



# FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

## Fair Housing & Communities of Opportunity Event

### Sara Pratt Speaks to Sold-Out Crowd

On May 22, 2014, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Enforcement and Programs at HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, Sara Pratt, provided the keynote presentation at the FHCWM’s 27th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon and Workshop Series. Four hundred people gathered to listen to Ms. Pratt



Sara Pratt addresses the luncheon crowd.

speaking about the fact that “how and where we live frames our lives.” She went on to say that if we are being honest, we must acknowledge that “our neighborhoods do not [all] offer the same opportunities.” This fact not only has negative consequences for the individual and the neighborhood, but also for the entire community. She continued to say that “we are only as strong as our weakest link.” She spoke with conviction about how communities can and must Affirmatively Further Fair Housing, not only as required by law but as a means to create a climate where

communities can strengthen themselves. Ms. Pratt shared a number of case examples as well as encouraged communities to create ranges of opportunities that would enable people to choose where they want to live. She emphasized that this process would require everyone in the room, from lenders to planners, elected officials to community advocates, to be among the voices that speak up and the people who stand up. Thank you, Ms. Pratt!

### 2014 Fair Housing Awards

Also on May 22, 2014 the FHCWM presented a series of awards honoring four individuals for their work in fair housing. FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin, assisted by Executive Director Nancy Haynes, honored two very special individuals who passed away in the last year, Mike Chielens and Ira Hart. They both served as Board



Nancy Haynes & Pamela Hoekwater Members, incredible mentors and friends to the Fair Housing Center in addition to making huge contributions to the cause of fair housing through their many years of support and dedication.



Joann King & Nancy Haynes

Mike Chielens was the long-time Executive Director of Legal Aid of Western Michigan where he committed his professional life to doing everything he could to ensure social justice for all. Pamela Hoekwater spoke on behalf of Mike’s family. Ira Hart was a selfless volunteer and advocate in addition to his many professional accomplishments through his over 30 year career with Consumers Energy. Joann King, Ira’s sister, spoke on behalf of Ira’s family. The FHCWM presented them with crystal houses to symbolize the many doors to housing choice they helped to open, as well as certificates noting the trees that will be planted in Pleasant Park and Dickinson Buffer Park in their honor.

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# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

FHCWM Board Member Michelle Behrenwald presented the 2014 Fair Housing Awards to **Miriam Reyes** and **Tracie Coffman**. Miriam is the Manager of the Homeownership Program at Habitat for Humanity of Kent County. She has been a champion for fair housing efforts at Habitat for more than 10 years. She works to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe, affordable housing and that they know their rights and responsibilities under Fair Housing Law. She is committed to fair housing education for everyone at Habitat Kent County and serves as a great example of a housing provider who understands the importance of fair housing and seeks to consistently apply fair housing best practices and standards while serving our community.

Tracie recently became the Director of the Essential Needs Task Force after 14 years with Home Repair Services (HRS). Tracie and her team of financial counselors at HRS helped more than 3,100 Kent County families avoid foreclosure, and Tracie personally handled 1,135 of those successful resolutions during her tenure. Tracie understands the importance of people having access to quality loan products and she saw the devastating consequences that the lack of fair access had on families and neighborhoods in our community. She also understood that she and her staff were uniquely positioned to recognize patterns and practices of predatory lending and make referrals to the FHCWM. She ensured her staff got the requisite training to make those referrals and always followed through for her clients. We look forward to continuing to work with Tracie and Miriam!

## 2014 Membership Drive Kicks Off

Membership Co-Chair **Floriza Genautis** shared inspiring and compelling comments on the importance of fair housing prior to the keynote address during the luncheon. Ms. Genautis is joined in the Membership Drive by her Co-Chair, **Tim Reimink**.

Funds raised through membership provide vital education to communities and individuals that would otherwise not have access to fair housing services.

## 27th Annual Workshop Series

The FHCWM again held three timely and comprehensive workshops this year. The **Planning Together to Foster Inclusive Communities** workshop provided information on the obligation to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing (AFFH) as well as practical guidance and meaningful actions to not only meet but exceed the obligation. The workshop also provided opportunities for dialogue after a brief overview of local data. The panel included Sara Pratt, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Enforcement and Programs at HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity; Sheryl Whitney, a Partner of Whitney Jennings, a management consulting firm dedicated to helping institutions be more effective and building stronger communities and Connie Bohatch, the Managing Director of Community Services for the City of Grand Rapids. The workshop was moderated by FHCWM Lakeshore Advisory Board Member Joel Dye (Community Development Coordinator, City of Holland).

The **Joining Together to Promote Choice for Seniors and People with Disabilities** workshop focused on reasonable accommodations and modifications that enable people to 'age in place' in housing that meets their needs. This workshop featured an overview of the laws and other guidance available on these and related topics, including assistance animals; case examples; and hands-on exercises to increase familiarity in handling requests for accommodations and modifications. Maurice McGough (Director of HUD FHEO Region V) provided an overview of reasonable accommodations and modifications as well as the HUD FHEO Notice on Service and Assistance Animals. Jim McCarthy (President and CEO of the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center/Chair of the Board of Directors for the National Fair Housing Alliance) shared case examples that illustrate the variety of fair housing cases and the importance of meeting the needs...

## FHCWM News

The FHCWM bids fond farewells to **Jean Baird** and **Kayla Doshier**. Jean joined the FHCWM in 2011 as our Administrative Assistant and all-around organizing guru; we wish her the very best as she retires to sunny California! Kayla joined us as an intern in January while she finished up her undergrad at GVSU in Geography & Urban Planning; we wish her the very best in New York this summer! Thank you both for all of your hard work and commitment to furthering fair housing!



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# ...FHCWM Notes & News...

...of seniors and people with disabilities. Elizabeth Stoddard (FHCWM's Director of Advocacy) focused on the interactive process for reasonable accommodations and facilitated interactive scenarios to enable participants to better understand how to handle accommodation requests. This workshop was made possible through the support of the Kent County Senior Millage. FHCWM Board President Doretha Ardoin (Coldwell Banker AJS-Schmidt) moderated.

The **Working Together to Enhance Neighborhood Opportunity** workshop built on the real estate owned (REO) properties session held last year, which focused on one of the many devastating outcomes of the foreclosure crisis – the vacant and poorly maintained REO properties marring once vibrant neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods of color. Shanna Smith (President & CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance) briefly introduced the national fair housing project that the FHCWM participated in that has led to the neighborhood stabilization and opportunities that are underway in Grand Rapids. Lee Nelson Weber (49507! Project Coordinator/Dyer Ives Foundation) provided a brief overview of what has been done in Grand Rapids to date. Tyler Smith (Vice President of REO Community Development at Wells Fargo) provided local data and information on efforts at Wells Fargo to support neighborhood stabilization going forward. Darel Ross (Co-Executive Director of LINC Community Revitalization) shared some of the work that LINC did to learn more about what the community's vision for their neighborhood as well as some of the housing development and violence prevention work they will be engaging in. Paul Haan (Executive Director of the Healthy Homes Coalition) shared information on their work on

environmental health hazards and home health assessments underway. Scott Jonkhoff (Executive Director of Next Step of West Michigan) discussed some of the housing development they are doing as well as the Hope Through Work Initiative. Lee Nelson Weber also moderated.

A record-setting 199 people registered to attend the content-rich workshops. Thank you all for joining us for this important effort to further fair housing!!!

## **Local Fair Housing News**

The National Fair Housing Alliance, the FHCWM and one other NFHA member organization have filed a federal administrative housing discrimination complaint against Asset Management Specialists, Inc. (AMS), a firm contracted by Fannie Mae to maintain its vacant foreclosures, also known as Real Estate Owned (REO) properties. This complaint is part of an ongoing investigation into the failure of Fannie Mae's field service vendors to properly maintain foreclosed homes in neighborhoods of color nationwide. NFHA and its partner agencies filed a series of complaints last year against Safeguard Properties, another Fannie Mae contractor and the largest property preservation company in the U.S., alleging a similar pattern of discrimination based on the racial composition of the neighborhoods investigated.

This complaint addresses the failure of AMS to maintain homes in Atlanta, GA, Grand Rapids, MI, and San Diego, CA. In all three cities, investigations found lawns littered with trash, overgrown shrubbery and invasive plants, and unsecured holes in the structures of homes in communities of color. In contrast, homes in White neighborhoods rarely had these same problems. Failing to maintain homes based on the racial or ethnic composition of a neighborhood is a violation of the Federal Fair Housing Act and has a toxic effect on the health and livelihood of entire communities.

## **Kent County Senior Millage Up for Renewal on August 5**

A renewal of 0.5-mill for eight years for the Kent County Senior Millage (KCSM) will be on the Aug. 5 primary election ballot. The millage funds a variety of services that are designed to help older adults stay in their own home environment. Kent County Senior Millage services are available to Kent County residents who are 60 years of age or older. The KCSM serves 17,000 people a year with 43 different services that help them live

independently in their home. The variety of services range from health promotion programs, transportation and volunteer opportunities for the more active senior to in-home services for the more frail. 95% of the Millage funds are dedicated to services. Half of those funds support priority services that include home delivered meals, personal care aides and medication management.

Since 2007, the FHCWM has received funds in the highly competitive KCSM process to ensure equal housing opportunities for seniors in Kent County. Throughout years of investigating fair housing practices for seniors in Kent County, the FHCWM identified many unique trends and practices of housing discrimination negatively impacting seniors, including discriminatory advertisements, application criteria, and policies in use by senior housing providers, resulting in increasingly limited housing choices for seniors. The FHCWM found that almost 1 out of every 3 minority seniors or seniors with a disability seeking housing may meet an unlawful barrier posed by housing discrimination. The KCSM project has enabled the FHCWM to provide training and conduct outreach to raise awareness of this important issue, and to eliminate the barriers to fair housing choice. Read our report, "Fair Housing For Seniors in Kent County: A Guide for Seniors, Caretakers and Housing Providers" on our Publications page and visit [www.kentcountyseniormillage.com](http://www.kentcountyseniormillage.com) to learn more.

The logo for Kent County Senior Millage features the text "Kent County Senior Millage" in a serif font. The word "Kent" is in a larger, bold font. A stylized graphic of a sun or a wave is positioned behind the text, with a green arc at the bottom.

# Save the Dates! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

## Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing: Save the Date!

The FHCWM is honored to have Bernard Kleina as the keynote speaker for the 8th Annual Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing Breakfast! Mr. Kleina, a long-time fair housing advocate and urban photographer, will exhibit his rarely seen color photographs of the 1965-66 Chicago Freedom Movement, a peaceful demonstration wherein Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called for open housing. This morning event will take place on **Thursday, October 16, 2014** in Holland. Please contact the FHCWM if you are interested in sponsoring and/or attending!

### 2014 Summer Reading List: Fair Housing Book Club Selections

- *The Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead* by Frank Meeink
- *The Casual Vacancy* by J.K. Rowling
- *The Chaperone* by Laura Moriarty
- *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* by Muriel Barbery
- *Home* by Toni Morrison
- *The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd
- *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich
- *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich

### 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](http://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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