West Coast reporter was one of 21 victims of Baltimore's 'Phantom' landlord

A reporter with the Seattle Times newspaper in Seattle Washington, said a meeting with Jesse Rhodes Jr., last summer caused him to loose $3,000 and he is only one of the "many people" who have lost money in Seattle.

Rhodes, 43, who formerly lived in Baltimore and was known as the "phantom landlord" allegedly tried to rent or sell a Garrison Boulevard home to at least seven people while it still was occupied.

After collecting more than $3,000 from seven people in Baltimore between Oct. 3, 1977 and Jan. 14, 1978 police report Rhodes left Baltimore and returned to his home in Washington.

Steve Johnston, a reporter in Washington, said he met Rhodes on March 18, 1981 to talk about a house he had for sale in Seattle, Washington.

Rhodes said on March 18, he and Martin Osborne put down a total of $6,500 in earnest money on the house. "At the time, neither of us knew about the other," said Johnston.

According to Rhodes, "The earnest money checks were made out to Vanita Bagley and collected by Rhodes, who said he was representing Mrs. Bagley in the sale. Real estate purchase and sales agreement contracts were filled out. Our checks were cashed the next day."

Rhodes said when the house sale did not go through, Osborne asked for his money back. On April 6, he received a personal check from Vanita Bagley for $3,500 "It bounced like a rubber ball," Osborne said.

Johnston said, "It took me a little longer, but I received a personal check for $3,000 from Vanita Bagley on June 2, delivered to my house by Rhodes.

"It bounced. When I called Mrs. Bagley about it she said the money would be in the bank in a few days. Rhodes later called to say it had something to do with the Internal Revenue Service and the money would be coming soon."

However, Johnston says he never received his money. He decided to start talking to an attorney and checking things out. "I had this feeling for some time that I was out $3,000," said Johnston.

After doing some investigative work on Rhodes, he found out that there were 20 civil lawsuits filed against Rhodes, some including Bagley. They involved real-estate transactions and, since the start of the year, most of them involved people not getting their earnest money back on the properties they thought they were buying.

Johnston says he discovered that Rhodes had the house up for sale that he thought he was buying. "He even had it up for rent one time," said Johnston.

Last week, Rhodes pleaded guilty to 21 counts of theft in Seattle after pocketing $51,300 from several people attempting to buy the same house. He failed to close any of the deals and kept the money.

Judge Jorman Quinn sentenced Rhodes to 10 years in prison for the housing fraud involving 21 people, several of the victims who were in the courtroom cheered and clapped, as Rhodes was being led out of the courtroom handcuffed.

Richard Hite, a Baltimore city detective told the AFRO he was in charge of the 1978 case against Rhodes. "Officials in the state's attorney's office said there was no money to send Hite to Seattle to arrest Rhodes.

Johnston explained the method Rhodes would use in Seattle. He said Rhodes would have a house for sale. The buyer would put down the earnest money usually several thousand dollars.

"The deal wouldn't go through. A personal check would come from Rhodes or Mrs. Bagley it would bounce, and the buyer would start trying to get his money back.

"There was another angle in which Rhodes would purchase a house sometimes with a check that bounced and eventually default on the payments. The owner would sue to get it back, but Rhodes would be using the house to get loans from other people. He would later default on those loans too. A majority of the plaintiffs involved were single women.

"A number of attorneys were sure they could get their clients money back because there was property involved. Unfortunately they didn't look at the numer of lawsuits ahead of them. As one Seattle policeman told me when I said I had $3,000 out, 'take a number.'

"I have had some time to consider how I managed to get into this mess and blow $3,000. I don't know about the four other people in the criminal complaint, but I plead stupidity, said Johnston.

—MTA

Continued from page 1

"It's a waste of money," another operator was overheard to grumble.

One operator told another that McElveen was "over qualified." Why should I vote for something to take money out of my pocket, he said. "I might be putting him in a position to come back and fire me."

McElveen admitted most of his fellow members saw the class action suit "as a personal thing, rather than a broader issue ... they see nothing in it for them."

Despite the vote, he said he will continue his fight against alleged discrimination in the MTA.

"We'll have to start another fight, but definetly a fight will continue," he said.

Sterling agreed McElveen has other options he can pursue.

"We talked with McElveen, there maybe some other ways he can attempt to address the issue. There are people who are very sympathetic with him," Sterling said.

Sterling also admitted, in the past, he has raised some questions about MTA's policies.

—Interest rates

Continued from page 1

Del. Walter Dean, D-41, told the AFRO he supports a ceiling on rates because those who have to buy on time would be the ones most hurt by high interest rates.

As an example, if Gov. Harry Hughes' proposal to take interest rates to 36 percent is adopted, a $7,000 car bought on time could conceivably cost $9,520.00

Haysbert said his arguments at the forum in favor of total deregulation centered around the fact that if the bill fails in the General Assembly, "It will merely send out a signal that Maryland is anti-business."

Such an action also would tell out-of-state businesses "please don't move your business here because the state legislation is against business," Haysbert said.

"I was in favor of total deregulation ... letting the laws of supply and demand handle it," he said.

Mrs. Waxter said she spoke at the forum as a private citizen. She said total deregulation would be harmful to consumers.

"I think it would be very difficult for people to get credit and they won't be able to afford it, if banks lend them money," she said. "How do you protect the consumer if you take off the ceiling?"

If consumers have to pay "exorbinant" amounts of interest, they will be unable to afford to borrow money, she said. This could result in them not buying goods, hurting the retail industry or having to go to loan sharks.

The banks are saying people already are going to loan sharks for money and if the ceiling was lifted then banks would be able to increase their interest rates making money available to lend, she said. Now there is no money available for lending, according to the banks, Mrs. Waxter said.

She said she questions this. A rate set at 24 percent sounds very high, but she is unsure what the ceiling should be.

"It's a very complicated issue," she said.

(1963 AFRO file photo)

VETERAN CAMPAIGNER — The late Mrs. Adah K. Jenkins, AFRO music critic and longtime civil rights activist, is pictured marching with Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) members as they protest the all-white admission policy of the now defunct Gwynn Oak Amusement Park.

See story Page 7

New play at Bowie

The S. Randlolph-Edmonds Players of Bowie State College will present "Teach Me How To Cry," a drama in three-acts by Patricia Joudry. The play will run from Saturday, Feb. 27 through Tuesday, March 2, 1982, in the Martin Luther King Auditorium. Curtain is at 7:30 p.m.

"Teach Me How To Cry" is a warm and touching family drama which deals with young love — and hate. Melinda Grant and Will Henderson, the play's main characters, become a modern day Romeo and Juliet as together they strive to overcome obstacles that hinder their happiness. This play will prove to be a heart-warming experience for the entire family.

BALTIMORE GAS and ELECTRIC Downtown Merchandise Store will be CLOSED Saturday, Feb. 27 (Paybill office will remain open) STORE WILL REOPEN MONDAY, MARCH 1 We regret any inconvenience to our customers.

High school students fail reading test

About 700 of Maryland's 56,000 high school seniors have yet to pass the State's functional reading test, and they are in jeopardy of not graduating this spring, a state report showed.

This is the first year passage of the test is required for graduation.

Joanne T. Goldsmith, president of the State Board of Education, Wednesday said she is pleased the number of potential test failures only is about 1 percent. She rejected the idea the small percentage is evidence the test is too easy.

"It's the way it ought to be," she said. "We never intended to prevent kids from graduating, only to ensure that they're taught enough to survive in modern society."

—Disco raid

Continued from page 1

Police yelled to the suspect to drop the gun but according to police, the suspect continued to run. After searching the club, police said they found a gun in the club.

A trial date for the club's owner is scheduled for March 18, 2 p.m., at Northwestern District. He is charged with maintaining a common nuisance.

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