

# **City resident wonders if tow truck drivers are on the take**

By Stephen Janis, Baltimore Examiner, December 11, 2008

Brett Unger points to the areas where he's had to leave his car because of illegally parked cars in his Southwest Baltimore neighborhood Tuesday. To make matters worse, Unger saw a city tow truck driver unhitch his tow after appearing to take money. "I just thought, you've got to be kidding me," said Unger. Kristine Buls/Examiner Residents who live near M&T Bank Stadium in South Baltimore know finding a parking space near their home on game day is rough. Just ask Brett Unger.

Forced to park at least a half-mile away from his South Charles Street home during the Ravens-Redskins Beltway battle Sunday, the 32-year-old real estate investor said he was fed up with having to leave his car in unsafe areas.

"It's not like I have anything against people visiting the city," he said. "I just want to park near my home. Last game I had to park in a back alley a half a mile away, and my car got broken into."

So Unger called the city towing hot line repeatedly Sunday evening, reporting several vehicles parked illegally on his block, hoping to make room for his car. City law allows nonresidents one hour of parking on game day, but Unger said fans ignore the law.

"People just don't care, and the city doesn't enforce it," he said.

After making several calls starting at 6 p.m., Unger said a city tow truck finally showed at 10:30 p.m. The truck promptly hooked up a gray Honda Accord, and Unger thought the car would soon be towed away.

But what happened next shocked him.

"The owner came running out, talked to the driver and [the owner] got on his cell phone," Unger recalled. "A few minutes later, someone drove up in a red Accord, got out and handed the car's owner what looked like money. The owner handed it to the tow truck driver, and the tow truck driver unhooked the car.

"I was like, you have to be kidding, I couldn't believe it," he said.

Unger wrote the license plate number of the illegally parked car but was unable to get the plate number of the tow truck.

On Monday, Unger turned over the information to Councilman William Cole and the parking authority, asking both to investigate.

"If a city truck is involved in something like this, that is very disturbing," Cole said. "We have enough problems with parking in Federal Hill and South Baltimore, so we need to make sure tow drivers are doing their jobs."

Cole said he would investigate the incident. Parking officials did not return calls for comment.