



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Lakeshore Fair Housing Award Presented to Dale Zahn

The Center is pleased to announce that the 2014 Lakeshore Fair Housing Award was presented to **Dale Zahn** at this year's annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* breakfast in Holland, MI. Mr. Zahn, the CEO of the West Michigan Lakeshore Association of Realtors (WMLAR), received the award for his dedication and commitment to raising community awareness about fair housing rights and responsibilities. Throughout his 40 years in the real estate industry, he has remained passionate about issues related to fair



Mr. Zahn with Nancy Haynes next to one of Mr. Kleina's photos of Dr. King.

housing and is always seeking further information and creative ways to educate himself and his WMLAR members. He is a strong advocate and speaks his mind because he truly believes in equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens. Jack Bouman, of Coldwell Banker Woodland Schmidt, presented him with the award. Congratulations and many thanks, Dale!

Bernard Kleina Speaks on Chicago Freedom Movement

The Center hosted its 8th Annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* breakfast on Thursday, October 16th at the Midtown Center in Holland, MI. Keynote **Bernard Kleina** served as Executive Director of HOPE Fair Housing Center in Wheaton, IL for



Bernard Kleina addresses the audience near one of his photographs.

more than 41 years and is one of the most respected fair housing advocates in the country. During his presentation, he shared powerful video footage as well as his personal experiences as part of the civil rights and fair housing movements. Mr. Kleina, also an urban photographer, exhibited some of his rarely seen color photographs which document the 1965-66 Chicago Freedom Movement, a peaceful demonstration wherein Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called for open housing. The Chicago Freedom Movement Photography Exhibit is a revealing snapshot of Dr. King's visit and marches in Chicago, and of both the ugliness and beauty of the response to open housing by the

people of Chicago. In remembrance and celebration of the Chicago Freedom Movement's fight for fair housing, Mr. Kleina assembled his rare and historic color photographs that depict that struggle. These photographs were recently selected for inclusion in the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Lakeshore Advisory Board President Dave Stellin (Talmer Bank & Trust) opened the breakfast with an update on the state of fair housing. Since 2006, the Center has investigated 292 complaints of housing discrimination from the Lakeshore region; 16 of those complaints were opened since last year. In the last 7 years, the Center has conducted more than 345 matched pair tests, finding evidence of significant differences in almost 41% of those tests. The Center has conducted 93 fair housing trainings for homeseekers, housing industry personnel, and/or social service agencies in the Lakeshore area.

Many thanks to our sponsors who made this event possible: City of Holland, Chemical Bank, Talmer Bank & Trust, First Merit Bank, Flagstar Bank, the Bank of Holland, the Brooks Family Community Fund and City Flats Hotel.

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...FHCWM Notes & News...

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 a three-year grant focused on enforcement and the other a one-year grant for education and outreach. 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.

HUD awarded \$38.3 million to more than 100 fair housing organizations and other non-profit agencies in 43 states and the District of Columbia to address housing discrimination. "Ending housing discrimination is at the core of HUD's mission and it takes dedicated people on the ground to address it," said HUD Secretary Julián Castro. "These funds support community-based organizations that do great work every day on the front lines in the fight for fairness and equality in our nation's housing market." HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity Gustavo Velasquez added, "The Fair Housing Initiatives Program provides the only federal grant support to private fair housing enforcement and education. Dispersed throughout the country, these grants enable our partner agencies to stand beside us in the fight against housing discrimination, and we couldn't do it without them."

The FHCWM looks forward to continuing to provide fair housing advocacy and enforcement services as well as substantially increasing its educational opportunities and outreach. The services include the provision of technical trainings on specialized topics such as zoning as well as more practical training for housing industry professionals. The FHCWM also plans to develop new educational materials for professionals and homeseekers.

Local Fair Housing News

The FHCWM recently assisted a family in Mt. Pleasant, MI to obtain approval to make reasonable modifications to their home for their 5-year old son with cognitive and physical disabilities. The family had recently purchased the home because its ranch floor plan suited the needs associated with their son's medical conditions and adaptive equipment, and it required minimal modification to be safe and accessible.

However, the home had a step at the front door and at the front porch, and they had been struggling to lift their growing son and his wheelchair over the steps. In addition, their insurance company's home assessment recommended a zero-step main entry for purposes of egress and safety. They sent this recommendation to the condominium association Board requesting approval to eliminate the steps from the front entry, with proof of professional bids for the work, but the Board denied the request because they felt the modifications would change the neighborhood aesthetics. The FHCWM contacted the Board, provided education on reasonable modifications and the association's obligations under the Fair Housing Act, and eventually fostered the approval of the modifications. After the work's completion, the once-resistant Board Secretary e-mailed the family, "Your new front sidewalk looks beautiful! Thanks for working with us for a common goal."



FHCWM News

The FHCWM bids a fond farewell to **Megan Derks**. Megan joined the FHCWM as an Education and Outreach intern in January 2013 and became Program Assistant that summer. She also took on additional responsibilities related to office coordination in earlier this year. We wish her the very best as she joins the staff of Pathways in her native Muskegon! Thank you, Megan, for all of your hard work and commitment to furthering fair housing!!

The FHCWM welcomes long-time advocate and supporter **Lyn Raymond**, Coordinator of the Lakeshore Housing Alliance, to the Lakeshore Advisory Board!



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...FHCWM Notes & News...

Know Your Fair Housing Rights!

What is fair housing?

Fair housing is the right of an individual to obtain the housing of their choice free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, **disability**, familial status, age or marital status. Discrimination is illegal in housing transactions such as rentals, sales, lending, and insurance. One type of discrimination prohibited by the law is the refusal to make reasonable modifications or accommodations that allow for a person with a disability the equal opportunity to access, use and fully enjoy a dwelling.

What qualifies as a disability?

The Fair Housing Act defines a person with a disability to include (1) individuals with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (2) individuals who are regarded as having such an impairment; and (3) individuals with a record of such an impairment. Major life activities include caring for yourself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, and working.

What are reasonable modifications?

Reasonable modifications are physical changes to an apartment or house that make the unit accessible to someone with a disability, such as ramps or grab bars. A person with a disability must be permitted to make reasonable modifications to their dwelling unit or to the public and common use areas if necessary for equal access.

What are reasonable accommodations?

Reasonable accommodations are changes in any rule, policy, procedure or service needed in order for a person with a disability to have equal access to and enjoyment of their home. Examples of reasonable accommodations include allowing an overnight caregiver despite a policy prohibiting overnight guests or

allowing an assistance animal despite a “no pets” policy.

What does reasonable mean?

Reasonable is not defined by law so each request should be determined on a case-by-case basis. To show that a requested accommodation or modification may be necessary, there must be an identifiable relationship, or nexus, between the request and the individual’s disability. A request may be denied if providing the accommodation or modification is not reasonable – i.e., if it would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the housing provider or it would fundamentally alter the nature of the provider's operations.

What are assistance animals?

Assistance animals work, provide assistance, perform tasks or services for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provide emotional support that alleviates one or more of the identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. An assistance animal is **not** a pet and is **not** subject to pet fees or “no pet” policies. Assistance animals do **not** have to be trained or certified.

What kinds of assistance animals are there?

The most recognizable assistance animals are those that assist people with obvious physical disabilities, such as guide or seeing-eye dogs. Other common assistance animals include hearing animals, mobility animals and seizure response animals. However, companion or emotional support animals, are also assistance animals. They can help persons with psychological disabilities alleviate symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress thereby enhancing the person’s ability to live independently and enjoy their home.

Are dogs the only animals that can be assistance animals?

No. While dogs are the most common type of assistance animal, other animals can also be assistance animals.

How do I request an accommodation?

Though *not required*, it is recommended the request for an accommodation is in writing. The requester should keep a copy of the request and any supporting attachments. An individual is not required to disclose the disability to the housing provider, but may be asked to provide information to show a connection between the nature of the disability and the requested accommodation. The individual should also describe the specific policy or rule which limits the opportunity for the individual to live in or fully enjoy the housing. The individual then needs to state the specific change in the policy he or she is requesting.

Where can I find more information?

If you have additional questions about reasonable modifications or reasonable accommodations, or if you would like assistance in requesting a reasonable modification or accommodation, please contact the FHCWM office.

Signs of Possible Discrimination:

- Being charged extra fees, such as a higher deposit, or higher rent
- Being told the unit just rented, even though it has an “available unit” sign
- Refusal to allow assistance animals because of a “no pets” policy
- Refusal to permit reasonable modifications, such as wheelchair ramps or grab bars
- Being asked for a medical history to prove you have a disability or to prove you can live independently
- Being told you won’t be safe, neighbors won’t want you there, or the neighborhood is not “right” for you
- Terms, conditions, or availability change between phone contact and an in-person visit
- Filling out an application and waiting an unreasonable time for a decision

Save the Date! Upcoming Fair Housing Events

28th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

Thursday, May 21, 2015

Please mark your calendars for this exciting educational event, which will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids. As always, we will have a variety of comprehensive morning workshops as well as a luncheon featuring a keynote speaker. Please contact the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980 or (866) 389-FAIR if you are interested in receiving information about or sponsoring this event!

Fair Housing Book Club

The Fair Housing Book Clubs have discussed some great books this year, including The Casual Vacancy, The Round House, The Invention of Wings and The Distance Between Us among others! Read along with us: www.fhcwm.org/booksweveread or send an email request to contact-us@fhcwm.org to be added to our Book Club email alerts!

We meet at 11:45 am in our office (20 Hall Street SE, Grand Rapids) or the Disability Network Lakeshore office (426 Century Lane, Holland). Bring a lunch, a friend and join the discussion!

Fair Housing Trainings

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan offers fair housing trainings, including, but not limited to, Fair Housing & Advertising, Fair Housing Training for Rental Professionals, Fair Housing & Maintenance and Fair Lending sessions. Costs vary depending on the type of training. Trainings run between 1-3 hours and include a comprehensive packet of reference materials as well as certificates of completion.

Some sessions are held at the Fair Housing Center 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 Center hosts regular **tester trainings**. 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, trainings will be offered both during business hours and in the evening. For the specific training dates, to register, or with any other questions, contact Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980 or gchapla@fhcwm.org.

www.fhcwm.org
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