

My name is Lee Child and I have owned and lived in a house at 1619 35th Street for fourteen years. It's a wonderful old Victorian house and my family and I have loved living in it save for the fact that it is on 35th Street. If I had know 14 years ago what I know now, I never would have bought the house.

Five years ago the father of a Georgetown student bought the house next door for \$2.4 million and handed to his son who moved his eight best friends into the house. To circumvent the zoning laws which limit the number to six adults in a house, the kids filed papers to incorporate as a religious organization, the Apostles of O'Neill. Were it not for the outrage of the community, their scheme might have worked. Not only were they making a mockery of the zoning regulations but of religion as well. And their Catholic University did nothing about it. It was as though the Apostles had been ordained and canonized by their school.

With a large pool in their back yard, the Apostle's house became party central. At first we neighbors called the University thinking naively they might be interested. I must have made 100 calls. Nothing. Eventually we learned to go straight to the police. The kids installed cameras front and back to stay one step ahead of the police. Loud, late night parties were the norm. Music blared, beer cans and golf clubs and cigarette butts were thrown in my garden, under wear was hung in my trees, a pad lock placed on my back gate. It was a living nightmare that consumed our lives.

The debris, the garbage, the noise, the rats, the lack of sleep are obvious but what is not so obvious is how we felt day in and day out. These are not houses we live in but homes. We are not kooks looking for ways to avenge college students. We're caring neighbors who work hard to maintain our parks and playgrounds and public gardens, we care about our city trees and every dog on a lease. To be surrounded by student who care about none of the above diminishes the integrity of our every day. I dreaded coming

ZONING COMMISSION
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home in the evening, I dreaded the night, dealing with the chaos, the calls to the police. It took way too much energy and consumed my life.

And it could easily happen again. Whenever a house goes on the market we live in dreaded fear that another father will buy it for yet another gang of 9. There are presently three For Sale signs on my block alone. People are moving out, they don't want to live on the West side and I don't either. Please understand how passionately we feel about what's happening around us. We are being overrun by students. We do not live in a college town, we live in our nation's capital. (Parenthetically, I have lived in a college town, Chapel Hill, NC. UNC has twice the number of students (30,000) as GU (16,437) but their campus is seven times larger (728 acres vs. 108 acres).) I hope you know the extent to which our lives are compromised. Where will it stop? How many more students will move in? Will we be back here in 5 years asking the same questions? I afraid we will, unless you do something to stop it.

We beg you to put a cap on the number of GU students, stop the off campus craze, move the undergraduates back on campus and give us back our neighborhoods.



BY BILL PETROS

Brian O'Neill Jr., bottom right, and eight friends formed a "religious community," which means 15 unrelated people can live in the house.

For Georgetown 'Apostles,' A Rowhouse Rebellion

Religious Immunity to Zoning Laws Cited

By MICHELLE BOORSTEIN
Washington Post Staff Writer

It's about God, America and the bonds of friendship. Or, maybe, it's just about beer.

On one side of the battle: nine best buds at Georgetown University who hung a skull-and-crossbones flag outside their home and a porn star poster inside. On the other: their neighbors, who accuse the students of running a scam to keep their partying friends together.

They live on quiet 35th Street NW, in a stately section of Georgetown, where Brian O'Neill Jr., 20, and his roommates moved in August and promptly held pool parties so loud the university and police were called.

This is where your classic town-gown dispute gets weird. The \$2.4 million house that J. Brian O'Neill Sr. bought for his son is allowed only six unrelated residents under zoning laws. But if it's a residence for a "religious community," the number jumps to 15.

The solution? The Apostles of O'Neill. That's the name the young men used Oct. 2 when they filed paperwork to incorporate as a nonprofit religious organization. In an e-mail statement, the group says that it has donated to charities and that its mission is "to be active and positive members of our community."

The neighbors call it blasphemous.

See HOUSE, A14, Col. 1

In Pakistan, I Hopes for Re

By PAMELA CONSTABLE and KAMRAN
Washington Post Foreign Service

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — Two months after Pakistan's president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf triumphantly announced a peace pact with Islamic extremists in the North Waziristan district near the Afghan border, some here hoped it would become a model for curbing domestic Islamic militancy and cross-border militant attacks in Afghanistan.

Today that model lies in shreds. Northern Pakistan's fragile political peace was shattered by two devastating attacks: a September missile strike that killed 82 people and a recent Islamic school in the Bajaur tribal district.

METRO

O'Malley Pushes for Slots

The Maryland governor-elect fears the horse racing industry could collapse as the Preakness could go elsewhere if the races aren't legalized at racetracks.

STYLE

A Masterpiece of a Deal

The National Gallery of Art has tentatively bought one of the best-known American paintings of the 19th century, "The Great Clinic" by Thomas Eakins.

BUSINESS

U.S., Russia Reach Landmark Trade Deal

The agreement, which officials say will open Russian markets to U.S. farmers and firms, advances Vladimir Putin's pursuit of WTO membership.



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In Georgetown, Student 'Apostles' Launch a Crusade Through a Zoning Loophole

HOUSE, From A1

my and a possible precedent-setting threat to property values. It has impressed some of the young men's parents, including one who called it "ingenious" and another who said they were defending American property rights the face of fuddy-duddy Georgetowners. And it has registered little reaction from the Catholic university, which says it doesn't consider the Apostles its business.

"It's between the owners of the property and the city," university spokesman Erik M. Smulson said.

Even as e-mails have been flying for a month between city officials and residents' groups over what O'Neill's friends on his Facebook.com Web site tease is his "fake religion," the students may in fact have found a legitimate legal loophole that gets at a core question: What is a religion?

There is no definition of "a religious community" in city regulations, said Karyn-Slobhan Robinson, spokeswoman for the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which interprets and enforces the city's zoning rules. Agency officials visited the 3,600-square-foot, five-bedroom home in

September and issued a warning about crowding after neighbors complained.

But because of the Apostles' filing, she said, the agency is looking at the case anew. Among the things the city can consider is the IRS definition of a religious organization: "one whose principle purpose is the study or advancement of religion."

Meanwhile, many neighbors living in the large, attached rowhouses are livid at the notion of landlords using the idea to pack homes with up to 15 high-paying students. Concerns about safety in off-campus homes increased after a 2004 fire killed a Georgetown student and news reports revealed that many houses were unsafe and had landlords without the required basic business license.

"This shameless proposal makes a mockery of the Zoning Ordinance (not to mention religion) and could have potentially devastating effect on the quality of life in our neighborhood," Georgetown architect Out-erbridge Horsey wrote in an e-mail to the Citizens Association of Georgetown.

Neighbors said they will take the case to court if the city grants the group religious status.

Robinson said the city is taking the Apostles seriously. "We have this under investigation," she said. "In recent memory, based on what we know, no one can remember anything like this."

J. Brian O'Neill Sr., chairman of O'Neill Properties Group in King of Prussia, Pa., bought the house for his son in August. He has told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that his company's real estate holdings are worth \$4 billion. The father did not return calls seeking comment, and his son and the other eight Apostles declined to answer questions.

On his Facebook site, the younger O'Neill describes himself as a politically moderate graduate of an Episcopal prep school in suburban Philadelphia who "doesn't really read much." Photos and other references to drinking and partying are plastered across the site.

Some neighbors and community representatives who have spoken with the men say that the students feel they have been good neighbors and that they are being hassled by older residents who simply don't want to live near young people. Some of their parents agree.

"This is America. If someone decides to

buy a house and people who move in are not the people [the neighbors] expected, that doesn't give them the right to harass the kids," said Dennis Iannovale of Chester Springs, Pa., whose son, Christopher, lives in the house.

Asked whether he was bothered by his son being in a group accused of pretending to be a religion, Iannovale's tone became more annoyed. "Who says they aren't a religion?" he asked. "If the law says you can form a religious organization, they have that right."

The Rev. Thomas J. Reese, a senior fellow at Georgetown's Woodstock Theological Center, said, "A lot of these kids are quite spoiled. They're paying \$35,000 [in tuition], and they can do whatever they damn well please. But that's a small percentage."

William Skelsey, an advisory neighborhood commissioner in Georgetown who says he has 1,000 students in his district, said O'Neill told him explicitly that the Apostles were formed to deal with the zoning restrictions and keep together a group of friends who have lived together since freshman year.

"He considers himself fairly clever in hav-

ing figured out how to evade the restrictions that are in place for the rest of us," he said.

Meanwhile, the students are trying to spiff up. On Oct. 16, they amended their name to Apostles of Peace and Unity. A U.S. flag has replaced the skull-and-crossbones banner, and there has been complete quiet since parents' weekend last month, when the students, some of their parents, neighborhood representatives, top city police officials and representatives of Georgetown met. With a poster of porn star Jenna Jameson as a backdrop during the meeting, everyone avoided the subject of the Apostles and stuck to polite talk about such things as proper landscaping and noise, people who attended said.

"It wouldn't have made any difference" to have tried to push the issue of the Apostles during the meeting, said Stefanie L. Bachhuber, a neighbor. "They know they're doing something wrong, but they want this house and they want nine people to be in there."

Staff writer Allison Klein and staff researchers Rena Kirsch, Magda Jean-Louis and Meg Smith contributed to this report.



padlock placed on garden gate by "Apostles of
O'Neill" - 1619 35th St. NW



underwear in tree - 1669 35th gr.