

## EXPERT EYE

**BY ELLEN ROSENBAUM**

Senior Association Manager  
Stratum



### *Of service charges – you be the judge*

**H**ere's the scenario – a young family has just shifted to Dubai from South Africa. The man of the house is starting a new job and part of his compensation is a housing allowance. The couple found a great flat to lease. They depleted their savings to get a discount for paying a full year's lease in advance, and they plan to use the company's housing allowance to offset school fees for their daughter. They scrimp and save to pay the utility deposits, rent a car, and to buy household furnishings. They understand that it will take many months to recover financially from the shift. Still, it's a great opportunity and a fresh start.

Month two begins and the couple notice threatening letters posted in the elevators – services will be discontinued if the unit owners don't pay their service charges. As tenants who have pre-paid their rent, they really don't pay attention. Surely this service fee problem doesn't concern them.

Month three finds the family in the heat of summer. As they go to use the pool one evening, the access door is locked and the pool water has been drained. They go back to the flat and call Security. The explanation is that the owners association (OA) does not have funds to keep the pool operational. Their next call is made to their landlord. There is no response. They console their disappointed child and hope that the situation is only temporary.

Weeks pass and the pool is still not operational. Upon returning home from shopping, they find the parking barriers closed. There's a security staff posted at the garage and no one can enter to park. The neighbors are agitated and then the police arrive. How can these problems exist in such a lovely building? They paid their rent in good faith, so why aren't they entitled to use the building facilities?

With the spotlight on service fees and various collection methods being imposed, it seems appropriate that we look at the innocent victims of collection enforcement.

In Dubai, would-be tenants can actually call the OA management company to check if the service fees have been paid for the unit they are considering. This one simple step may save a potential tenant from future disappointment, inconvenience, embarrassment and unexpected expense.