



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Little Rock Nine Student Provides Keynote Address

Carlotta Walls LaNier Speaks to Sold-Out Crowd

On April 25, 2013, civil rights icon Carlotta Walls LaNier, the youngest of the nine students who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1957, offered the keynote presentation at the FHCWM’s 26th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon and Workshop Series. Her presence was particularly poignant as this year marks the 45th Anniversary of the federal Fair Housing Act. More than 400 people gathered to listen to her share her personal experiences, including some from her memoir, A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little



FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin with Carlotta Walls LaNier

Rock Central High School. Mrs. LaNier has had a successful career as a real estate broker for more than 30 years and founded her own real estate brokerage firm. She currently serves as the President of the Little Rock Nine Foundation.

She spoke with conviction about her choice to seek the best education she could, stating her choice to attend

Little Rock Central High School was not a calculated move, but rather one she made based on her parents’ insistence to pursue the highest academic opportunities. Mrs. LaNier spoke with eloquence and dignity and made the audience feel they were alongside her on her remarkable journey. The excitement of receiving a postcard in the mail to register for classes in August. The confusion when she arrived and was told she could not register for classes until she and her parents met with the superintendent. Carlotta knew she deserved to go to Central High School, she was a good student and the Supreme Court had ruled both African American and white students deserved the same educational opportunities. However, reality began to set in when she and her mother met with Superintendent Blossom. Carlotta and the eight other African American students were not allowed to participate in any extra-curricular activities and had to leave the school grounds immediately at the end of the school day. Simply getting through the door of this admired academic institution involved angry mobs, racist elected officials, and intervention by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was forced to send in the 101st Airborne to escort the Nine into the building.

Mrs. LaNier spoke of the fear she felt when she was told to follow an officer out of her math class into waiting police cars with the other eight students. The students were given blankets and told to

lay flat against the floor and seats while the order was given to the driver “Put your foot to the floor and don’t stop for anything”. The students were delivered home after a mob outside the school had grown to over 1,000 people. Her journey included more than just harassment, total isolation and relentless bullying at the school. Her father lost several jobs and had to travel to find work. Her family home was bombed. Her father and friend were questioned; her friend was later wrongfully charged with the bombing.

Yet, she knew she was a part of something much bigger, even at such a young age—she was 14 when she enrolled at Central. Mrs. LaNier’s story is a testament to the power of a single person to make a difference. As such, Mrs. LaNier applauded Kendra Velzen, one of the 2013 Fair Housing Award recipients, as a fellow civil rights pioneer for pursuing her own fair housing rights; she commended her for her efforts, which will lead to increased opportunities for all students. Thank you, Mrs. LaNier, for sharing your inspiring life story with our west Michigan community!

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2013 Membership Drive

Kicks Off

Membership Co-Chair **Mindy Ysasi-Castanon** shared inspiring and



Mindy Ysasi-Castanon

compelling comments on the importance of fair housing prior to the keynote address during the luncheon. Ms. Ysasi-Castanon was joined by her

Co-Chair **Judy**

Barnes, who 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.



Judy Barnes

2013 Fair Housing Awards

Also on April 25th, the Center presented two Fair Housing Awards. About 400 people watched as FHCWM Board Member Suzanne Schultz and FHCWM staff member Elizabeth Stoddard presented the awards to two fair housing advocates, Sue Ortiz and Kendra Velzen. **Sue Ortiz** was selected for her long-time professional commitment to and personal passion for



Sue Ortiz & Family

fair housing. Through her work with the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF), she has been a leader and champion of fair housing efforts in the community. She is not only committed to providing

fair housing education and best practices to her staff but she also works to apply fair housing standards consistently while serving over 2,000 people each year. Ms. Ortiz has been instrumental in the creation of educational materials for ICCF's housing counselors, which included a strong fair housing component. This curriculum is now being promoted by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and is utilized by housing counselors throughout the state. As a result, many housing counselors are affirmatively promoting and advocating for fair housing because of her efforts.

Kendra Velzen also received a Fair Housing award. Ms. Velzen was selected because of her commitment to fair housing and efforts to ensure fair housing for all, especially university students throughout the country. She sought a reasonable



Kendra Velzen

accommodation from her on-campus housing provider to allow her support animal to reside with her in a private, single occupancy dormitory. Though Ms. Velzen's request was met with denials, she researched the law and bravely advocated for herself. Despite the trials of the situation, Kendra continued on with the strength and courage of a true advocate, trusting her knowledge, instincts and passion for justice. Ms. Velzen is a true representation of the systematic impact that one determined young woman can have.

26th Annual Workshop Series

The FHCWM again held three timely and comprehensive workshops this year. The first workshop, **Fair Housing & Education: The Keys to Sustainable Communities**, focused on the relationship between housing and education and the continued disparities in school quality. Dr. Deborah McKoy (Executive Director and Founder of the Center for Cities & Schools at UC Berkeley) discussed the connection between housing and education by

FHCWM News: Welcome!

The FHCWM Board is pleased to welcome two new members **Brian Parks**, of Herman Miller and **Ryan VanderMeer**, of Urban Pharm. The FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory Board is also pleased to welcome new member **Tim Lemanski**, of Citizens Bank in Holland.

Welcome, Brian, Ryan, and Tim—we look forward to partnering with you to further fair housing!



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...FHCWM Notes & News...

providing an overview of their recent report, "Framing the Connections: Coordinating Housing and Education Policy to Promote Integration," as well as a brief overview of the 7 Steps outlined in the "Opportunity Rich Schools & Sustainable Communities: Seven Steps to Align High-Quality Education with Innovations in City and Metropolitan Planning and Development" report. Salin Geevarghese (Senior Advisor for HUD's Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities (OSHC)) provided an overview of the work HUD is doing to create and maintain sustainable communities including specific information on the efforts of the OSHC and the Fair Housing Equity Assessment. Dr. Wendy Falb (Board President of the Grand Rapids Public Schools) spoke about the Grand Rapids Public Schools' Transformation Plan. Eric Williams (Executive Director for Equity Affairs at Grand Rapids Community College) concluded the panel discussion by addressing the nexus between housing and education from the perspective of higher education and its impact on our communities. Grand Rapids City Mayor George Heartwell moderated.

The second workshop, **Fair Housing & Seniors: The Threshold of Independence & Inclusion**, highlighted fair housing issues specific to ensuring housing choice for seniors, as they seek to maintain their current housing or access new housing. Professor Michael Seng (Co-Executive Director of The John Marshall Law School Fair Housing Legal Support Center and Fair Housing Legal Clinic) presented a handbook developed by the Fair Housing Legal Support Center entitled "Fair Housing Rights of Seniors with Disabilities: What Seniors and their Families Need to Know". Melissa Owens (Director of Sales and Marketing for Elmcroft Senior Living) spoke about fair housing best practices in relation to

advertising for senior housing. Kim Cross (Chief Operating Officer at Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids) shared fair housing best practices and experiences the Dwelling Place staff has had in providing senior housing in addition to reasonable accommodations and modifications. Elizabeth Stoddard (Director of Advocacy at the FHCWM) concluded the panel by conducting an interactive exercise concerning rental applications and the protected classes under the Fair Housing Act. FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin (Coldwell Banker AJS-Schmidt) moderated.

The third workshop, **Fair Housing & Bank-Owned Properties: Maintaining Our Curb Appeal** discussed the discriminatory practices in the marketing and maintenance of REO properties and the significant resulting impact on neighborhoods and communities. Shanna Smith (President of National Fair Housing Alliance) specifically addressed the work NFHA and Fair Housing Centers such as the FHCWM conducted in regards to bank-owned properties and the significant impact it has on neighborhoods and communities including cities such as Charleston, Chicago, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and Orlando. Gabe Chapla (Testing Coordinator for the FHCWM) discussed testing efforts and specific REO work that has been conducted in west Michigan to date. Peter Romer-Friedman (Attorney at Cohen Milstein) provided the legal perspective and case work done concerning the work on bank-owned properties by the fair housing centers in addition to specific case information. Eric Will (Senior REO Sales Director for HomeSteps at Freddie Mac) concluded the panel by speaking about Freddie Mac's procedures for REO maintenance. Former FHCWM Director Lee Nelson Weber (Dyer Ives Foundation) moderated. A record-setting 193 people registered to attend the content-rich workshops. Thank you all!!!

National Fair Housing News

Universities Subject to Fair Housing Act
Nebraska - On April 19, 2013, U.S. District Court Judge John M. Gerrard ruled that university owned housing facilities, including dormitories, are subject to the Fair Housing Act (FHA). This ruling confirms the position of the FHCWM, as well as the standpoint of fair housing advocates throughout the country and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), while providing definitive clarity to university officials across the nation: **university housing must comply with the Fair Housing Act.**

This ruling was made in a lawsuit that HUD brought against the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) for violating the FHA by refusing to allow a student to live in university housing with an assistance animal. The FHA makes it unlawful to refuse to make reasonable accommodations to rules, policies, practices or services when needed to provide persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to use or enjoy a dwelling. Reasonable accommodations include the rights of persons with disabilities to live with assistance animals.

HUD brought the case on behalf of a former UNK student diagnosed with anxiety and depression who had requested to live in one of UNK's student housing facilities with her four-pound miniature pinscher therapy animal that helps alleviate the symptoms of her disability. Despite the provision of medical documentation, UNK stood by their "no pets" policy and the student's requests were denied.

Judge Gerrard specifically notes that dormitories are dwellings, and finally concludes that all of UNK's student housing facilities are clearly 'dwellings' within the meaning of the FHA. Many universities promote on-campus living as the best option for students, drawing the inherent relationship between university sponsored housing opportunities and academic success. For that reason, upholding students' fair housing rights in university housing not only enhances equal housing opportunity, but also contributes to overall academic success.

According to Judge Gerrard, "Simply put, students live in university housing for a significant time period, and while they do, they treat it like home."

Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing: Save the Date!

The FHCWM is honored to have Dr. Dennis Preston keynote the 7th Annual Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing Breakfast! Dr. Preston is a Regent Professor at Oklahoma State University. He will present on linguistic profiling and its impact on fair housing. This morning educational event will take place on **Thursday, October 10, 2013** in Holland. Please contact the FHCWM if you are interested in sponsoring and/or attending this great event!

2013 Summer Reading List: Fair Housing Book Club Selections

- *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* by Carlotta Walls LaNier
- *In the Shadow of the Banyan* by Vaddey Ratner
- *Okay for Now* by Gary D. Schmidt
- *The Healing* by Jonathan Odell
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
- *The Kitchen House* by Kathleen Grissom
- *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* by Lois Leveen
- *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

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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