

Fall 2009



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Members & Friends of Fair Housing: Constellations of Opportunities

2009 Fair Housing Awards

On October 20, 2009, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan hosted its third annual fall event entitled “*Members & Friends of Fair Housing: Constellations of Opportunities*.” This year’s event was generously sponsored by Chemical Bank, Crowe Horwath and Huntington Bank. Again held at the Western Michigan University Graduate Center in downtown Grand Rapids, the event was a great success drawing about 200 members and friends of fair housing.

FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin opened the luncheon by welcoming the guests and explaining that the purpose of this annual event is to connect with our FHCWM Members, introduce fair housing to more people each year, and build relationships in the community. She explained that each year the event features the presentation of the *Fair Housing Advocate Award* to two individuals who have made significant contributions to fair housing in west Michigan. Ms. Ardoin announced that this year’s recipients were two very committed individuals who have worked with the FHCWM over many years to further fair housing efforts: Pat Vredevoogd Combs and Regina M. Davis. Finally, Ms. Ardoin highlighted that the title of the event, “Constellations of Opportunities,” acknowledged the keynote speaker, Dr. Gregory Squire, and his writing on critical community issues, including integration, predatory lending, and urban sprawl, among many others. The title of the event, “Constellations of Opportunities,” comes from Privileged

Places: Race, Residence, and the Structure of Opportunity (by Gregory Squires and Charis Kubrin) wherein they quote the phrase from fellow author Laura Pulido.

Nancy Haynes, FHCWM’s Executive Director, presented the *Fair Housing Advocate Awards* to two “generals” in the battle for fair housing, **Pat Vredevoogd Combs** and **Regina M. Davis**. Ms. Vredevoogd Combs, is a former president of the National Association of Realtors and a member of the recent Fair Housing Commission, which conducted regional hearings across the country to gather testimony, research, data and information on fair housing enforcement and the persistence of residential segregation forty years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act. Ms. Vredevoogd Combs is a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan and is a REALTOR with and Vice President of Coldwell Banker AJS Schmidt Realty. She began her career in real estate in 1971 and has accomplished much in her distinctive career. Ms. Vredevoogd Combs has been president of the Women’s Council of Realtors, the Grand Rapids Association of the Realtors, the Michigan Association of Realtors and in 2007, served as the President of the National Association of Realtors. In 2002, she was



From L to R: Davis, Haynes, Vredevoogd Combs

named the REALTOR of the Year for the State of Michigan. She stated that she’s been a fair housing advocate since “the day I got my real estate license.” Ms. Haynes described her as “someone who can inspire people to follow her into battle and do good.”

The second *Fair Housing Advocate Award* was given to Regina M. Davis. Ms. Davis is a past Director of Enforcement for the Fair Housing Center and a long time supporter of fair housing. Her commitment to affirmatively further fair housing and civil rights began in 1995 when she became a volunteer tester for the Center. Ms. Davis volunteered as a tester for four years until, in 1999, she became the Center’s Investigations Coordinator. During her time with the Center, Regina conducted 2,403 tests and took 1,417 complaints of which 883 were client-based complaints; therefore she helped more than 900 people and families during her tenure. Regina’s commitment to fair housing was mirrored in her commitment to her volunteers, all of whom saw her not only as the person who coordinated their efforts and provided them instructions, but also as a friend. Regina’s dedication to fair housing showed through her commitment to her testers and transformed volunteers into true advocates for fair housing. She now serves as a Housing Resource Specialist for the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF). Ms. Haynes stated that she is “a general in the fair housing army” and that “Regina wears fair housing.” The FHCWM is grateful for the continued work of these two committed advocates!

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Members & Friends Luncheon...

(continued from page 1) After the awards, the audience was addressed by keynote speaker



Dr. Gregory Squires. Dr. Squires is a Professor of Sociology and Public Policy and Public Administration at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He spoke about “Integration Exhaustion, Race

Fatigue, and the American Dream.” Dr. Squires began his talk with a quote from a 1965 Phil Ochs song: “I love Puerto Ricans and Negroes, as long as they don’t move next door.” He then discussed the varying and conflicting views that people have about de-segregation and integration today, from the thinking of ‘we won that battle in the 1960’s’ to many non-white families not holding the same goals and values relating to integration that were held by many a generation ago.

Dr. Squires presented his research regarding the intensity of racial segregation at the metropolitan level as it relates to the proportion of high-cost loans. He shared national and local data that correlated segregation and the prevalence of hyper-segregated neighborhoods with subprime lending, which significantly contributed to the economic fallout that we are facing today. He pointed to surging inequalities, uneven metropolitan development and the persistence of racial segregation as contributing factors. His research concluded that:

- The concentration of minorities is associated with the proportion of high-cost loans.
- The association of black segregation with high-cost loans is stronger than Hispanic segregation.
- Higher education and higher credit scores are important protective factors against high-cost loans.

Dr. Squires spoke about next steps, including legislation: CRA Modernization, Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending, and Housing Fairness Acts of 2009 as well as utilizing inclusionary zoning and Low Income Housing Tax Credits in low-poverty areas to reduce segregation. He also spoke about the importance of ensuring that fair housing is affirmatively furthered through federally funded programs such as CDBG and TARP. He also highlighted the importance of assuring fair access to financial services and prohibit predatory lending through advocacy and organizing.

Local Fair Housing News

Complaint 09-128: The FHCWM received a call from a client with a complaint of source of income discrimination against a landlord. The client, who receives Section 8 rental assistance, alleged that the owners of the rental property stated that they did not want to rent to people with Section 8 because they had heard “horror stories” about tenants with Section 8 vouchers from friends in the rental industry. The owners also stated that they didn’t think tenants with Section 8 would take care of their property. The FHCWM conducted testing and found evidence to support the client’s claim of illegal discrimination. The case has been filed with the City Attorney of Grand Rapids.

National Fair Housing News

Washington, DC—HUD announced that it has charged Millikin University in Decatur, IL with housing discrimination for allegedly refusing to allow a student with epilepsy and blindness to live in a dormitory with her service dog. HUD’s Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, John Trasviña, stated, “Having a service animal promotes independent living for many people with disabilities.” In this case, the dog is trained to assist the student in the event of an epileptic seizure. HUD alleges that the student was banned from entering the building after obtaining the dog, thereby requiring her to vacate her room and commute from home if she wanted to keep the animal. The university later relocated her to an inaccessible dormitory.

Installation of Our Tile Donor Wall Begins!

FHCWM staff are very pleased to announce that the installation of the tile donor wall in the entryway of our building has begun! Tile artist Mary Kuilema of Kuilema Pottery (www.stonewaretile.com) worked with staff to design a truly



unique donor wall, featuring our logo of an open door, representing our mission of ensuring fair housing for everyone. Mary was inspired by the logo that the Center

adopted several years ago and created a “mosaic alcove” of glazed tiles embossed with the names of all of our generous donors to the “Housing Fair Housing” Capital Campaign. The tile



wall will be complete by mid-November so please stop in and see the wonderful addition to our lobby! Many thanks to our donors, including Chase, who made this dream a reality!



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...FHCWM Notes & News...

Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing

The Fair Housing Center hosted its 3rd Annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* Breakfast event in Holland on Wednesday, September 16th at the Historic Baker Lofts Building in Holland. An audience of more than 80 people came to learn more about fair housing along the lakeshore and see the Lakeshore Fair Housing Award presented to **Mark Kornelis**. Dave Stellin, President of the FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory Board, presented the award to Mr. Kornelis, who was instrumental in bringing fair housing to the lakeshore

communities and continues to be an active fair housing supporter and advocate to this day.

The event was supported by the Holland Sentinel, Chemical Bank, Byron Bank, Bank of America, Fifth Third Bank, the Bank of Holland and CityFlats Hotel.



From L to R: N. Haynes, M. Kornelis and D. Stellin

The breakfast featured a presentation on Fair Housing Heroes in the region by **Steve Dane**, Partner of nationally renowned fair housing law firm Relman & Dane. Mr. Dane spoke of a family in Michigan that faced discrimination because they had a child when they attempted to purchase a condominium that was not on the first floor. He also shared the story of a whistleblower who was terminated as a rental manager after she refused to discriminate against applicants and residents based on their national origin; the housing provider had a policy of assigning any foreign residents to a separate building and maintaining separate listings based on national origin. Although new to the position, this woman stood up for the rights of others and herself. Mr. Dane spoke about a single mother of three children, one of whom had a disability that caused him to move using his arms or rely on family members to carry him within the home as the hallways were very narrow. As he grew, his condition deteriorated and he was required to begin using a wheelchair. The family requested a ramp at the front of the home. Their landlord delayed the process for over a year in spite of the fact that the family had the ramp and labor donated and ready for installation. Without consulting the family, the landlord then installed a ramp at the rear of the home that was too steep for use. He also had the driveway repaved but the paved area did not reach the foot of the ramp. Mr. Dane then shared a powerful video summarizing a recent fair housing case in Zanesville, OH wherein citizens were denied access to public water for over 40 years based on their race. The event was an eye opener and a great success!

Know Your Fair Housing Rights!

What is fair housing?

Fair housing is the right of an individual to obtain the housing of their choice free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, familial status, age or marital status. Fair housing rights also include the right of a person with a disability to request a **reasonable modification** or a **reasonable accommodation**.

What are reasonable modifications?

Reasonable modifications are physical changes to an apartment or house that make the unit accessible to someone with a disability, such as ramps or grab bars. A person with a disability must be permitted to make reasonable modifications to their dwelling unit or to the public and common use areas if necessary for equal access. Reasonable modifications are critical for equal housing opportunity, especially in meeting the demand for accessible housing from a growing senior population.

What are reasonable accommodations?

Reasonable accommodations are changes in any rule, policy, procedure or service needed in order for a person with a disability to have equal access to and enjoyment of their home. Examples of reasonable accommodations include allowing an overnight caregiver despite a policy prohibiting overnight guests or allowing a service animal despite a "no pets" policy.

What are service animals?

Service animals are animals that perform tasks or provide support to assist people with disabilities in the daily activities of independent living. **Service animals are not considered to be pets, and are not subject to pet fees or "no pet"**

polices. Service animals do not have to be certified or licensed by any government or training program.

What kinds of service animals are there?

The most recognizable service animals are those that assist people with obvious physical disabilities, such as guide or seeing-eye dogs. Other common service animals include hearing animals, mobility animals and seizure response animals. **However**, companion or emotional support animals, are also service animals. Companion animals can help persons with psychological disabilities alleviate symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress thereby enhancing the person's ability to live independently and enjoy their home.

Are dogs the only animals that can be service animals?

No. Any animal prescribed by a doctor or other medical professional to assist a person with a disability can be a service animal.

I think my neighbor has a service animal, but I am not sure. Can I ask about his/her disability?

You should avoid initiating conversation about a service animal or a person's disability. If you are curious, you may ask your neighbor if he/she would care to discuss it, but be aware that many people with disabilities do not care to, nor are required to, share personal details.

Where can I find more information?

If you have additional questions about reasonable modifications or reasonable accommodations, or if you would like assistance in requesting a reasonable modification or accommodation, please contact the FHCWM office.

Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

23rd Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

The 23rd Annual *Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series* will take place on **Thursday, April 22, 2010** at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids. As always, we will have educational morning workshops as well as a luncheon with awards and a keynote speaker. This year's event will celebrate the Center's **30th Anniversary**. Please contact the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980 or (866) 389-FAIR if you are interested in sponsoring and/or attending this significant event!

Fair Housing Book Club

The next Fair Housing Book Club discussion is scheduled for Tuesday, November 17th at 11:45 am at the FHCWM office. We will discuss the novel Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret by Steve Luxenberg. This book is part memoir, part mystery, part history of the mental health movement—'a fascinating account of a life lived in the shadows' as the author discovers a family secret: an aunt he never knew existed.... Bring a lunch and join in the discussion!

Trainings

The Fair Housing Center offers fair housing trainings, including Fair Housing & Advertising, Fair Housing Training for Rental Professionals and Fair Lending sessions. Costs vary depending on the type of training. Each training is 3 hours and includes a comprehensive packet of reference materials.

Some sessions are held at the FHCWM office; we can also come to your location. Call Liz Keegan at (616) 451-2980 to learn more or register.

Check our website home page for upcoming dates: www.fhcwm.org.

The FHCWM hosts 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 contact Lucia Belassi at (616) 451-2980.

www.fhcwm.org
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