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Restoration Rescue: A CONDO CASE STUDY

By Jeff Carrier

Our company, First Restoration Services (FRS), has been providing quality service with utmost integrity in western North Carolina since we opened in 1987 in Fletcher, N.C. We have completed more than 7,500 jobs over the years. In 2010, FRS was No. 291 on the *Qualified Remodeler* list of the top 500 contractors in the nation. We have won a Sky High Growth Award from the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce for three consecutive years.

THE CALL

It was Nov. 5, 2010. At 7:15 a.m., Emergency Manager John Gentry received the call that one of the condominiums at Highland Farms Retirement Community in Black Mountain, N.C., had caught

fire, and several units were severely damaged. He immediately organized his team to drive to the scene, about 45 minutes from the office. Highland Farms is a licensed, locally owned continuing care retirement community nestled in the mountains about 15 miles east of Asheville. Nearly 400 residents from across the U.S. and several countries live in apartments and condominiums. Assisted living and skilled nursing facilities also are available.

Arriving on the scene, Gentry's team was directed to a four-unit stacked duplex. The fire started in the top right unit. This unit was severely burned in both the living room and kitchen, with smoke damage throughout the remainder of the condo. The unit below it had severe water damage in the living room and kitchen, with smoke damage throughout the remainder of the home.

Before & After



The top left unit had no fire or water damage, but did sustain smoke damage throughout the entire condo due to the ventilation system in the building. The bottom left unit had no structural damage.

MITIGATION AND PACK-OUT

Day 1 started with documentation, which included taking pictures, establishing a scope of work and moisture mapping. The key to the entire project was communication; both the emergency and cleaning departments met with property managers, the community president and all of the affected owners. This meeting on the front end was helpful to get everyone on the same page. It went over safety issues, time expectations,

scheduling, scope of work and logistics (traveling in and out of the complex, parking, port-a-john placement, etc.). The team learned that one owner was chemically sensitive, so a green product (Benefect Botanical Disinfectant) was used to clean and disinfect the unit's structure and contents.

Following that meeting, drying equipment was set up inside the units to prevent further structural damage. The property was secured with caution tape and a temporary roof was built to prevent weather damage. Temporary heat was established to help with the drying process and to keep any pipes from freezing. We also placed an Odorox in the lower left unit to eliminate odor and to prevent cross-contamination. When the firefighters were in the upper unit, they had smoke and soot on their boots. They



Before & After

eventually made their way to the lower left unit to make sure it was clear. The lower left unit didn't have any damage, but when the firefighters walked across the rugs, they contaminated the rugs with smoke and soot from the upper unit.

Highland Farms provided the three families whose condos were damaged with temporary housing in furnished units that were available. It was very comforting to the homeowners to know they would have a familiar place to stay for the duration of the reconstruction. It also showed other residents that they would be taken care of if they were in the same position.

By Day 2, we had the damaged units winterized. The next step in the process was to remove drywall, carpet and pad, vinyl flooring, baseboard casings, tackless strip, wet HVAC duct lines, insulation, nails and anything else that could have been considered a safety hazard. Once everything was removed, all areas were treated with an anti-microbial spray, and all the debris was hauled off. We identified and inventoried the contents from two of the damaged units. This allowed the homeowners and our team to easily identify which contents were to be restored and which items were considered a loss by the adjuster.

CLEANING CONTENTS AND REPAIRS

Once the homeowners' contents arrived at the FRS facility, most of them were placed in the drying and deodorizing chamber. From there, depending on the category of the contents, we cleaned the items using an Esporta Wash System, Fireline Pro Ultrasonic

Cleaning System or Odell Electronics Cleaning Stations. (Larger items were hand-cleaned and deodorized.)

FRS is the only company in western North Carolina that owns and operates all three pieces of this contents-cleaning equipment. The state-of-the-art technology allowed us to clean the contents quickly, cost effectively and with the highest quality results.

After cleaning, the contents were repacked to match the inventory list. The items then were stored in a climate-controlled area of the FRS storage vaults until repairs at the owners' units were complete.

While the contents were being cleaned, repairs were underway at the units. All of the insulation in the attic of the entire building was replaced, along with all the shingles on the roof. The entire exterior was painted, and some of the siding and a chimney cap were replaced.

We worked on all four units to some degree and treated each interior unit as if it were a separate project, starting with the drywall finish and working out. Everything behind the drywall was cleaned and restored to industry standards and built to code.

The top right unit, which had the most severe fire damage, was completely gutted and cleaned down to the studs. FRS had to replace the trusses and the HVAC unit, rewire the unit and seal the studs and framing (sprayed with odor sealant). We installed new insulation, drywall, flooring, cabinets, appliances, trim, doors and lighting, as well as a new fireplace and chimney. Flooring was replaced in the top left unit; it also was repainted.

“ THE KEY TO THE ENTIRE PROJECT WAS **COMMUNICATION.** ”

LESSONS LEARNED

As with all restoration jobs, communication was key. The repairs department held weekly jobsite meetings with the owners to ensure that material selections were correct and that the owners' concerns were being addressed. The cleaning department had constant meetings and follow-up calls with the owners and the adjuster to cover such items as reviewing the cleaning of the contents, finalizing the non-salvageable list and scheduling the pack-in.

The owners of the units were given extensive leeway by the condominium association in the choice of finishes for their units. The owners wanted those finishes restored after the fire.

This meant that unlike in an apartment loss, every unit was going to be finished differently.

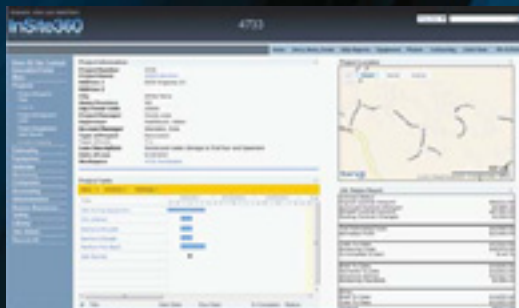
For other restorers working on similar projects, we recommend that you:

- Keep a record of the selections made by each owner;
- Log all communications (conversations, email and phone calls); and
- Take pictures of everything before restoration starts, during repairs and upon completion.

Jeff Carrier is the marketing and business development manager for First Restoration Services.

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