



# FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

## Members & Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating 30 Years!

### 2011 Fair Housing Advocate Awards & Luncheon

On November 17, 2010, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan hosted its fourth annual fall event entitled “*Members & Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating 30 Years of Opening Doors to Housing Choice.*” This year’s event was generously sponsored by Chemical Bank, Flagstar Bank and Huntington Bank. More than 200 FHCWM members, industry and community partners, and friends of fair housing attended.

FHCWM Board Member and City of Grand Rapids Planner Suzanne Schulz 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. 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. Schulz 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: long-time FHCWM Board Member and President Doretha Ardoin, and Kim Cross, Chief Operating Officer of Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids. She talked about the necessity of fair housing work, citing an example of a development that was met with opposition because it would be multicultural and offer a variety of housing choices. She then highlighted the title of the event, noting that for the first time the event would focus on the history and work of

the FHCWM, to be presented by former Executive Director Lee Nelson Weber and current Executive Director Nancy Haynes.

Nancy Haynes, FHCWM’s Executive Director, presented the *Fair Housing Advocate Award* to two well-known faces who have made fair housing a priority in their life’s work, **Doretha Ardoin** and **Kim Cross**. Ms. Ardoin has been involved in the Fair Housing Center since its early days. “Doretha is the face of fair housing,” said Nancy Haynes. “I don’t know what fair housing would be without Doretha.” Ms. Ardoin talked about the need for fair housing and how important it is for people to be able to make choices when it comes to housing. She also discussed the need for continuing education on fair housing laws, stating “awareness is empowerment.” See page 3 for a Board Member Profile on Doretha Ardoin.



Nancy Haynes & Doretha Ardoin

The second *Fair Housing Advocate Award* was given to Kim Cross. Ms. Cross has been with Dwelling Place for 20 years. According to Nancy Haynes, “Kim is the little person on my shoulder whispering to me, ‘Have you thought about this yet?’” Ms. Cross never hesitates to bring emerging issues to the FHCWM from a housing provider’s point of view as soon as she identifies them and she works tirelessly to implement policies and

procedures that further fair housing throughout Dwelling Place and the greater community.



Kim Cross & Nancy Haynes

Ms. Cross stated “I am so grateful that the [FHCWM] are there so that I have somebody I can call and ask questions. Even though we’ve all been in the business for so many years, we don’t have all of the answers.” She discussed the need for partnerships across the community, saying, “It’s calling another partner and saying hey, we’re in this together remember? Let’s figure out how to move forward and further progress.” The FHCWM is grateful for the continued work of these two committed advocates!

The award ceremony was followed by the debut of the FHCWM’s new video, “*Opening Doors to Housing Choice,*” which features interviews with Doretha Ardoin, Lee Nelson Weber, Nancy Haynes, Dave Bulkowski, and a Fair Housing Center client, all sharing their experiences with fair housing and talking about what it means to them as individuals and to our community. Lee Nelson Weber then spoke about the first 20 years of the Center’s history and how it was started by a group of concerned citizens looking at the segregation in the

# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

Grand Rapids schools in the late 1970's. She shared humorous reflections on how difficult it was to receive faxes and how a seed grant from Dyer-Ives came with a letter saying "Good luck"! Ms. Nelson Weber shared a series of thanks to so many who put the Center together: the founders (John Dow, Gordy Fessenden, Anne Schreuder, Carol Townsend), FHC



Detroit's Cliff Schrupp, Mary Alice Williams, volunteer testers, test coordinators, the Grand Rapids

Association of Realtors, cooperating attorneys, complainants, and many other friends acquired along the way. She concluded that in light of a history of racial and other fundamental divisions, government policies supporting segregation, limited funding and challenging work, "the wonder is not that we have done so little, but that we have in fact done so much." Nancy Haynes then followed up Ms. Nelson Weber's comments with a summary of the last 10 years of the Center's history, which built on the strong foundation built by so many. The Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids became the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan after a HUD grant enabled the Center to add 10 counties surrounding Kent County to its service area. Chase (then Bank One) donated a bank building to the Center in 2006. The FHCWM embarked on its first ever capital campaign, *Housing Fair Housing*, and raised over \$1 million to renovate the building and add a classroom to the existing facility. Staff are able to offer a menu of trainings to members of housing industry: lending, advertising, rental, maintenance and more. The FHCWM officially partnered with the Lakeshore Fair Housing effort by forming a Lakeshore Advisory Board and establishing an office in Holland. The expanded funding and space enabled the FHCWM to add several staff positions to focus on the newly revised vision and mission. The FHCWM offers more events and opportunities to connect to fair housing than ever before: monthly book clubs, the lakeshore breakfast and the April luncheon

and workshop series. Ms. Haynes referenced a quote from President Lyndon B. Johnson made after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968:

*"In these years, we have moved toward opening the way of hope and opportunity and justice in this country. We have rolled away some of the stones of inaction, of indifference, and of injustice. Our work is not yet done. But we have begun."*

She noted that despite 30 years of hard work, the work in West Michigan is not yet done. But thanks to so many of our Members and Friends, "we have taken steps in the right direction and we are counting on you to continue marching with us as we work to open the way of hope and opportunity and justice."

## Local Fair Housing News

**Complaint 09-128:** The FHCWM recently helped a client resolve a complaint of national origin discrimination filed with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) against a national mortgage lending company. The client had been working with a particular representative of the mortgage company to obtain a loan modification to allow him to keep his home and avoid foreclosure. The client alleged that this representative made several derogatory statements regarding his national origin, including referring to him as a "Mexican jumping bean" both directly and in the presence of witnesses at a public forum, as well as stating that if his loan modification did not go through then he could "just return to Mexico and work in the gardens picking cabbage." After such statements and perceived promises made by the representative to halt foreclosure proceedings, the client's home fell into foreclosure and the loan modification was denied. As a result, the client felt that he had fallen further behind in his mortgage because of misinformation and false promises made by the representative, and further felt that such actions were connected to the statements made regarding his national origin. In July 2009, the client filed a complaint with MDCR, and in August 2010 the client entered into a private settlement agreement with the mortgage company wherein he was compensated in the amount of \$7,000.00.

## National Fair Housing News

**Swarthmore, PA**—The Fair Housing Council of Suburban Philadelphia (FHCSP) and Robin Link settled federal housing discrimination complaints against two Bucks County landlords for violating the familial status portion of the Fair Housing Act. In April, the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued a charge of discrimination on behalf of Robin Link, her adopted minor son, and FHCSP against the landlords for illegally terminating the lease of Ms. Link due to the adoption of her son. HUD alleged that the landlords made discriminatory statements indicating that they did not rent to families with children and that they discouraged other families from applying for available rental units by understating the number of bedrooms. "Adoptive families deserve the same respect and enjoy the same rights as all families in our society," stated John Trasviña, HUD Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity.



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# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

## Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing

The FHCWM hosted its 4th Annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* breakfast event in Holland on Wednesday, September 29<sup>th</sup> at the Historic Baker Lofts Building in Holland. An audience of 70

people came to learn more about fair housing along the lakeshore and see the Lakeshore Fair Housing Award presented to **Dave Stellin**. Amber

VerBurg, an FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory

Board member, presented the award to Mr. Stellin, 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 Chemical Bank, Macatawa Bank, First Place Bank, the Bank of Holland and CityFlats Hotel.

The breakfast featured a presentation by attorney **John Obee**, Vice-President and Shareholder at Wood, Kull, Herschfus, Obee & Kull. He

specializes in all aspects of real estate law and real estate litigation, with an emphasis on Realtor® Errors and Omissions

matters. Mr. Obee is an honors graduate of Wayne State University Law School in Detroit, Michigan and an active partner and member of the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit.

Mr. Obee shared several cases of families and individuals from across the state who have experienced hate crimes and housing discrimination including a case where African-American families found hateful and threatening messages hidden in Easter eggs on their lawns. In another case, a Caucasian homeowner received a threatening and hateful letter after his real estate agent showed the home to an African-American woman. In this particular case, the homeowner also turned out to be an FBI agent who was well aware of his rights under fair housing and hate crime laws. Mr. Obee also highlighted some of the cases of discrimination occurring along the lakeshore and the work of the Fair Housing Center and the Lakeshore Advisory Board to combat it. FHCWM Executive Director Nancy Haynes closed the luncheon with comments on the importance of working together to identify and stop housing discrimination.



Dave Stellin and Nancy Haynes

## Get to Know: Our Board President Doretha Ardoin



Doretha Ardoin is the current FHCWM Board President. She is a realtor and real estate trainer and has been a strong and vocal fair housing advocate within the housing industry since she first obtained her

real estate sales license in 1978. As stated in the FHC-MD September newsletter, Ms. Ardoin and three other women “were the courageous and often lonely voices and trainers for fair housing in the sales industry in Michigan.”

One of Ms. Ardoin’s most wonderful qualities is her ability to meet every situation and opportunity with grace and humor. Despite the fact that she has successfully faced and overcome racial and gender barriers in a highly competitive field to become one of Grand Rapids’ most successful and widely-known agents, she has never succumbed and never lost sight of her goals. She has paved the way for many who have come after her, particularly for women and people of color.

In 1989, Ms. Ardoin received the highest lifetime award of the industry, *Realtor of the Year*, and in 1994 was chosen as the *Woman of the Year* by the women’s Council of Realtors.

In 1998, she was awarded the *William Glenn Trailblazer Award* at the Giant’s Banquet. Also in 1998 she was the recipient of the *YWCA Tribute Award* and was most recently honored by the Lakeside Organization during March Women’s History Month for her numerous contributions and leadership in the community.

Earlier this fall, she was presented with a *Fair Housing Leadership Award* from the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit. In November, the FHCWM was pleased to present Ms. Ardoin with the *Fair Housing Advocate* award for her many years of dedication to fair housing and to the FHCWM.

There are not words to sufficiently express the debt and the gratitude of the FHCWM to Ms. Ardoin for the guidance, support and dedication that she has given through the years. **Thank you Doretha, you are truly an inspiration to us all!**

## Update: Fair Housing Senior Project

In 2006, the FHCWM conducted a pilot project in order to learn more about the existing barriers and housing discrimination experienced by senior citizens of color and seniors with disabilities in Kent County. Evidence of differential treatment was found in 66% of the investigations, more than double the evidence rate found for all of the protected classes at that time. Armed with this startling statistic, the FHCWM secured funding from the Kent County Senior Millage to expand access to affordable housing for older adults

**Kent County Senior Millage**

traditionally shut out of the housing market through: advocacy, training, education and outreach, survey testing and senior marketing reviews. FHCWM Director of Advocacy, Elizabeth Vezino, provided an early look at the information gathered by the FHCWM staff over the last 3 years as part of our April Fair Housing Month workshop, “*Am I Welcome to Live Here? Analyzing the Impact of Discriminatory Advertising in West Michigan*”.

This work has revealed several important trends in discriminatory behaviors and practices, particularly featuring the use of human models in advertising campaigns. In response, the FHCWM created a one-hour training for senior housing providers to introduce fair housing, increase awareness of rights and responsibilities under law, and to provide education on how to prevent violations. The FHCWM has proposed the development of both a three-hour comprehensive fair housing training for staff of senior communities and a report on discriminatory trends in senior housing. If you are interested in learning more about this and/or other FHCWM trainings, contact Liz Keegan at (616)-451-2980.

# Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

## 24th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

The 24th Annual *Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series* will take place on **Thursday, April 28, 2011**, 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. 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 Fair Housing Book Clubs are currently discussing *I'm Down: A Memoir* by Mishna Wolff, and *Not a Genuine Black Man* by Brian Copeland. These two books are both candid and poignant memoirs detailing the experiences of the author as they struggled to fit in—for Ms. Wolff, growing up in an all-black Seattle neighborhood with a white father who wanted to be black; and for Mr. Copeland, as a lone black child in 1972 San Leandro, CA, a 99.4% white community. Check our web site for dates and times—bring a lunch and join 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](http://www.fhcwm.org).

The FHCWM hosts two **tester trainings** each month. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a small reimbursement 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 with any other questions, contact Michelle Charette at (616) 451-2980.

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