

## A DEPARTURE & NEW FACES AT THE FAIR HOUSING CENTER

We are very sad to announce the departure of long-time Administrative Assistant Liz Spreitzer this summer. Liz is leaving us to begin teacher-assisting and student teaching as she finishes her pursuit of a teaching degree in secondary education with an emphasis on English (especially Harry Potter).

Liz has worked with us for more than 5 years, keeping the Center organized and efficient. Many of you recognize her as the friendly voice that is always answering our phones. Thanks, Liz, for everything you've done for all of us. We wish you the **very best** in all you do! We'll see you every April for Fair Housing Month, though, right?!?

On the other hand, the Fair Housing Center is pleased to welcome several new faces: Dane, our Fair Housing Intern; Rev. David May, our Senior Project Coordinator; Maryam, our receptionist; and Elizabeth, our Office Coordinator.

Dane will soon begin his third year at Grand Valley State University where he is studying both political science and sociology. He will graduate in May 2008 and plans to continue on to law school. He helps with special projects and keeps the mood light in the office.

Rev. May is Pastor and founder of Mount Moriah Baptist Worship Center. He recently retired from the Grand Rapids Area Center for

Ecumenism (GRACE) and joined our staff part-time. He works to recruit volunteers and to spread fair housing awareness throughout the senior community.

Maryam is a mother of four. She works part-time through AARP and is the new friendly voice you may hear answering the phone. She greets all visitors and tends the front desk.

Elizabeth is a recent graduate of the University of Notre Dame where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in mathematics and Spanish. She keeps the office organized and provides support for the staff and all its programming.

### **Welcome To All!**

Summer 2007



# FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (FHCWM)

## Steelcase Foundation Offers Challenge Grant

### STEELCASE FOUNDATION OFFERS THE FHCWM A CHALLENGE GRANT FOR MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to the Steelcase Foundation, for the first time in its 27 year history, the Fair Housing Center is the recipient of a challenge grant.

What is a challenge grant you may ask?

Great question!

According to [www.mscf.org/DR\\_Glossary.html](http://www.mscf.org/DR_Glossary.html), a challenge grant is a grant that is made on the condition that other funding be secured, either on a matching basis or some other formula, usually within a specified period of time, with the objective of encouraging expanded fundraising from additional sources.

According to the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan, a challenge grant is FREE MONEY!

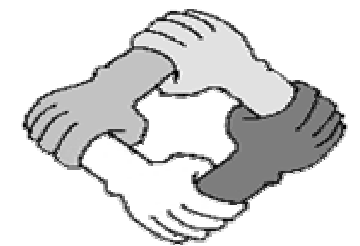
Well, more seriously and specifically, the Steelcase Foundation's challenge grant is for membership dollars, matching each new membership dollar for dollar AND any increases from 2006 members dollar for dollar as well! For example, a member that gave \$25 last year that sends \$50 in for membership this year will actually raise \$75 for the Center. Any new members that join for \$25 will raise \$50 for our Center. This is a wonderful way for us to build further capacity to serve the community.

We are extremely appreciative of the generous grant from the Steelcase Foundation and plan to "capitalize" on this opportunity. It is a chance, not only to raise funds for our Fair Housing Center and its programs, but also to foster strong resources and relationships for fair housing within the community through new and renewed memberships. Your membership is an important way to demonstrate your commitment to equal housing opportunity. It enhances our Center's credibility as a

representative organization and provides an opportunity for you or your organization to publicly state your support of ensuring equal access to housing choice.

Members receive periodic newsletters full of updates about cases and Fair Housing activities, copies of the FHCWM's Annual Report and also an invitation to nominate individuals and/or organizations for the Annual Fair Housing Awards.

We need YOUR membership to continue fighting housing discrimination in the West Michigan area, as well as to ensure equal housing and the acquisition of civil rights.



*Please fill out the enclosed envelope to make your donation today!*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED  
[www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org)

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...Notes & News...

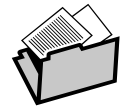
**FROM THE DESK OF  
REV. MAY: SENIOR TESTING**

The Fair Housing Center's Senior Tester Program is one of several programs which provides ongoing attention to the issue of illegal housing discrimination. I value this particular approach because it produces objective, demonstrative evidence that reveals distinct patterns of discrimination. This method has uncovered an increased number of incidents of both age based and racial discrimination in the senior population.

Over the past three months, I have spoken with over 35 congregations, across denominations, about providing testers for this program. It has been encouraging to see the fervent response of the faith community's laymen and pastoral leadership to provide volunteers to become part of this very important method of identifying and addressing housing discrimination. It has been personally rewarding to me that every congregation I have contacted has committed to invite their senior members to sign up for the senior tester program.

I truly believe the tester program is one method of intervention that has the power to interrupt, challenge, and change the patterns of discrimination. Let me thank the Fair Housing Center, and all those who support it, for having the wisdom and courage to make the invisible, visible!

Contact us to be a tester!!



**LOCAL FAIR HOUSING  
NEWS**

Over the last month, our Center has opened over 25 new complaints against landlords posting ads for rental properties online. Most cases have been opened due to phrasing which may indicate a practice of familial status discrimination. Such phrases include: "Ideal for college students," "2 bedroom apartment, max capacity 3 persons," and "looking for 'quiet' individuals." All of these statements could suggest an unwillingness to rent to families with children. Denial of housing based solely on the presence of children is illegal under federal law.

**COMPLAINT # 06-022**

On February 6, 2006, the FHCWM opened a complaint against Richmond Hills Apartments in Grand Rapids based upon evidence of racial discrimination found in testing. The case was then filed with HUD and they initiated their own investigation. After finding further evidence of discrimination, HUD presented their case and in July 2007 conciliated with Richmond Hills for an undisclosed amount.

**NATIONAL FAIR HOUSING  
NEWS**

**Swarthmore, PA**— Glenn Brown lived in a two bedroom home in Loags Corner Mobile Home Park in Elverson, PA. Several years ago, a sign identified Loags Corner as a "FUTURE ADULT COMMUNITY," despite numerous young families living there. Mr. Brown wished to sell his home, but Loags Corner would not consider any prospective tenants with

children, and he was thus unable to sell. Mr. Brown contacted the Fair Housing Council of Suburban Philadelphia, and in April 2007, with their help, filed a complaint with HUD of illegal conversion to a Senior community against Loags Corner. On July 23, the parties agreed to a settlement and Mr. Brown received \$50,000.



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**SAVE THE DATE! FRIENDS OF  
FAIR HOUSING: CELEBRATING  
IMAGES OF HOPE**

We are extremely privileged to introduce Bernie Kleina as the keynote speaker for our inaugural fall event titled *Friends of Fair Housing: Celebrating Images of Hope* on **November 19, 2007!** Mr. Kleina is the Executive Director of the HOPE Fair Housing Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Throughout his life, Mr. Kleina has passionately promoted fair housing, has been an active civil rights advocate, and has been an urban photographer capturing inspirational images.

Mr Kleina will talk on his personal experiences in the history of civil rights and fair housing, and will also share some of his rarely seen color photographs which document the 1965-66 Chicago Freedom Movement's peaceful demonstrations' call for open housing.

His exhibit celebrates the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders and includes images of Dr. King; Coretta Scott-King; the Rev. Jesse Jackson, as well as thousands of other peaceful demonstrators involved in these historic rallies and marches. Over 30 of his photographs, from both the Freedom Movement and his more recent collections, will be on display at the event. He also will present a news clip from the Chicago News where Dr. King spoke on open housing and testing, and will bring historical newspaper articles.

\*\*Anyone wishing for more information should contact the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980 or [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org)

**FAIR HOUSING AND  
REASONABLE ACCOMODATIONS**

Our Fair Housing Center assists persons who have mental and physical disabilities with reasonable accommodation requests and complaints. Reasonable accommodations are changes in rules, policies or practices so that a person with a disability can live in or use a housing unit. They also include physical changes to an apartment or house that make the unit accessible.

If a tenant, home buyer, or other home seeker needs a



**EQUAL HOUSING  
OPPORTUNITY**

reasonable accommodation, he or she may request it from the housing provider at any time. In addition, he or she must provide information from a professional which documents the disability and why the accommodation is needed. A tenant can request as many accommodations as he or she needs. You are not limited to just one accommodation.

For the most part, landlords and housing providers in Michigan must allow the tenant to make physical changes to the property at the tenant's expense. However, there are some federal laws which may require a landlord to finance the physical changes to an apartment or house.

There are many misconceptions as to what are, and are not,

reasonable accommodations. The FHCWM helps to determine if the request is in fact reasonable and then utilizes its relationship with Disability Advocates to acquire the needed accommodation.

Examples of reasonable accommodation requests that our Center has received this year:

- Installing a handrail on a stairwell for an elderly woman who had previously fallen down the stairs
- Installing vinyl flooring instead of carpeting for a wheelchair user

Other reasonable accommodations include: allowing a service animal despite a "no pets" policy, assigning a parking space to a person with impaired mobility despite a policy of not having assigned parking, installing a ramp instead of stairs, installing a flashing fire alarm instead of a traditional one to assist the hearing impaired, etc.



Although many housing providers have reasonable accommodation policies, there are numerous others that do not, or that do not fully understand their responsibilities under the law. We at the Center are working to educate the housing community and secure housing rights for all those needing an accommodation.