



# FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

## Friends of Fair Housing: Voices for Justice

On October 8, 2008, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (FHCWM) hosted its second annual fall event entitled “Friends of Fair Housing: Voices for Justice,” a follow up to last year’s event, “Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating Images of Hope.” This year’s event was generously sponsored by Northern Trust, Chemical Bank, Crowe Horwath and Law Weathers & Richardson as well as was supported by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. Again held at the WMU Graduate Center in downtown Grand Rapids, the event was a great success drawing over 200 attendees despite the perpetual downpour that reigned outside!



FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin opened the event by welcoming the guests and explaining that the purpose of this annual event is to introduce fair housing to more people each year and to 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 to further fair housing efforts: Kate Pew Wolters and Jim Wilson. Finally, Ms. Ardoin highlighted that the title of the event, “Voices for Justice,” acknowledged the keynote speaker, Dr. Dennis Preston, and his important work on linguistic profiling and its significance to fair housing.

Nancy Haynes, Executive Director of the FHCWM, presented the first *Fair Housing Advocate Award* to Kate Pew Wolters (pictured at left). Ms. Pew Wolters, a lifetime community leader, philanthropist, and social justice advocate, was honored for her invaluable contributions to the growth and vision of the FHCWM as well as for her outspoken leadership on disability and social justice issues at the national level. Upon accepting the award, Ms. Pew Wolters explained that her passion for fair housing was ignited by an instance that occurred while she was the Executive Director of the Center for Independent Living, now known as Disability Advocates of Kent County. She stated that a client was denied housing solely because the landlord observed the client’s disability and questioned his/her ability to live unassisted, and also assumed the client to be a risk and potentially a danger. Ms. Pew

Wolters is a long-time advocate for disability issues, as evidenced by her 8 years of service as the Vice President of the National Council on Disability, appointed by President Bill Clinton.

The second *Fair Housing Advocate Award* was given to Jim Wilson (pictured below with Nancy Haynes). Jim Wilson, a distinguished leader in the property management industry and FHCWM Board Member, was recognized for his innovative and distinguished approach to incorporating fair housing into the rental property management industry and for his



national advocacy for the housing voucher program. Mr. Wilson joked that his relationship with the FHCWM did not start out as the most agreeable partnership, but evolved into a strong, dedicated collaboration between fair housing and the housing industry. Mr. Wilson’s dedication to fair housing includes joining the FHCWM Board of Directors in 2004, integrating original fair housing strategies into one of the largest property management companies in the region, and transforming the housing

(continued on page two)

# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

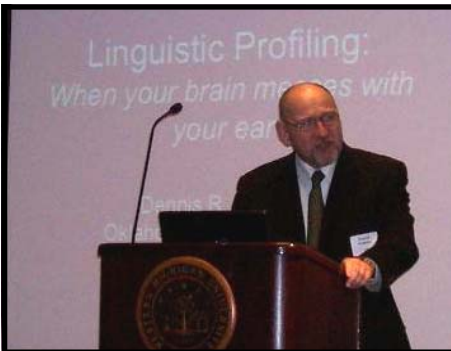
## Friends of Fair Housing (cont.)

industry's once fearful attitude toward the housing voucher program into advocacy throughout the nation.

After the award presentations, the audience was addressed by keynote speaker Dr. Dennis Preston (pictured below). Dr. Preston is the preeminent national expert on linguistic profiling and is nationally recognized for applying his linguistic research and study to better understand the pervasiveness of the assumptions that are made based upon a person's voice and language and the impact and danger of acting on those assumptions.

Dr. Preston had the audience fully engaged during his interactive presentation. He played audio and video clips that demonstrated "how your brain messes with your ears," i.e. how the perception of a person's language, accent and/or pronunciations are not always reality. Dr. Preston explained that these perceptions lead to assumptions about a person's race, level of education, gender, etc. and that these assumptions often lead to differences in treatment. He explained how critical it is that we not allow such practices to impede a person's access to housing.

Nancy Haynes concluded the luncheon by thanking the attendees for their continued support and highlighting a special opportunity for membership (see next column!).



## Fair Housing Capital Campaign Nears Goal

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan has completed over 80% of its Capital Campaign, and plans to complete the entire Campaign by the end of 2008. The \$1,022,246 raised thus far goes toward the goal of \$1,250,000 set in order to fund the renovation of a former Bank One Branch office into the new home of the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan. The new office has brought the FHCWM increased capacity to provide fair housing services, improved accessibility, and greater visibility. For example, the FHCWM has offered use of its new meeting room to over 100 different groups, greatly increasing awareness of fair housing and the potential for partnership and collaboration.



### **\*\*ONE TIME SPECIAL OFFER\*\***

You can help the FHCWM close out its Capital Campaign by making a donation of \$100. This time only, your gift will purchase a tile on our Donor Wall featuring your name **AND** a 2008



membership at the same time! A big impact with a savings of \$25!!

Local artist Mary Kuilema, of Kuilema Pottery, has designed the Donor Wall as a "mosaic alcove" for the greeting area of the office of the FHCWM. It will be composed of beautifully glazed terra cotta tiles (see sample above) embossed with the names of donors. The wall design shows an open door and window which represent the FHCWM's mission to eliminate practices of housing discrimination and promote diverse, open communities through education and advocacy. Donor tiles will be various sizes designated for different amounts of donation. All new donors and previous campaign donors of gifts of \$100 or more will be acknowledged on the Donor Wall. Take advantage of this offer by visiting [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org) to download a tile form or call us at 1-866-389-FAIR.



**Fair Housing Center  
of West Michigan**  
20 Hall Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

T: (616) 451-2980 or 1-866-389-FAIR  
F: (616) 451-2657

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# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

## Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing

The Fair Housing Center hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* Breakfast event in Holland on Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> at the DoubleTree Hotel in Holland. Every seat at this event was full – in total, 85 people attended. The event was supported by the West Michigan Association of Realtors, Chemical Bank, Bank of America, Bank of Holland and Huntington Bank.

Keynote speaker David Rusk was very well-received as he spoke about the impact of segregation on our communities. Mr. Rusk (pictured at left) is an internationally renowned public policy consultant and author; he is a former mayor of Albuquerque and state legislator. Mr. Rusk often speaks on how urban sprawl, racial segregation and concentrated poverty interact and impact a region's growth patterns, social equity and quality of life.



Mr. Rusk's presentation, entitled "Jim Crow by Race—Jim Crow by Income," addressed many key issues for our region, including what new housing gets built where for whose benefit and at what cost. He also discussed exclusionary zoning as one of the most critical local issues because of its high costs to our communities. He proposed that communities incorporate inclusive zoning in order to provide access to growing job centers, more affordable housing opportunities, and high performance, low-poverty schools. Further, Mr. Rusk stated that "housing policy is school policy" and shared local data demonstrating the high levels of segregation by space, race and ethnicity. He also discussed the role of governmental fragmentation in furthering segregation by race and recommended that Michigan communities work together across municipal lines to address critical community problems. Mr. Rusk also pointed out that increased governmental fragmentation adversely affects the competitiveness of the metropolitan region, resulting in slower economic growth. See his presentation slides on our website: [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org).

Staff also provided a fair housing training immediately following the breakfast. This two-hour training, "Fair Housing Education" for sales professionals, was approved for 2 Michigan State Continuing Education credits. This training was developed in partnership with the Michigan Association of Realtors and the National Fair Housing Alliance.

## First Fair Housing Book Club a Great Success

The Fair Housing Center has hosted 2 book club meetings, one in Grand Rapids and one in Holland, discussing Kevin Boyle's book, "*Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in the Jazz Age.*" This book is a true story of housing discrimination in 1920's Detroit which led to a sensational murder trial that divided the City of Detroit, ignited the civil rights struggle and involved America's greatest attorney, Clarence Darrow. The book tells the story of Dr. Ossian Sweet, a proud African American doctor who makes the long climb from the ghetto to a home of his own in a previously all-white neighborhood. The discussions that took place during the book club meetings led to a deeper understanding of the roots of the systemic and institutionalized aspects of segregation and housing discrimination that continue to plague our communities today.

## National Fair Housing News

**Tallassee, AL**—HUD has filed discrimination charges against the owners of a house in Tallassee, Alabama, who allegedly forced their white tenants to move after the owners saw the couple talking with black neighbors in the front yard. According to the charge, the white tenant recorded the owner saying, "If y'all want to have African-Americans to visit, we're going to ask you to move..." The owner also reportedly later told the couple, "You should live in the projects if you want to interact with those people...I don't care if you made a complaint to HUD, you have to move." This case was originally closed by HUD that stated that the landlords were exempt because they only owned 3 properties, did not use a realtor, etc. However, it was pointed out that although the landlord was exempt from discriminatory practices, he had made discriminatory statements which are not subject to the exemption. The outcome of the case has yet to be determined.

## Local Fair Housing News

### **Complaint # 08-106**

The FHCWM was contacted by a landlord whose prospective tenants had been harassed by the neighbor of the property for rent because of their age. As the prospective tenants were young they were assumed to be irresponsible and raucous, and were told they were not welcome in that neighborhood. The landlord requested that the FHCWM initiate the case by sending an educational letter to the neighbor explaining fair housing rights and laws, specifically focusing on the protections on the basis of age. The FHCWM drafted and sent such a letter with a fair housing brochure to the neighbor who then contacted the FHCWM. After a conversation with the FHCWM's Enforcement Director, the neighbor was further aware of fair housing and understood her responsibilities under law. This is a positive example of the FHCWM's abilities to mediate through the use of education and to prevent future violations.

# Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

The **22nd Annual Fair Housing Luncheon and Workshop Series** will take place on **April 22, 2009** at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. This premier fair housing event will celebrate 41 years of fair housing since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, yet will also challenge the impediments to housing choice that continue to hinder the creation of healthy, sustainable, diverse communities throughout west Michigan. Please contact the FHCWM if you are interested in sponsoring this significant event!

The next **Fair Housing Book Club** discussion is scheduled for **November 20, 2008** at Disability Network/Lakeshore (426 Century Lane, Holland) at 11:45 am. This will be the second discussion of the book "*A Stronger Kinship: One Town's Extraordinary Story of Hope and Faith*" by Anna-Lisa Cox. This is the true story of Covert, MI, a fully, and illegally, integrated town in the 1860s. Starting in the 1860s, the people of Covert broke laws and barriers to create what then seemed impossible: a town where blacks and whites lived as equals. The book is available at Schuler Books in Grand Rapids and Tree House Books in Holland.

The next Grand Rapids meeting of the Fair Housing Book Club will be at the FHCWM on **December 15, 2008** at 11:45 am. This meeting will not feature a specific book, but rather selected video clips, articles, and historical events that have greatly impacted the status of fair housing today.

The next book for the Fair Housing Book Club is "*Seven Laurels*," by Linda Busby Parker. The first discussion on this book will take place on **January 29, 2009** at the FHCWM at 11:45 am.

Bring a lunch and come join in the discussion on any/all of these dates!!

**Fair housing training for rental professionals** will be held on:

♦ **January 22, 2009**, 2-5 pm

♦ **March 24, 2009**, 5:30-8:30 pm

Both sessions will be held at the FHCWM at 20 Hall St. SE, Grand Rapids. The cost to attend is \$60. Call Liz Keegan at (616) 451-2980 to register.

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 Regina Davis at (616) 451-2980.

[www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org)  
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**FAIR HOUSING CENTER OF  
WEST MICHIGAN**  
20 Hall Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

