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Landowner barricades parking spaces

P.H. Craig says an 'account has been delinquent for over two years' and he can't 'allow the situation to continue.'

JESSE JAMES DECONTO, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL - Customers and employees at The Courtyard at West Franklin and Roberson streets arrived Monday morning to an inconvenient surprise: about 80 parking spaces had been slashed to about 25.

Using sawed-off utility poles, landscape timbers, piles of gravel, yellow CAUTION tape and even a three-foot-wide boulder, Chapel Hill resident P.H. Craig blocked access to most of The Courtyard parking lot Sunday.

Craig owns portions of two lots that had served The Courtyard's tenants since 1979. He cleared some brush so that Waste Management Inc. trucks might be able to drive over the Roberson Street curb and remove two large trash bins and several recycling containers used by The Courtyard's tenants.

"This is just ridiculous," said Roger Tillison, owner of the Great Cuts hair salon at the edge of the parking lot. "I've never seen anybody do anything so foolish in my life."

In a news release dropped off Monday at The News & Observer's Orange County bureau, Craig said he had been trying to renegotiate a contract with Courtyard owner Spencer C. Young. The previous agreement expired in January 2006.

"The account has been delinquent for over two years," Craig said in the release. "I have been too patient too long and cannot allow the situation to continue."

Young did not respond to e-mail or to phone calls to his Chapel Hill office or The Courtyard's management company, Hunter and Associates.

Craig's move is just the latest chapter in a long-running dispute.

In February, e-mail sent from Young's account threatened to break the nose of Lex Alexander, owner of 3 Cups coffee shop at The Courtyard, for "mutinous antics" in connection with the parking dispute.

About that time, the town of Chapel Hill also issued a stop-work order on renovations at The Courtyard after Craig and another neighbor complained about construction materials being stored on their land.

This time, the conflict has forced many of The Courtyard's employees and customers to finding parking on the street -- or just to stay away.

"My afternoon business is just shot," Tillison said. "That two grown men can't sit down and iron out their differences and cause something like this to happen is absolutely ridiculous."

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