



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

FHCWM Receives Two HUD Grants to Combat Housing Discrimination

The Board of Directors, Lakeshore Advisory Board of Directors and the staff of the FHCWM are very pleased to announce that the FHCWM has been awarded two U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) for the first time in its 31 year history. The funds will be used to investigate allegations of housing discrimination and to promote equal housing opportunities. The FHCWM received a three-year grant (\$325,000) for enforcement and advocacy work as well as a one-year grant (\$125,000) for education and outreach services. This is the first year the FHCWM has applied for the education and outreach funds.

HUD awarded nearly \$1.3 million in grants in Michigan and \$28 million nationally. “The Obama Administration is committed to ending housing discrimination, and these grants enable local fair housing and community organizations all over the nation to help HUD enforce the Fair Housing Act, and make people more aware of their fair housing rights,” stated HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. HUD Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity, John Trasviña added: “Last year, HUD filed more Fair Housing Act charges than any year since 2002,” “The Fair Housing Initiatives Program grantees play a vital role to enhance our civil rights law enforcement efforts.” “These funds will

help grantees continue their support of fair housing initiatives to make inclusive communities a reality for all Michigan families,” said Antonio R. Riley, HUD’s Midwest Regional Administrator.

Through the education and outreach grant, the FHCWM plans to provide more fair housing training to the industry, local government and the community. Staff are also looking forward to bringing fair housing information to grade school students through a unique collaboration with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC). Since west Michigan has seen significant increases in discrimination against families with children over the last 4 years, the FHCWM is grateful to partner with the GNOFHAC to provide activities and materials that teach students and their families about their housing rights and equal housing opportunity.

The FHCWM is looking forward to investing in technology with a new website, online training and videos that will enable people to better understand the importance of fair housing. Nancy Haynes, FHCWM Executive Director, stated, “We are thrilled to build on the foundation established under our past FHIP contracts and to take our education and outreach work to a whole new level. The education grant will enable us to provide services that we have dreamed of conducting for many years, as well as our on-going systemic work.”

Congratulations to the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan and the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit, who also were awarded new FHIP grants.

Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing Breakfast Draws Record Crowd

The FHCWM hosted its 5th Annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* breakfast event in Holland on Wednesday, September 14th at the Historic Baker Lofts Building in Holland. A record number of guests—more than 100 people—came to learn



Michael Allen

more about fair housing along the lakeshore from nationally renowned fair housing attorney **Michael Allen** and to see the Lakeshore Fair Housing Award

presented to **Heritage Homes Inc.** Lakeshore Advisory Board President and First Place Bank Mortgage Loan Officer/Sales Manager, Dave Stellan, opened the breakfast with a welcome and an update on the state of fair housing on the lakeshore. Since 2006, the FHCWM has investigated 208 complaints of housing discrimination from the Lakeshore region; 25 of those complaints were opened since last year. In the last five years, the FHCWM has conducted 195 matched pair tests, finding evidence in almost 45% of those conclusive tests, and conducted 63 fair housing trainings for homeseekers, housing industry personnel, and/or social service agencies. He acknowledged the members of the Lakeshore Advisory Board: Deb Barton, Curt Carini, Susan Cervantes, Coray, Bob Dunn,

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Lakeshore Breakfast cont... Joel Dye, Gail Harrison, Leroy Hernandez, Bart Jonker, Mark Kornelis, Mary Libby, Al Serrano, Ruth Stegeman, Amber VerBurg and Karla Walker.

FHCWM Executive Director Nancy Haynes then introduced Mr. Allen, a Partner at Relman, Dane & Colfax in Washington, DC. Mr. Allen primarily practices civil rights litigation, and represents individuals and organizations in matters under the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. He spoke on "*The Fair Housing Act: Basics and Hot Topics*" including an overview of federal, state and local laws, specific practices to avoid, accessibility, advertising, and case examples.

Susan Cervantes, an FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory Board member and Program Director at the Allegan County Resource Development Committee (ACRDC), Inc., presented the 2011 Lakeshore Fair Housing award which was accepted on behalf of Heritage Homes, Inc. by Dawn Noordijk.

Heritage Homes was nominated and selected due to their commitment to fair housing best practices, including on-going training and education, as well as their active



D. Noordijk & N. Haynes

implementation of policies and procedures which reflect their ongoing commitment to equal housing opportunity. Heritage Homes engages in proactive efforts to identify and immediately address real or potential fair housing issues, and undertakes continued efforts to enhance quality assurance. They work to ensure that their processes, forms, policies and practices do not impose barriers to equal access to housing choice. The staff frequently contacts the FHCWM with fair housing questions and issues in order to ultimately provide fair and equal services to their clients. Many thanks to our sponsors who helped make this event a success: **Fifth Third Bank, Macatawa Bank, First Place Bank, the Bank of Holland and CityFlats Hotel.**

Local Fair Housing News

Complaint 11-073: In August 2011, the FHCWM was contacted by a single mother who alleged unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of age against a manufactured home community located near Holland, MI. The mother had contacted the community to inquire about a two bedroom home for herself and her 23 year old daughter, who is unable to live independently due to a disability. The rental agent allegedly informed the mother that they only rent to one family per unit, and that she and her daughter would be considered two families, and thus could not live together, because her daughter was over the age of 21. The mother and daughter were then forced to find housing elsewhere, at a substantially increased cost. FHCWM testing confirmed that the manufactured home community did not consider an adult mother and biological adult daughter to be one family. As such, the FHCWM will assist the mother in pursuing the matter.

National Fair Housing News

Washington – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is charging a Minnesota property owner, manager, and management company with violating the Fair Housing Act for forcing an elderly couple to vacate their apartment of 3 years because of the manager's perception that they were unable to care for themselves. HUD is alleging that Big Norway, LLC, Northern Management Real Estate Services, Inc., and its Vice President of Operations and manager, Laura Schroden, pressured the couple to move to an assisted living facility even though there was no evidence of a need for assistance.

"Seniors should not be forced to leave their homes because someone stereotypes them as being unable to live independently," said John Trasviña, HUD Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. "It's not the role of property owners and managers to decide whether elderly persons can live on their own. HUD is committed to protecting the rights of seniors to make their own housing choices, free from discrimination."

According to HUD's charge, Schroden, contacted the couple's children and

grandchildren multiple times to pressure the couple to move out, citing the couple's "forgetfulness" as evidence that they "should be in assisted living." The family maintained that the couple could live independently as they managed their own bills, shopping, and laundry, and frequently babysat their great-grandchildren. Although the couple repeatedly informed management that they did not want to move and did not need help, after more than 3 months of pressure they moved to a senior community 20 miles away, where they could no longer visit frequently with their family. The couple continues to live independently.



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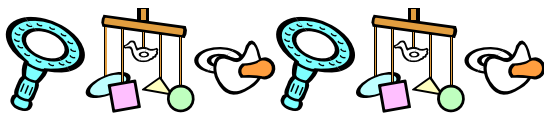
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New Fair Housing Opportunities in West Michigan

The FHCWM is very pleased to report two new opportunities to affirmatively further fair housing in west Michigan, specifically in the Muskegon and Grand Traverse areas. The FHCWM has been funded to provide fair housing services in the cities of Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, and Norton Shores as well as Muskegon County. The FHCWM will be working with these municipalities to decrease impediments to housing choice and to promote open, diverse communities by providing complaint investigation, testing, and education and outreach services.

As part of the multi-year FHIP funds mentioned in our cover story, starting in 2012, the FHCWM will expand its territory to include Grand Traverse County, in addition to Allegan, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa counties. Grand Traverse has been designated as a Preferred Sustainability Status Community through HUD, meaning they are committed to continuing to advance sustainability in their region, and they are interested in the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities (comprised of HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) supporting them in reaching that objective. The FHCWM will work with local government, affordable housing developers, non-profit organizations and others to assist Grand Traverse in meeting their goal of affirmatively furthering fair housing in their regional planning efforts and other processes.



Congratulations!

The FHCWM is proud to announce our newest member! Viola Spreitzer-Riley was born on September 14, 2011 to proud parents Liz Spreitzer (FHCWM Office Coordinator/Fair Housing Specialist) and Bec Riley.

FHCWM Board & Staff Update

The FHCWM would like to thank **Ron Eberhardt** for his many years of service as he steps down from the FHCWM Board of Directors. Ron has served as



Ron Eberhardt speaking

President, Vice President and Treasurer of the Board and has been a member since 1995. He provided timely and critical insight as a private and nonprofit housing provider. Ron led the Board in developing a 5-year Strategic Plan in 2004 that set the stage for the FHC of Greater Grand Rapids to change its name, expand its service area to 11 counties and embark on the *Housing Fair Housing Capital Campaign* when Chase donated 20 Hall SE to the Center. Thank you, Ron, for all of your years of service to the FHCWM! We hope you enjoy more time with your grandkids and family in North Carolina!

The FHCWM would like to welcome two new staff members: **Gabe Chapla** and **Jean Baird**. Gabe joined us as our new Test Coordinator in August. Previously, he provided consumer protection education and outreach in the Ohio Attorney General's office, and aided with foreclosure rescue assistance with Positive Balance Ohio through AmeriCorps. He also served as a Senior Field Manager for Clean Water Action in East Lansing while attending MSU.

Jean is our new Part-Time Administrative Assistant; she is in the office three days a week. She spent 25 years in the corporate world and subsequently worked with the Aquinas College Emeritus College and Kent Regional 4C before joining the FHCWM in August. Welcome Gabe & Jean!!

WELCOME

Upcoming: Fair Housing Senior Report

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. High rates of evidence of differential treatment was found in the investigations so the FHCWM, through the Kent County Senior Millage, has worked to expand access to affordable housing for older adults traditionally shut out of the housing market. The FHCWM is very pleased to be releasing a report based on the information gained from this project.

The report, "Fair Housing for Seniors in Kent County: A Guide for Senior Housing Providers," notes significant housing discrimination against seniors in Kent County—one in every three minority seniors in Kent County may face unlawful housing discrimination. It cites incidences of housing discrimination against Kent County seniors on the basis of race, national origin and disability. The potential evidence of unlawful housing discrimination included agents representing housing as unavailable to Black seniors and available to White seniors and offering significant

financial or other incentives to White seniors but not to Black seniors. The report also includes the results of a review of human models used in marketing materials for Kent County senior housing communities, which noted a significant underrepresentation of seniors of color and seniors with disabilities. The report also contains extensive information on fair housing laws as they apply to seniors, and offers practical guidance and best practices for senior housing providers. Stay tuned to our website for the release of the full report: www.fhcwm.org.

Kent County Senior Millage

Save the Date! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

25th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

The 25th Annual *Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series* will take place on

Wednesday, April 18, 2012

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 milestone event!

Fair Housing Book Club

The Fair Housing Book Clubs are currently discussing two books set during the Second World War: Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption by Laura Hillenbrand, and The Book Thief by Markus Zusak. Unbroken is the biography of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic track star turned Army Air Corps bombardier held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp for more than two years. The Book Thief is an unforgettable story about the ability of books to feed the soul. 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.

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 Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980.

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