

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 21ST ANNUAL FAIR HOUSING LUNCHEON AND WORKSHOP SERIES!

The FHCWM is pleased to announce that it will host its 21st Annual Fair Housing Luncheon and Workshop Series on **April 30, 2008** at the Crowne Plaza Hotel! 2008 will be a very exciting year for the FHCWM as well as for Fair Housing Centers across the nation as it brings the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act. The Event will celebrate all the doors that have been opened for homeseekers in the past 40 years under the Fair Housing Act and set the strides for parading fair housing into the future.

We hope that you will make a commitment to fair housing by planning to attend this powerful event!



FAIR HOUSING TRAINING DATES

Rental Trainings - The FHCWM has scheduled two upcoming fair housing trainings for rental professionals. The first training will take place on Tuesday, February 19th from 6 to 9 pm and the second will be Thursday, April 3rd from 1 to 4 pm. For any questions or to register contact Liz Keegan at the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980.

Tester Trainings - The FHCWM will host two tester trainings each month. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a stipend in return for their time and services. In order to accommodate differing schedules, one training will take place during business hours while the other will be held in the evening. For the specific training dates, to register, or any other questions about testing contact Regina Davis at the number above.

All trainings are located at the FHCWM facility at 20 Hall Street SE in Grand Rapids on the corner of Hall and Division Streets.

Happy Holidays from the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan!

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FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating Images of Hope

On November 19, 2007 the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (FHCWM) hosted its first ever table hosted event entitled *Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating Images of Hope*. This exciting inaugural event, sponsored by Citizens Bank, Crowe Chizek & Company and 1-800-GOT-JUNK-Michigan West, took place at the Western Michigan University Graduate Center in downtown Grand Rapids drawing over 225 attendees!



recipients of this award, Lee Nelson Weber and Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers, were honored with a Bernie Kleina photo of Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. Nancy Haynes, Executive Director of the FHCWM, presented the first award to Lee Nelson Weber, the preceding Executive Director and a devoted friend of fair housing. Ms. Weber genuinely understands the

complexities of fair housing and never grows tired of advocating for change and creating opportunity for the Fair Housing Center. She volunteers each year at the *Annual Fair Housing Luncheon and Workshop Series*, continues to connect the FHCWM with new initiatives, and assists with special projects.

The second award was presented to Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers for his longtime commitment to fair housing. Congressman Ehlers has been a member of the FHCWM over ten years, but his support extends far beyond his membership. This award thanks him for working to ensure transparency and fairness in HUD's allocation process, bringing fair housing funds to west Michigan as well as initiating bi-partisan support for adequate federal funding for fair housing on the national level.



Another feature of the annual luncheon is the presentation of the *Fair Housing Advocate Award*. The first ever

The photos by Bernie Kleina displayed throughout the event all served as reminders of the roots and progress of the fair housing movement. Mr. Kleina found himself in the center of the fair housing battle as he participated in a Freedom March in Alabama in the 1960s; he has never left. He is one of the founding members of the National Fair Housing Alliance where he currently serves on the board of directors and is the past President of the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance. Mr. Kleina began his speech with his characteristic wit and humor by throwing "parts of his speech" over his shoulder, but the seriousness and pervasiveness of the fair housing crisis quickly arose from his message despite his congenial manner. Mr. Kleina showed a news clip that coupled his photographs with speeches of Dr. King and other footage from the Chicago Freedom Movement highlighting the importance of fair housing, specifically the need for testing. Mr. Kleina offered tragic examples of fair housing discrimination from his current experiences as the Executive Director of the HOPE Fair Housing Center in Wheaton, IL. He revealed that despite the progress made in the Civil Rights movement, fair housing violations continue to impede equal opportunity and open neighborhoods. He challenged all to confront the barriers set by illegal housing discrimination.



...FHCWM Notes & News...

FROM THE DESK OF REV. MAY: FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

The Fair Housing Center continues to fight the good fight against those individuals and agencies that knowingly or unknowingly practice discrimination in one of the most vital areas of our lives, housing. Current statistics tell us that this discrimination is being reported more frequently in the senior population (those who are 60 years old and older). The work of the staff and the many volunteers is not only greatly appreciated, but desperately needed and should be applauded! I would also like to give a great big word of thanks to all of you who have participated in the Fair Housing Center's vision.

In my experience in working with issues of discrimination and race-based bias, I have found many who believe that racism is a phenomenon of the past, resolved with the movement of Dr. King and the larger civil rights era of the 50's and 60's. The result is a denial of modern day race-based discrimination. Although some strides were made during those times to correct the hundreds of years of race-based inequalities through open accommodations, we fell short of addressing the area of economic justice, which includes the equity based personal wealth of home ownership. There are many of us today who understand the power of multiple years of legalized racism and its ability to continue to permeate our culture and impact all of us to this very day.

One of the valued approaches of the Fair Housing Center is that we work from the bottom up and the top down. Many don't know that we still have home assessment language (*Regression Analysis, the Great Lakes Geographer, Vol. 12 No., 2005*) that says "an area with higher percentage of non-Hispanic whites is an indication of a more stable neighborhood and result in less turnover rates"; whereas the same report says that areas on the rise with increased presence of Black, non-Hispanics are predictably assessed negatively because, "whites would be sensitive to an increase of non-Hispanic blacks in their neighborhood and this would initiate turnover", or what we know as white-flight. So, there is a need to address the issue from the top down!

In a recent 2007 survey (*Notes on the Supreme Denial of Integration*) it was reported that one in every five minority home seekers encounters some form of discrimination during their first visit with a real-estate and/or rental agent. This number is believed to be underestimated because of the many incidents that go unreported. Minorities also experience race-based discrimination when seeking follow-up visits, making an offer on the home, applying for insurance, or even in getting a chance to talk to a realtor because realtors in these cases refuse to talk to them when they hear a Black or Hispanic voice on the phone. It has been demonstrated that Whites can accurately identify people of color 80% of the time just upon hearing them say "hello". So, there is a need to address the issue from the bottom up!

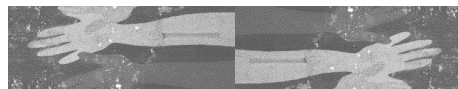
It is increasingly clear that the work of the Fair Housing Center is relevant to our present condition and severely affects our "quality of life" measures. So, I want to again thank you for your support and your continued presence in the Fair Housing Center's vision. If you are not involved in the Center's work, and would like to get involved, contact us! We will be excited to hear from you!



FAIR HOUSING INTRODUCTION ON THE LAKESHORE A GREAT SUCCESS

The Fair Housing Center Lakeshore Event Committee worked with the Bank of Holland and the Lakeshore Advisory Board to create and host an educational breakfast event held in Holland on September 26, 2007. The breakfast served as an introduction to fair housing for people and organizations in the lakeshore region that were either new to fair housing or played a significant role in the housing industry, with a special emphasis on the lending community.

After opening remarks, the attendees were shown a brief yet powerful video of an actual housing discrimination case and the impact on the victim, Dr. Okianer Dark. After this eye-opening video, Dave



Stellin, Lakeshore Advisory Board President and FHCWM Board Member, provided an overview of the origin and efforts of the Lakeshore Fair Housing Center as well as its recent incorporation with the FHCWM. Mr. Stellin then introduced Rich Lievense, Bank of Holland President. Mr. Lievense spoke about the importance of fair housing within the community. He highlighted his personal commitment to fair housing as well as the Bank of Holland's partnership with the FHCWM. Mr. Lievense then introduced keynote speaker Elena Grigera of the national fair housing law firm Relman & Dane.

Ms. Grigera gave a wonderful and informative 45 minute presentation on "Fair Housing: A Review of Lending Practices and Risk Management" which she offered to make available to anyone who would like a copy. Her presentation was a marvelous introduction to fair housing practices and laws, as well as a great tool to promote fair housing awareness. It was very well received by all attendees.

Nancy Haynes, Executive Director of the FHCWM, gave closing remarks about the future of fair housing on the lakeshore and the need to create a strong regional collaboration in order to most effectively fight housing discrimination in West Michigan. In order to further fair housing efforts on the lakeshore attendees were offered the opportunity to support the FHCWM by becoming members (and utilizing the matching grant opportunity offered by the Steelcase Foundation!) as well as receive educational trainings on fair housing. Ms. Haynes also highlighted that all funds that originate from the lakeshore will be invested directly back into the lakeshore.

This breakfast event incited a very positive response. As a result, the FHCWM received requests for copies of the presentation, fair housing trainings and new opportunities to collaborate with the lakeshore.

If you would like to request a fair housing training for your organization please contact the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980 or send an email to: contact-us@fhcwm.org.

...FHCWM Notes & News...

LOCAL FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Complaint #07-034

The Fair Housing Center was contacted by an attorney seeking assistance on a reasonable accommodation case. The attorney's client has a disability which causes her to be incontinent. Unfortunately this led to frequent accidents that gave her carpeting a permanent unpleasant odor. As the client lived in a subsidized housing development, the attorney cited federal law when requesting that the carpet, which was of replacement age, be substituted with vinyl at no cost to the client in order to accommodate her disability. The housing development denied the request stating that it was "not in a position to incur this additional expense." The FHCWM contacted the housing development and explained their obligations under fair housing law to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities. After the attorney further negotiated, the client was notified that her request had been granted and would be funded in part by the housing development.



Complaint #07-110

The FHCWM was contacted by a landlord who was renting out a single family home in Grand Rapids. The landlord had been notified by prospective tenants that when they visited the property they were approached by a neighbor who asked invasive questions and expressed a partiality against Hispanic persons. As the tenants that the landlord had approved to move in were Hispanic, there were concerns that harassment, discourteous treatment or steering would occur on the part of the neighbor. The FHCWM was able to contact the neighbor and discuss fair housing rights and laws. The FHCWM monitored the move-in and first month of tenancy, and received no report of any ongoing or further issues. The case was closed after having successfully intervened in order to prevent a fair housing violation.



ATTENTION: ALL PERSONS WHO LIVED AT, APPLIED TO LIVE AT OR SOUGHT TO LIVE AT COVENANT VILLAGE OF THE GREAT LAKES

Covenant Retirement Communities, an organization owning communities nationwide including Covenant Village of the Great Lakes in Grand Rapids, have come to a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice resolving a lawsuit alleging violations of the Fair Housing Act. In the lawsuit, the United States alleged that, among other things, these communities denied housing to, limited access to common areas for, or otherwise discouraged persons with disabilities who used mobility aids from living there. Mobility aids include wheelchairs, motorized wheelchairs, motorized scooters, walkers, crutches, and canes.

Although Covenant Retirement Communities denies the allegations made by the United States, under the Consent Order the parties have agreed to resolve the lawsuit by establishing a claims process so that any individual who believes that he or she was subjected to any of the following types of discrimination may file for compensation:

- Were denied housing or otherwise discouraged from living at Covenant Village because you or your spouse used a mobility aid
- Were denied access to or discouraged from using common facilities, including the dining hall, auditorium, rental office, etc., because you or your spouse used a mobility aid
- Were required to buy insurance as a condition of residency because you or your spouse used a mobility aid, or were required to meet other conditions, including providing proof of need and/or proof of ability to operate the motorized aid

If you wish to make such a claim against Covenant Retirement Communities, or if you have any information about persons who may have such a claim, please call the U.S. Department of Justice at **1-800-896-7743 ext. 5**.

You may also write to the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Housing and Civil Enforcement Section, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW-NWB, Washington, D.C. 20530, Attn: 175-12C-577



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