has not been paid by a student. In many cases, there is no way to recover because students don't make enough wages to garnish them, he said.

The biggest friction point with students is damage deposits, he said. Damages and unpaid bills are deducted from that amount, but most of the time he is able to return students' deposits in full, he said.

The enforcement of city ordinance housing codes drives the price of rent up, Whitford said. The codes get into "cosmetic aspects" of property that are not important to health and safety, he said.

"The housing code is not good if the goal is to have adequate housing for the lowest cost," he said.

"They (housing code authorities) come out and say, 'You've got a crack here and need some paint there,' and by the time they're finished, you have to raise the rent to more than the tenants can afford," Whitford said.

If anything does concern health and safety, he does get it fixed, he said.

Joseph Kean, a property manager, said he has very few problems with student tenants, fewer than with other tenants of the same age group who are not students.

The common problems that do come up are usually when there are three roommates, he said. He does not recommend having three people living together because it often deteriorates into a two-against-one situation, he said. When that happens, it can lead to breaking the lease and being responsible for the rent amount for the remainder of the lease unless the apartment can be re-rented.

Another difficulty arises when only some of the people renting an apartment can make their payments. If it looks like a good faith effort is being made by a person who can't pay on time, Kean said he is willing to allow him to stay and work something out.

Though several students are in that situation now, he said, in general, students are not in the "professional rent procrastinator" category.

The biggest problem between students and landlords is lack of communication, Kean said.

"If they will just come in and talk — especially in cases of not paying the rent on time — just not telling us about problems is the worst possible thing to do," Kean said.

Lapses in responsibility, courtesy or a lack of experience are the sources of many problems for some students, he said.

Caring for property, paying rent and giving proper notice of moves, showing courtesy to other tenants concerning noise levels and gaining experience from living away from home are all things students develop as good tenants, he said.

A problem first-time apartment dwellers experience is not being able to control the crowd at a party they might give. People who they do not even know can come and sometimes leave damages that must be paid for, he said.

"We don't object to a party, but most of our problems with students come from lack of experience on their part. Very few problems are a result of maliciousness," he said.

Students should compensate for their lack of experience with caution, he said.

"Once you've signed the lease, it's too late to decide that you don't like the situation," Kean said. Students should read the lease, understand it and if they don't, they should ask questions, he said. It is important to understand a lease because it is legally binding.

All the property he manages for rental uses a lease that was drawn up according to the Landlord/Tenant Act, Kean said. Landlords who use oral agreements are "probably the worst ones," he said.

"It's a good idea to have things in writing — a properly drawn lease is the best protection for both parties," he said.

Kean said he would advise all students for their own protection not to change or add roommates without consulting their landlord. If a new roommate, who is not named on the lease, cannot pay rent or damages, the landlord can only go to the people who are on the lease to get the remaining amount, he said.

"In general we find them (students) a mediocre lot," landlord Roy Rorabaugh said.

He prefers to rent to students that have come from small towns because he has found that students who have been raised in Lincoln are not satisfactory renters, he said.

"Kids in town want to get out, to try their wings and they do that at the landlord's expense," he said.

Rorabaugh estimates that 50 percent of tenants raised in Lincoln back out of rental agreements. They do not honor contracts because they can always move home, he said.

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Staff photo by John Zoz

Dirk Steffens of Rapid City rides in the calf roping event at the Silver Stampede rodeo at the Nebraska Fairgrounds Saturday and Sunday.

RODEO Cowboys rope second place

By Jim Rasmussen

The Nebraska men's rodeo team turned in several fine performances while placing second at the University of Nebraska Rodeo Association's "Silver Stampede Rodeo" Saturday and Sunday at the Nebraska State Fairgrounds.

South Dakota State at Brookings, the nation's top team, won the men's title, earning 440 points to easily outdistance the Huskers, who scored 190. Dickinson State College at Dickinson, N.D., finished third with 158.3 points. Dickinson had been ranked second in the Great Plains Region of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, ahead of No. 3 Nebraska, before the rodeo.

In the women's competition, Nebraska finished sixth behind team champion Black Hills, S.D., State.

More than 200 contestants from more than 15 colleges and universities participated in the three-day event, which was indoors at the fairgrounds coliseum.

Two UNL cowboys took first place in their events. Don Churchill won the calf

roping with a combined time of 25.2 seconds for two go-rounds, while UNL's Jeff Oestmann and South Dakota State's Brian Fulton combined to win the team roping. Their time was 16.5 seconds for two go-rounds.

Von Svoboda of Nebraska, the top collegiate bull rider in the nation, won the go-round during Sunday's finals with a score of 75. However, he was beaten in the average of two go-rounds by Jay Eitzkorn of West Dakota Voc-Tech.

The bull riding proved to be the toughest event, as some of the nation's top bulls were on hand to be ridden. Only three riders in Sunday's finals were able to stay on their bulls for the required eight seconds.

Several other contestants placed for UNL. Paul Cleveland took second place in the steer wrestling with a combined time of 10.2 seconds for two go-rounds. Teammate Dale Mienecke was fourth with a time of 13 seconds. Doug Young of South Dakota State won the event with a combined time of 9.9.

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