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Neal: A home-grown solution to the rising rents that are hurting renters in Arizona

Cost of living affecting teachers, first responders and other middle-class renters

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By **Kareem Neal**

I know what it is like for teachers who work hard for their students and schools but struggle to afford to live in the same communities they love.

I have been a special education teacher at Maryvale High School in Phoenix for 23 years. And after all this time, I was just finally able to buy my first place.

Even working a second job in addition to teaching I have found it tough to find and afford quality housing and apartments to rent.

That is a mounting problem for teachers, first responders, health care workers and other middle-class residents across the Valley.

Phoenix apartment rents were up 9% in 2019 compared just a year earlier, according to research reports. Those are among the highest rent increases in the country.

Higher rents are stressing my fellow teachers and other Valley residents who love living and working here but are finding increasingly difficult to afford a place to live.

Housing affordability has been a problem in other cities to including expensive markets such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Miami and New York. But it is also a challenge in other growing cities such as Colorado Springs, I

Metro Phoenix has long been an attractive place to live and move and for compa leaving, especially compared to California.

Let's not lose that quality of life and competitive advantage.

Thankfully, there are those in our community and the real estate industry listen government can solve problems and sometimes they can't. And when government sector step up.

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Scottsdale-based Greenlight Communities, for example, has developed a new business model for building “attainable housing” for working families, nurses and other health care workers, first responders and teachers like me. This is exciting.

Greenlight Communities’ Cabana multifamily concept utilizes innovative construction and design practices to build new developments that offer design-forward and well amenitized communities with rents that are significantly less expensive than other new apartments being built in metro Phoenix.

This math means teachers and other middle-class renters can afford to live in our city rather than be priced out of all the luxury apartments being built which requires incomes of \$80,000 or more.

Greenlight is doing what we have needed developers and others to do for a long time. They are focused on and willing to serve the middle class and build attractive attainable rental housing that residents will be proud to live in and call home.

Middle class households --- including nurses, fire fighters and teachers like me --- are frequently finding themselves priced out of expensive “luxury” apartments they can’t afford. We need market-based and community solutions to help the backbones of our society afford a place to live that they will love.

Other developers and apartment builders as well as policy makers and elected officials should take note.

They need to be aware of the housing crunch facing middle class families and households, the impacts on their communities and innovative solutions to that problem.

One of those creative solutions is being fostered right here in Arizona and will serve as a model across the country.

Editor’s Note: Kareem Neal is Arizona Teacher of the Year 2019.

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Respect Our Scottsdale Students

SUSD and City of Scottsdale are 2 of the top 10 employers in this City, with over 5,000 people serving the most critical needs of our residents.

To live in Scottsdale most of those workers need a roommate, a spouse, and multiple jobs.

For those who live elsewhere, a 40 mile roundtrip commute daily costs between \$500 and \$1,000 depending on the car used. There's little savings to be found by renting in lower cost communities then adding expensive transportation back to your budget.

One solution that provides multiple benefits - SUSD has empty campuses that cost money to mothball eac... See More

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