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PRESS RELEASE
LAUNCH OF TENANT/LANDLORD WEB APP – “SQUARED AWAY CHICAGO”
MTO Releases Bridge Building App -- First of its kind in the Nation

CHICAGO -- When the Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO) launches its new web app, “**Squared Away Chicago**”, in mid November 2013, renters in Chicago will have access to a new tool for facilitating communications and bringing together landlords and tenants. **Squared Away Chicago** app will provide access to resources and knowledge about rights and best practices. It will offer the ability to document and share issues between tenants and landlords in real-time, leading to faster issue resolution, increased accountability and fewer misunderstandings.

“The **Squared Away Chicago** app provides resources to both tenants and landlords to improve communication and access to information, setting the stage for better rental practices and elevating the dialogue between tenants and landlords to build relationships that can ultimately lead to longevity for the rental life cycle and improve the quality and livability of housing stock,” said **John Bartlett, executive director, Metropolitan Tenants Organization.**

Unresolved housing-related issues are often the result of a lack of awareness of rights and poor communication practices. The result negatively impacts tenants through unsafe housing conditions or unnecessary evictions and also has a detrimental effect on landlords through lost rental income, costs associated with turnover and a devaluing of property. The **Squared Away Chicago** app is designed to support both tenants and landlords by enabling them to:

- **Document and communicate repair issues or problems in the quickest, most effective way possible.**
- **Track and manage landlord’s building tenants and respond quickly to tenant inquiries or issues.**
- **Prevent and remedy common housing problems before they become larger and more insurmountable.**
- **Collects data to inform policy makers of trends in the rental housing market.**
- **Improve the landlord-tenant relationship through increased communication and accountability.**

Squared Away Chicago is a web-based app that users will access through a URL link, squaredawaychicago.com, on their mobile phone browser or by tapping a link they receive through an email. The app automatically detects and adjusts the display enabling all users to have access no matter what type of smartphone they use. The design and development team for the app included Chicago firms: **Greater Good Studios, Philamonjaro Studios and DevMynd.**

The app development was funded through a grant from the [MacArthur Foundation](#) and support provided by the [Marguerite Casey Foundation](#) and the [Chicago Community Trust](#). “Squared Away has the potential for nationwide adoption and can serve as a resource for members of the Marguerite Casey Foundation’s family-led [Equal Voice Campaign](#). Squared Away Chicago will support informed and engaged tenants and landlords and will ultimately serve to build awareness of renters’ housing rights and options,” said Edgar Villanueva, program officer at Marguerite Casey Foundation.

FEATURES FACILITATE COMMUNICATIONS & BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Through our 28 years of experience serving renters in Chicago, MTO has found that almost all renter households at one time or another face a housing problem that threatens their tenancy. Many tenants come to MTO for assistance to navigate what is often an emotional process of communicating and negotiating with their landlord. Likewise, landlords have their own set of challenges in providing information and updates to tenants and maintaining constructive communications.

With the **Squared Away Chicago** mobile app, tenants and landlords will have these four features at their fingertips:

- **Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance (RLTO):** Accessing the law provides users with knowledge about the rights of tenants and landlords.
- **Photo Sharing:** Tenants can take/upload photos of issues, creating a visual record that is instantly accessible to the landlord.
- **Letter Templates:** Specific details of housing-related issue can be inserted in template documents and then accurately and quickly shared with landlords.
- **Open A Ticket:** Provides the ability to track communications about issues and organize and save the string of communications for reference and documentation.

“Effectively resolving housing crises is important to the tenant’s long-term future and the **Squared Away Chicago** app will be an important tool for creating rental housing stability by helping tenants speak with greater credibility through initiating and documenting communications and building productive relationships with landlords,” said **Bartlett**.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not, is slowly closing as a result of mobile devices.

In 2010, the Pew Research Center conducted a study of wireless users and found that 46% of households earning less than \$30,000 per year are wireless Internet users. An estimated 54% of African-Americans and 53% of English-speaking Hispanics access the Internet on a handheld device.

While thousands of renters currently use MTO’s website, proving the need for web-based rental housing information, the Pew study demonstrates the need for an app or internet access compatible with mobile devices since low-income renters may not have access to a computer, but many have access to a phone.

“MTO believes that the **Squared Away Chicago** mobile phone app will offer the broadest access for today’s renters and a means for landlords to be in touch with their tenants, further bridging the digital divide to level the playing field for low-income renters,” said **Bartlett**.

Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO) is the largest renters organizing group in Chicago. A membership based organization, MTO’s mission is to educate, organize and empower tenants to have a voice in the decisions that affect the affordability and availability of decent and safe housing. For more information please visit www.tenants-rights.org or go to twitter.com/TenantsRights or facebook.com/MTOchicago.

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