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Workers sue 10 Light Street contractor, developer for unpaid wages

By Natalie Sherman

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A group of construction workers have filed a class-action suit against a subcontractor for a high-end downtown apartment conversion, alleging the company underpaid workers by issuing partial payments and failing to follow through on promises to make up the full amount. advertisement

The suit, filed in circuit court Dec. 23, alleges Virginia-based Lewis Brothers Inc. violated federal and state labor laws, paying workers irregularly, in cash, for less than the amount owed for work at 10 Light Street.

Metropolitan Partnership, of Reston, Va., is developing the 1929 office building at 10 Light Street into 445 apartments, the biggest downtown apartment conversion yet.

Lewis Brothers, which performed demolition and site work on the 34-story building, also never paid overtime, despite frequently having workers stay beyond their shifts or put in time on the weekends, the suit alleges.

"We began to be worried because they were paying us \$50, \$100," said Adonis Pacheco, 33, of Baltimore, one of the workers bringing the suit, who eventually left the job because of the problems. "They always gave us the excuse that they didn't have the money They would pay us next week."

The suit seeks the unpaid wages and damages for Lewis Brothers workers at the site for the last three years, an estimated 50 to 100 people. Lewis Brothers workers said they were promised between \$9 and \$12 an hour.

The suit also asks to recover money through a mechanic's lien from Metropolitan Baltimore LLC, an affiliate of the Virginia-based property owner. The suit alleges Metropolitan Baltimore is aware of the workers' claims.

Pacheco said he is owed more than \$2,000 and is still trying to repay friends money he was forced to borrow because of the unexpectedly small pay.

"We have to eat, pay rent, the phone, water, light," he said. "We were affected We want to be paid the fair amount for what we worked."

Lewis Brothers and Metropolitan Partnership could not be reached for comment.

Project manager Halle Companies took over responsibility for tracking Lewis Brothers' workers shifts in September, according to the suit.

Attorneys from Baltimore's Public Justice Center and the Washington, D.C. firm Cohen, Milstein, Sellers & Toll PLLC are representing workers in the case.

"Most of us live paycheck to paycheck," said Tyrone McCullough, 53, of Baltimore, who is seeking back pay. "It affects a lot of people."

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