



Kendell Kardt sits at his in-home studio inside his trailer home in Lodi

“A Gift from God”

Kendell Kardt had just married a woman with a 4-year-old child. He was renting a basement apartment from his cousin, but the cousin did not want any additional tenants.

Kardt's new wife was staying in an emergency shelter with the child, while Kardt searched for housing.

“When we found this mobile home it was a gift from God,” he remembers. “I could get them off the street. I didn’t have to worry about that little kid living on the street.”

The marriage only lasted a few years, but both Kardt and his wife had found a place to call home. Kardt gave the trailer to his ex-wife, who still lives there seven years later. In 2005, he bought another home in the same park.

“This is the first time in my life that I’ve actually owned anything,” Kardt says. “I’m a professional musician. I’ve always earned a modest income. Living anywhere has always been a challenge.”

“The people here don’t make a lot of money,” he adds. “To be able to live decently is incredible for them.”

Kardt is one of the chief organizers of Save Our Homes. He spends a lot of his free time working on behalf of the residents to fight the borough's attempts to condemn their homes. In these efforts, he has been buoyed by local residents' support of their fight.

"Most of the people locally didn't want anything to do with the redevelopment project because they're decent people," he says. "Decent people understand that kicking 240 people out of their homes is, well, disgusting. Even people paying really high taxes get that."

Kardt says the government should be barred from simply deciding that a neighborhood isn't good enough. They shouldn't be allowed to take people's home to build something they think would look better – and generate more taxes.

"This isn't just about trying to make your town look like a picture on the postcard," he says. "This is about people's lives. The people who live here are mechanics, janitors. They do something useful. They won't be able to afford to live here if they take this park away."

He says the borough never had a plan for relocating the residents. There was talk that the city would offer up to \$4000 for rental expenses over three years. That, Kardt notes, is barely enough for a security deposit and the first month's rent.

"There was nowhere for us to go," he says. "They never had a plan for us. Go away. That's it."

Kardt is optimistic, however, that the residents will prevail.

"I think we'll win. I hope so" because losing would mean homelessness for a lot of the residents, Kardt says. "Most of us have no savings. We live paycheck to paycheck. Have we thought about where we'd go? What's to think about? There really aren't many choices."