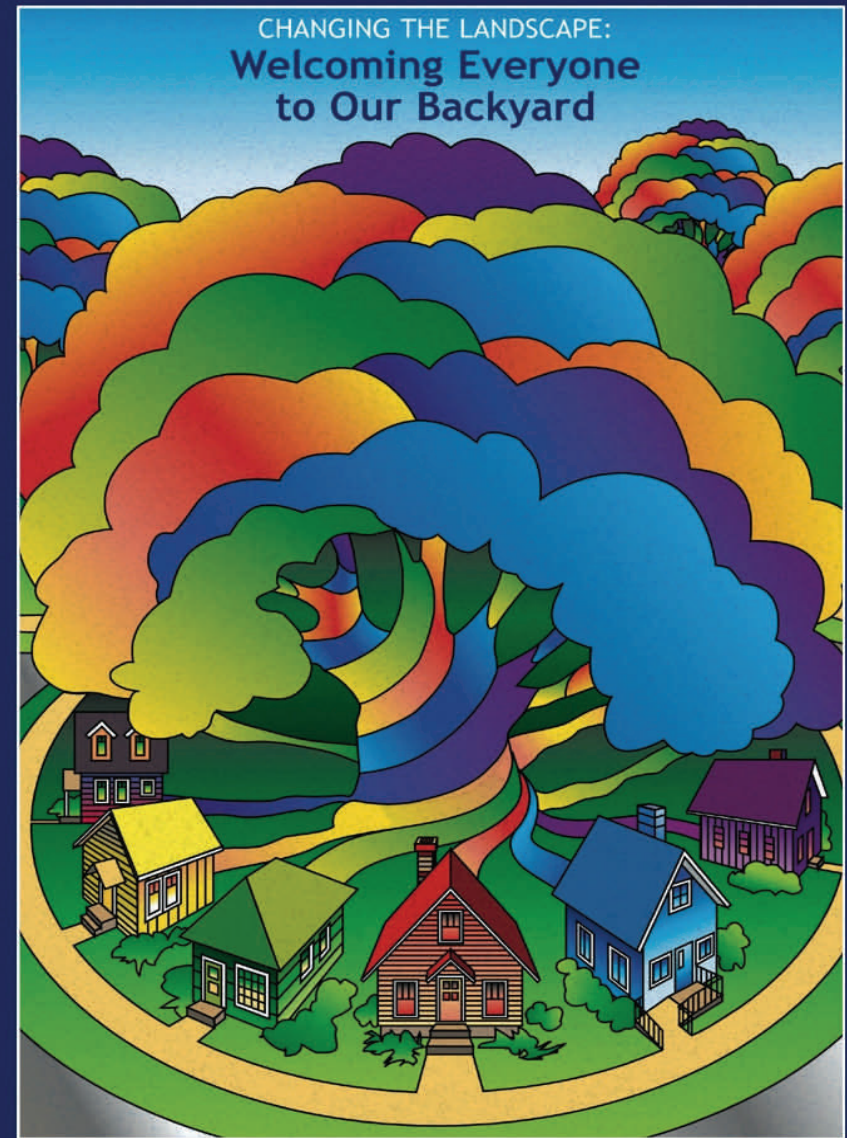


Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids

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Fair Housing Center
of Greater Grand Rapids

2005 Annual Report

2005 FHC-GR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| | |
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Tonya S. Willingham, Operations Director
Liz J. Keegan, Education & Outreach Director
Elizabeth Spreitzer, Administrative Assistant
Dante Pirtle, Fair Housing Specialist

We would like to thank our **2005 MEMBERS** whose donations enable FHC to continue the important work of ensuring equal housing opportunity to all our citizens.

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Inside FHC-GR's Annual Report:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| FHC is on the move! | 4 |
| Letter from the Executive Director | 5 |
| Fair Housing Center Facts | 6 |
| Enforcement Program | 7 |
| Education & Outreach Program | 8 |
| Luncheon & Workshop Series | 9 |
| FHC Thanks the 2005 Members | 10 |
| FHC Board of Directors & Staff | 11 |

Fair Housing is on the move!



In late 2004, **Bank One** approached the staff and Board of Directors of the Fair Housing Center with the possibility of donating a branch they were closing in the inner city. With an extensive environmental scan recently completed and strategic planning process underway, the Center accepted the building, valued at over \$340,000. In light of the increased demand on the FHC staff due to expanding the levels and areas of services as well as increased community collaboration, the new space will insure that the citizens of Greater Grand Rapids and West Michigan will receive timely responses, referrals and education.

The New Facility

The new 4,000 square foot building offers ample onsite parking and more office, meeting and storage space than the FHC has had in its 25 year history. The FHC is the first in the country to receive a building donation and only the second fair housing center nationally to own its own facility. The new location will provide greater visibility to the FHC and its mission. The building will be more accessible to those the Center serves. The new location is close to downtown Grand Rapids, and is located in the active South East Community Association neighborhood. The neighborhood has seen significant changes in the last few years as more businesses and organizations move in. The area is beginning to rejuvenate due to the investments made by nearby organizations such as the Home Repair Services and Grand Rapids Job Corps.

The new center will be able to serve more citizens more efficiently. The larger center will allow for additional staff and be able to accommodate 60 people in its training space as well as host community events or other trainings. On-site parking will be available as well as on-site storage, which will enable immediate access to historical records, better data management, faster responses and the elimination of storage fees.

Perhaps most importantly, the visibility and increased outreach of the new center will enable citizens to learn more about their fair housing rights and opportunities to get involved. The training space will enable more testers to be efficiently trained as well as providing private debriefing rooms for testers and clients to use to discuss their experiences and cases.

FHC is embarking upon a Capital Campaign in 2006 to raise funds for building renovations. For more information on FHC's capital campaign, email Liz Keegan at lkeegan@fhcgrandrapids.com

18th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

The 18th Annual Luncheon and Workshop series held on April 14, 2005 at the Crown Plaza was another sold-out success. Over 330 people marked April as Fair Housing Month by attending the event. Professor Okianer Christian Dark of Howard University School of law gave an outstanding Keynote Presentation.

Dr. Dark shared her own experience of housing discrimination with the captivated crowd. The presentation received a standing ovation at its conclusion. Comments submitted on evaluations included "Great Speaker" and "Dr. Dark will be hard to top."

Margaret Sieh and Doretha Ardoin, Fair Housing Board Members, presented Fair Housing Awards to Louis Berra (HUD Grand Rapids), the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department, and Heartland Builders. Louis Berra and the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department were recognized for their continuous work on fair housing in Grand Rapids. Heartland Builders were recognized for integrating universal design into their new homes.

Fannie Mae and the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department partnered to hold an extra workshop for this event. The four workshops concurrently running included: Perspectives on Diversity in Mortgage Lending, Justice for the Future: Understanding the Impact of Housing Discrimination, Building for the Future: Reasonable Accommodation & Universal Design, and Planning for the Future: How does West Michigan want to grow. Over 120 people attended these popular workshops.

19th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

Changing the Landscape: Welcoming Everyone to Our Backyard

Michael Allen of the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law will be giving the Keynote Presentation at the Fair Housing Center's 19th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series: Changing the Landscape: Welcoming Everyone to Our Backyard to be held on April 20, 2006.

This year, 3 workshops will run concurrently. They will include:

- *NIMBYism: Understanding the Implications of Prejudice in Our Backyard,*
- *Community, Industry, & Advocates: Partners in Fair Housing,*
- *Building Multi-Cultural Competence* – This workshop is a follow up to last year's workshop "Perspectives on Diversity in Mortgage Lending."

We look forward to making this year's event an even bigger success for participants and our guests.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAM

Currently, the FHC's education and outreach program provides hundreds of people with valuable information on their rights and responsibilities under federal, state and local fair housing laws each year. During 2004, FHC staff provided fair housing presentations and seminars to several different organizations and groups in the West Michigan area, reaching over 500 individuals. Training was also provided to over 150 rental property owners and managers. The FHC also developed a new training for exclusively for advertisers. Over 50 individuals participated in this new seminar. In addition, the FHC has been contacted by many other organizations looking for similar information to provide to their employees and members. Recently, the Center received a federal grant expanding services to nine West Michigan counties.

The Fair Housing Center works to further fair housing by providing information about compliance with fair housing laws to every organization relative to housing. This large group includes property managers, landlords, mortgage lenders, mortgage brokers, realtors, developers, builders, homeowners' insurance agents, government offices, city/township planners, commissioners, zoning staff and advertisers. The FHC works with many groups by specifically identifying their fair housing obligations based on the role they play in housing, thereby leading to fewer violations and reduced risk of punitive damages in court. Many run into regulatory barriers that close off markets to them and the FHC is able to help remove them to open up the housing market. One such barrier is the lack of affordable housing throughout the community. Currently, this disparately affects families with children and minorities who are not able to move outside of the city due to the unnecessary increased cost of land. With increased capacity, the FHC will develop outreach and education for each group to help them understand fair housing and how it can be used as a tool to advance their business not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is good for business. Currently the FHC reacts to requests from organizations but proactively developing and providing these programs would be more efficient and effective.

The Center educates consumers about how to recognize and report housing discrimination by providing information and referral services to callers with all types of housing related inquiries. Such inquiries are commonly related to issues such as housing subsidies or financial assistance, tenants' rights, the condition and repair of housing and other landlord-tenant concerns. When callers with non-fair housing inquiries contact they Center, they are given general information about the protections provided by the fair housing laws and are then referred to an appropriate community group, government agency or social service agency. The Center has provided information and referral services to over 1,000 people annually.



Nancy Haynes, Executive Director

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Fair Housing,

In September 1980, with community support and \$1,500 "seed money" from the Dyer-Ives Foundation, the Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids (FHC-GR) first opened its doors. From various locations and with very small staffs (at times only 2), the Center worked diligently toward our mission, to "support and encourage equal housing opportunities in the Greater Grand Rapids area.

The Center began to provide assistance to individuals pursuing legal rights and remedies related to fair housing, community education and fair housing research services while at the same time promoting good working relations with agencies and individuals within the housing industry.

Unfortunately, it became painfully apparent over the years, that there was a greater need in the West Michigan Community for fair housing education/outreach and enforcement programs than FHC-GR could keep up with at it's former capacity. In 2005, thanks to a grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, FHC-GR expanded its service area and staff to meet these needs.

The staff expansion made our small Eastown office, in which the Center has been housed for the majority of it's years appear to be bursting at the seams. The Center's once efficient office had become over crowded with filing cabinets and makeshift workspaces. Now, due to a generous donation from Bank One, the Fair Housing Center will soon have a new, more spacious home. In October 2005, FHC-GR took possession of the donated building, located at 20 Hall St. SE. Of course, renovations must be made, but move-in is anticipated in Summer 2006.

Also in 2005, our Board of Directors voted to change the name of the Center from the Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids to the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan to reflect our expanded service area.

With our new name and central location, the doors to equal housing opportunity will hopefully be opened wider for all people across West Michigan.

Yours for Fair Housing,

Nancy L. Haynes
Executive Director



Fair Housing Center Facts

Choosing a home is a right that most of us take for granted. But the truth is, discriminatory housing practices create barriers to housing choice. Every year, the Fair Housing Center (FHC) of Greater Grand Rapids investigates more than 150 complaints of fair housing violations in our community. Housing discrimination disrupts lives and divides our neighborhoods. It denies access to the services and resources people need to improve their lives. Below, are some startling facts about fair housing.

Every year, more than 3.7 million fair housing violations are committed against African Americans and Latinos alone. Millions more are committed against people in all of the protected classes: family status, disability, religious, color, race, sex, and national origin. The most complaints are based on race (29%), disability (27%) and family status (13%).

According to 2000 US census data and recent trend reports, the Grand Rapids area ranks 44 out of 331 metropolitan statistical areas in the nation for racial segregation. West Michigan schools are in the top ten percent of the nation's most segregated school systems.

Annually, the Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids opens an average of 150 cases for investigation of housing discrimination and conducts over 500 tests. Evidence of discrimination is found about one third of the tests performed. The FHC provides information and referral services to over 2,000 people.

Enforcement Program

Enforcement Program Activities

The Center's top priority is the assist homeseekers in the investigation and resolution of complaints of illegal housing discrimination through the use of comparison testing, cooperation with enforcement agencies and litigation. In addition to actual complaints, the Center actively monitors the nature and extend to existing housing discrimination through periodic market surveys. Information obtained is often used a evidence to support independent complaint actions with appropriate authorities.

Intake of Fair Housing Complaints

The Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids received **137** housing discrimination complaints during 2005. Due to the complex nature of discrimination, some complaints received are based on more than one protected class. The majority of complaints received by FHC-GR are related to rental transactions, with sales transactions a distant second. The breakdown of complaints by protected class and transaction type is as follows:

| Basis | 2005 | 2004 | 2003 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Race | 61 | 69 | 54 |
| Familial Status | 21 | 17 | 33 |
| National Origin | 16 | 17 | 9 |
| Disability Status | 12 | 13 | 17 |
| Age | 6 | 8 | 9 |
| Income Source | 11 | 5 | 17 |
| Gender | 4 | 4 | 7 |
| Marital Status | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| Religion | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Color | 4 | 0 | 0 |

| Transaction | 2005 | 2004 | 2003 |
|-------------|------|------|------|
| Rental | 104 | 113 | 123 |
| Sales | 29 | 15 | 12 |
| Mortgage | 3 | 4 | 11 |
| Other | 1 | 4 | 7 |

Volunteer Housing Testers

The Center relies upon a highly dedicated pool of volunteer housing testers to help carry out its enforcement activities. The Center currently has a roster of over 150 testers.

Interested in fair housing testing? Email the Center at contact-us@fhcgrandrapids.com for more information.