

Earth Liberation Front Strikes in Maryland

“The Ents Are Going to War”

Bregalad

1 January 2006



artwork by Leah

On November 20, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) struck at a housing development construction site in Hagerstown, Maryland. The ELF set four separate fires, damaging three town houses and burning one entirely to the ground. It is believed to be the ELF's first action in the state.

The ELF claimed the action in a communique sent from an email address containing the name "Treebeard." In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Treebeard is an elder among the Ents—animated trees responsible for defending the forest from exploitation.

“We warn all developers that the people of the Earth are prepared to defend what remains of the wild and green,” read the communique. “The Ents are going to war.”

The fires dealt more than \$225,000 in damage to Hager’s Crossing, a 930-unit subdivision being developed by the Rachuba Group and subcontracted to Ryan Homes and Patriot Homes.

It was Ryan Homes that the ELF named as its target: “Last night we... put the torch to a development of Ryan Homes... to strike at the bottom line of this country’s most notorious serial lands rapist.” The company has been targeted by the ELF before. In December 2002, the ELF did \$20,000 in damage to construction vehicles at a Ryan Homes development in Pennsylvania.

Hager’s Crossing sits on 230 acres of former farmland, but according to Shelby Daniels, a sales and marketing representative for Ryan Homes, there has been nothing particularly controversial about the project.

Although Hager’s Crossing is one of the first large-scale “planned residential communities” in Hagerstown, such communities are a growing trend in the region as Washington, DC workers seek affordable homes far from the city. Hager’s Crossing is situated about 70 miles northwest of Washington, next to a Wal-Mart and at the intersection of two highways.

Although not mentioned in the communique, the utterly artificial nature of the development may have contributed to its selection as a target. In January 2005, the ELF burned housing developments near Sacramento, California, “in honor of everyone who has felt helpless to sprawl and development, everyone who feels [that] their rural lifestyles are being threatened by these mass-produced, designer communities” (see *EF!J* May-June 2005).

The price of houses at Hager’s Crossing starts at \$250,000. Although the entire project is only 30 percent complete, the four damaged units were nearly finished and had already been sold; in fact, the destroyed house was scheduled for occupancy at the end of December. Nothing remains of that building but metal pipes and charred wood, and the developers will have to scramble to rebuild it or face some very frustrated customers. Factoring in the public relations expenses and those associated with hasty reconstruction, the cost for that unit alone will probably far exceed the reported \$200,000. In addition, Ray Rachuba, vice-president of the Rachuba Group, reports that the company has hired security guards for the duration of the project.

Perhaps the company is concerned that, like the Ents in *The Lord of the Rings*, the people of Maryland will heed the call to war put forth in the Treebeard communique: “We encourage all who watch with sadness while developers sell out the future of us and our children to join us in resisting them in any and every possible way.”

The Ted K Archive

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