

Cape contractor closes shop before refunding dissatisfied customers

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By Rachel Polansky, Reporter



CAPE CORAL, Fla. -

A reputable Cape Coral home builder abruptly closed his business, leaving customers out hundreds of thousands of dollars.

There are 17 open cases against Southern Premier Homes three months after the company shut down.

Sixteen of those cases were filed in the last two months.

The owner, Chris Cheney, is under scrutiny for accepting payments from some of those customers the same week he shut down.

Dalia and Rolandas Girdvainis paid Cheney a \$10,000 deposit, and a \$27,000 first draw. One year later all they have to show for it is an empty lot.

"Just sad. We are sad. We felt, what did we do wrong? How did this happen?" Dalia Girdvainis said.

The Girdvainis' did their homework before hiring Cheney, checking his credentials and talking with his references. He had a stellar resume online.

He was even featured in Gulfshore Business Magazine's [40 Under 40 article](#), last year.

"It looks like we did everything right," Girdvainis said.

Lisa and Randy Johnson of Pine Island share a similar story. They're out \$15,000.

"It was quite devastating to find out that the money had just been taken from us," Lisa Johnson said.

In addition to leaving buyers high and dry, Cheney also burned his sub-contractors. And in Florida, when sub-contractors aren't paid by the general contractor, the homeowner has to pay a second time to cover the contractor's bad debt.

"Not only do they have a problem with Southern Premiere, but they have a number of sub-contractors who Southern Premiere did not pay," real estate attorney Kevin Jursinski said. "Those sub-contractors have now filed liens against my clients' house, seeking to get payment against my client, when she already paid Southern Premiere for their work."

Where is Chris Cheney and where is the money he took from all of these people?

The NBC2 Investigators went to his former business, but the space is now occupied by new tenants. We also went to his home in Cape Harbor, but he didn't answer the door.

We learned that he has hired a Cape Coral attorney, but the attorney declined to talk with us about this report.

The Department of Business and Professional Regulation has also ordered the emergency suspension of both of Cheney's licenses, Certified Residential Contractor and Financial Responsible Officer.