



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

25th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

James Perry Delivers Insightful Luncheon Keynote

On April 18, 2012, Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center Executive Director **James Perry** provided the keynote address at the *25th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series* to a rapt audience. Mr. Perry began his presentation by asking the audience to share why they



GNOFHAC E.D. James Perry with FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin

think people are poor. Answers included lack of education or opportunity, systemic racism, segregation, lack of jobs, and poor money management or literacy, which Mr. Perry categorized as individual and systemic issues. He then led the audience through reflection on several images and a discussion on how far the country has come when it comes to thinking about race while acknowledging “it’s not easy to make those kinds of strides.” He also led the audience through a visioning exercise, utilizing different images brought to mind by the word “apple” to demonstrate how our brains make associations by way of shortcuts. He

related this to the fair housing movement and its efforts to change peoples’ thinking, or “shortcuts,” about race, religion, disability, etc. over time by saying, “When those shortcuts become the common way of thinking, it means we’ve changed our system of thinking about an issue.” Mr. Perry acknowledged that “it is really hard for your brain to make that switch. And so that is the great work that fair housing centers are trying to do. It is to try to change the way that whole communities are thinking about race, religion, disability, about national origin, sexual orientation. All these issues. We have all been taught to think about these issues in one particular way.” He stated that the fair housing movement is saying “Maybe there is a different way to think about this.... It’s hard to make that transition. It doesn’t happen naturally. It doesn’t happen easily.” After sharing information about the housing discrimination and cases that emerged in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, including the numerous discriminatory advertisements placed online, and the efforts in St. Bernard Parish to limit rental opportunities to blood relations only, Mr. Perry urged the many members of the housing industry and community present to take a stand for fair housing with the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan. He affirmed that members of the housing industry, *especially* the realtors and lenders, “are the actual civil rights and fair housing activists in this community” because

they “decide whether or not we transform this community,” and continued on to say that we’ll know we’ve changed the way we think when “we all see that the best opportunity is for every single one of us to have an opportunity.” His presentation was met with a standing ovation. Thank you, Mr. Perry, for your thoughtful, inspiring keynote!

2012 Membership Drive Kicks Off



Robert Upton and Thomas Appel

Membership Co-Chair **Tom Appel** shared inspiring and compelling comments on the importance of fair housing during the luncheon. Mr. Appel was joined by his Co-Chair **Robert Upton**, who passionately spoke on the importance of becoming a member of the FHCWM. Funds raised through membership provide vital education to communities and individuals that would otherwise not have access to fair housing services. Mr. Appel is the President of the Advocates for Senior Issues, and Mr. Upton is a long-time friend of the FHCWM.

...FHCWM Notes & News...

2012 Fair Housing Awards

Also on April 18, 2012, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan presented two Fair Housing Awards at its *25th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series*. Over 300 people watched as FHCWM Board Members

Dave Stellin and Floriza Genautis presented the awards to two fair housing advocates, Holly Sturges and Chemical Bank.



H. Sturges and N. Haynes

Holly Sturges was presented with the Fair Housing Advocate Award due to her ardent support of fair housing. In her work with the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, she demonstrated that she truly cares about ending housing discrimination and that she is a passionate proponent of fair housing. While at the Housing Commission, Holly brought important questions, housing gaps, and barriers to the attention of the FHCWM and worked tirelessly to promote trainings and an awareness of fair housing rights within her staff and the community. In addition, Holly has been at the forefront of addressing chronic homelessness for people with mental and physical disabilities in Grand Rapids.

Chemical Bank received the Outstanding Organization Award, which was accepted by Dennis Miller. Chemical Bank was selected because their economic impact on the community has encouraged diversity and housing opportunities for



N. Haynes & D. Ardoin with Chemical Bank staff members.

all people. The staff has worked to develop innovative ways to address the current credit market and meet the needs of community members and potential homebuyers to create equal access to affordable housing. Chemical Bank has been a long time supporter of the FHCWM, helping to ensure that staff and community members have access to fair housing education and outreach opportunities.

25th Annual Workshop Series

The FHCWM held three timely and comprehensive workshops this year. The first workshop, **Accessible Housing for All**, focused on the barriers to and the need for accessible housing, especially in light of our aging population. Michael Allen (Relman, Dane, & Colfax) provided an overview of the accessibility requirements under the Fair Housing Act as well as case examples. Joanne Feutz (Disability Advocates of Kent County) gave an overview of their ZeroStep program while her co-worker Kim Menninga discussed resources available to assist with accessibility assessments and reasonable accommodation requests. Rich Kogelschatz (Heartland Builders) provided information on universal design. Elizabeth Vezino Stoddard (FHCWM) shared local statistics on accessibility violations and trends on discrimination based on disabilities, along with information from a recent FHCWM report, *Fair Housing for Seniors in Kent County*.

The second workshop, **Creating & Sustaining Inclusive Communities**, highlighted the variety of systemic barriers that deny people access to housing, such as discriminatory policies, ordinances, zoning or land use decisions, or community biases. Morgan Williams (National Fair Housing Alliance) provided an introduction to fair housing law and discussed cases against Westchester County, NY and St. Bernard Parish, LA, wherein systemic barriers to fair housing limited access in those communities. Suzanne Schulz (City of Grand Rapids) discussed exclusionary zoning issues as well as details of a recently awarded Sustainable Housing & Communities grant from HUD. Sarah Lucas (Northwest Michigan Council of Governments) shared information on a ...

FHCWM News:

Thank You & Welcome!

Thank you to **Dr. Barbara Palombi**, for your service on the FHCWM Board of Directors. We truly appreciate your time and energy working to increase fair housing awareness these past few years, Dr. Palombi!

The FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory Board is pleased to welcome new member **Ben VanderWoude**, of BVW Property Management in Holland. Welcome, Ben—we look forward to partnering with you to further fair housing on the lakeshore!



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...FHCWM Notes & News...

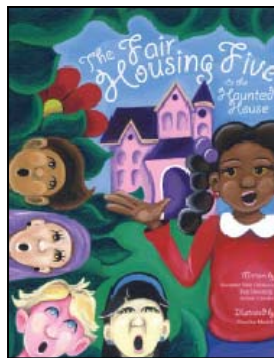
...(continued from previous page) successful regional plan, the Grand Vision, and their experience in overcoming systemic barriers, such as opposition to affordable housing. Finally, Kym Spring (Kent County Renters Alliance) spoke from the renter's perspective on policies that limit opportunities and community biases; she also provided an update featuring local foreclosure data.

The third workshop, **Overcoming Obstacles to Developing & Purchasing Homes** discussed the obstacles that individuals face as they seek to purchase a home in today's market as well as the challenges facing communities as they work towards redeveloping existing neighborhoods. The workshop offered an important opportunity for presentations and dialogue about the on-going impact of the foreclosure crisis as communities are strapped with the high cost of maintaining vacant homes with few resources. Steve Dane (Relman, Dane, and Colfax) shared information discriminatory lending cases against Wells Fargo as well as other examples of unlawful policies and practices by condominium associations that prohibit unmarried couples or families with children from buying homes. Shanti Abedin (National Fair Housing Alliance) discussed discriminatory trends seen in the upkeep of foreclosed homes which damage neighborhoods and prevent stabilization. Dave Allen (Kent County Land Bank Authority) shared the Land Bank's current efforts to emerge from the foreclosure crisis. Reatha Anderson (City of Muskegon Heights) provided information on the challenges that the City is facing in redeveloping housing, especially lack of access to credit. In addition, John Bitely (Sable Homes) shared his company's successes in developing affordable housing. A record-setting 155 people registered to attend the content-rich workshops.

FHCWM Receives 2 HUD Grants to Provide Education and Combat Housing Discrimination

The boards and staff of the FHCWM are very pleased to announce the receipt of two U. S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) grants under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP), one for education and outreach and the other focused on enforcement. The grant funds will be used to provide comprehensive fair housing services throughout a 12 county service area, including investigating allegations of housing discrimination and providing significant education and outreach. About the FHIP grants, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan said, "It is our continued commitment to ensure that every person has equal access to housing. These grants are a cost-effective investment. Cases bolstered by FHIP-funded investigations are more likely to uncover discrimination when it has occurred than cases without such support." HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, John Trasviña, added, "We are pleased to provide the only federal grant support to private fair housing enforcement and education. Our partners are essential to ending housing discrimination."

One of the highlights of the education grant is bringing new fair housing curricula to students, parents, and teachers to further awareness of fair housing rights and expand equal housing choice for families with children. The curricula is based on the new children's book produced by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, **The Fair Housing Five & the Haunted House**. Contact the FHCWM if you are interested in learning more about this great work!



National Fair Housing News

The owner of a Pennsylvania apartment complex recently agreed to pay \$15,000 to settle claims that the development's on-site manager discriminated against families with children. Last summer, HUD found that the owner and manager both charged families higher rent if they had children and indicated a preference against families with children. Under federal fair housing law, it is unlawful to impose different rental charges and lease terms on households because of the presence of children. HUD also accused the owner and manager of posting discriminatory statements in online advertising. Allegedly, one of the manager's advertisements stated: "Winter Special Price for Two Adults."

Under the settlement, the owner agreed to pay \$15,000 to the local fair housing organization and to implement a nondiscrimination policy at the community. The complex will also display fair housing signs in its leasing office, as well as the "Equal Housing Opportunity" logo on its vacancy signs and other rental materials.

Local Fair Housing News

In early 2012, the FHCWM successfully ended an almost five-year investigation against Craigslist, Inc. for allegedly publishing discriminatory advertisements on its website. Over the course of the investigation, the FHCWM identified over 100 west Michigan housing advertisements that contained discriminatory statements on Craigslist sites. The Michigan Department of Civil Rights facilitated the resolution of the matters after Craigslist, Inc. agreed to corrective action requested by the FHCWM. Specifically, Craigslist sites now inform housing providers that the use of the phrase "ideal for single/couple" may violate fair housing laws. The FHCWM anticipates that this resolution will help to prevent future discriminatory advertisements.

Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

Friends of Fair Housing: Save the Date!

The FHCWM is bringing Brian Copeland's one-man show, Not a Genuine Black Man, to Grand Rapids this fall! Author of a memoir of the same name, Mr. Copeland in the one-man show shares his experience as a lone Black child struggling to blend in after his family moves to San Leandro in 1972—a community in California that was 99.4% White. We are hosting this show the evening of **Thursday, September 13, 2012** in Grand Rapids. Please contact the FHCWM if you are interested in sponsoring and/or attending this significant event!

2012 Summer Reading List: Fair Housing Book Club Selections

- *The Dollmaker* by Harriett Arnow (to be discussed in June)
- *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* by Carlotta Walls LaNier
- *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers
- *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* by Maggie O'Farrell
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand
- *All the Way Home* by Ann Tatlock

Fair Housing Trainings

The FHCWM 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 designed to last 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. **Check our website home page for upcoming dates: www.fhcwm.org.**

The FHCWM hosts regular **tester trainings**. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a stipend in return for their time and volunteer service. 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 Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980.

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