

NBC2 Investigators: Buyer claims to be ripped off by Fannie Mae

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HENDRY COUNTY, FL -

The hustle and bustle of Miami was just too much for Renate Manns and her family sometimes. They wanted a place to escape.

"Our plan was to get something out here to be able to be coming out here every weekend," Manns said.

Manns and her husband found what they thought was the perfect place to build their dream. Ten acres in rural Hendry County they could bring their three children to disconnect from technology. They planned on building a home, horse stables and a garden.

"My husband has this dream of having this chalet style cabin out in the back," Manns said.

But that dream quickly came crashing down when they realized they didn't get what they paid for.

"I don't know what's going to happen here."

Manns and her husband bought the property in 2015 for \$67,700. According to transaction records filed in court, all of the marketing for the property showed it was 10 acres. But when she started applying for permits on the property, she was told she only owned 2.65 acres.

"There was no doubt in our minds that we were buying a 10-acre property," Manns said.

What makes it worse for Manns is that she bought the property from Fannie Mae, a government-sponsored bank.

"I was distraught, distraught because I never imagined that something like this could happen," Manns said.

"A bank sold us this!"

Manns ended up hiring real estate attorney Kara Jursinski to file suit against Fannie Mae. They also filed suit against the the law firm Albertelli Law and real estate agent Elizabeth Strehse.

"Their belief was 10 acres for 'x' amount of dollars and unfortunately after closing, that's not the case," Jursinski said.

Jursinski says Fannie Mae never owned all the property they were selling. The bank foreclosed on only part of the land held by the previous owner. However, when they had Strehse list the property, it was marketed as the full 10 acres.

"There were multiple listings that showed this property as 10 acres," Manns said.

But Jursinski says all the parties involved rebuffed Manns' offer to rescind the deal. She says contracts with banks like Fannie Mae often restrict what the new owners can recuperate after the fact.

Jursinski says that's why she recommends owners take precautionary steps to make sure they know what they're signing up for.

"I always recommend a thorough property inspection, a radon test, a mold test, termite inspection and then they have to know the contract that they're signing limits them to such a degree," Jursinski said.

But she says that could not have prevented what happened to Manns.

NBC2 reached out to Fannie Mae, but a spokesperson told us they do not comment on pending litigation.

A representative from Albertelli Law got back to NBC2 and said they would look into it but has not gotten back.

When reached by phone, real estate agent Elizabeth Strehse claimed Manns was "already in breach" by talking to NBC2 but didn't explain what that meant.

She wouldn't answer any of our questions but said of Manns and her husband: "In the meantime, they might want to relearn how to read English."

While Manns is looking for her money back in court, she knows their dream on this property is likely over.

"It's still a beautiful piece of land but this isn't what we wanted," Manns said.