



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

2015 Lakeshore Fair Housing Award Presented to Bart Jonker

The FHCWM is very pleased to announce that the 2015 Lakeshore Fair Housing Award was presented to Bart Jonker at this year's annual *Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing* breakfast in Holland, Michigan. Mr. Jonker currently serves as the Senior Compliance Specialist and BSA



Lakeshore Board President Dave Stelling with Bart Jonker and Nancy Haynes.

Manager at Chemical Bank. Lakeshore Advisory Board Member Lyn Raymond (Lakeshore Housing Alliance at the Greater Ottawa County United Way) presented Bart Jonker with the award. Mr. Jonker is one of the original volunteers who helped start the Lakeshore Fair Housing effort, and was part of the volunteer-led initiative for 7 years before transitioning to becoming an active member of the Lakeshore Advisory Board. He has always been very intentional and conscientious about connecting fair housing to issues he is working on as well as the people he

serves. He is very proactive in his efforts to identify and address real or potential fair housing issues, and undertakes continued efforts to enhance quality assurance. The FHCWM thanks Bart Jonker for his service and commitment to fair housing!

Kevin Boyle Speaks to Record Crowd at Lakeshore Event

On October 22, 2015, **Dr. Kevin Boyle** provided the keynote presentation at the FHCWM's *9th Annual Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing: Opening Doors to Housing Choice Breakfast* which was attended by 130 community members and housing professionals.

Dr. Boyle shared the true story of Dr. Ossian Sweet from his book, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in The Jazz Age*. He is the William Smith Mason Professor of American History at Northwestern University in Chicago. *Arc of Justice* talks about the housing discrimination and other struggles experienced by the Sweet family in 1920's Detroit. Dr. Sweet is an African American physician who sought a better life for his growing family. He and his wife Gladys purchased a home in a white neighborhood and were faced with a mob of angry neighbors and others after they moved in. Dr. Boyle read excerpts of *Arc of Justice* to the attendees, sharing the fear and pain experienced by the Sweet family and friends while attempting to defend themselves and their new home. Shots rang out from the house after the mob began to pelt objects at the home and through the windows.



Keynote speaker Dr. Kevin Boyle

Everyone inside the home was arrested. The FHCWM highly recommends reading *Arc of Justice* to learn the full extent of what happened to the Sweet family as the case unfolded...

Dr. Boyle ended his keynote with a powerful thought derived from his book, that from the Sweet's unfortunate situation came a chance for change. The family's lawyer said in his powerful closing statement that this was an opportunity for the community to begin treating each other as equals, that "this thin, frail promise of redemption" was possible. The FHCWM thanks Dr. Kevin Boyle for transporting us back in time and inspiring us to continue pursuing equal housing opportunity!

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HUD Issues Update Public Housing Guidance Related to Use of Arrest Records

CHICAGO—HUD announced updated guidance for Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) regarding the use of arrests in determining who can live in HUD-assisted properties. The Guidance outlines that arrest records may not be the basis for denying admission, terminating assistance or evicting tenants; reiterates that HUD does not require PHAs and owners to adopt “One Strike” policies; and includes best practices and models of success from PHAs across the nation.

“Young people who have been held accountable for nonviolent offenses and paid their debt to society deserve the opportunity to become active and productive members of their communities,” said HUD Secretary Julián Castro. “These grants and guidance will allow Public Housing Authorities and their partners to help these young people reach their full potential.”

“The Department of Justice is committed to giving formerly-incarcerated individuals the tools they need to become productive members of society,” said Attorney General Loretta Lynch. “Providing meaningful support through housing opportunities, prevention programs and other critical services is vital to our ongoing efforts to reduce recidivism, promote public safety, and foster positive results in communities across the country.”

According to HUD’s related press release, “having a criminal record severely limits a person’s ability to seek higher education, find good employment, qualify for credit and secure affordable housing. Today, an estimated 60,000 youths under the age of 24 are confined in juvenile detention and correctional facilities, with hundreds of thousands more on probation.”

To download this and other important information about fair housing laws and regulations, please visit our “Housing Professionals” section: www.fhcwm.org/professionals as well as “Publications” at www.fhcwm.org/publications.

National Fair Housing News

NEW ORLEANS—A landlord accused of discriminating against African American renters in Metairie, Louisiana was ordered on November 5, 2015 to pay more than \$172,000 in damages. The landlord is also accused of using racial slurs to describe applicants to the rental property.

The GNOFHAC filed suit in federal court on behalf of Denise and Michael Thornton in 2014. The Thorntons, who are African American, tried to rent an apartment in the Lime d’Royale Apartments but were told it was no longer available. When they asked for an application, in case the people under contract changed their minds, they were again refused. Denise Thornton, suspecting discrimination, asked a white friend to try to rent the unit. Her friend was told the apartment was available and to stop by.

Thornton contacted the GNOFHAC, which conducted an undercover investigation in the spring of 2013. The non-profit organization sent white and black testers to try to rent an apartment at the Lime d’Royale. The white testers consistently received preferential treatment while staff refused to show apartments to the African American testers. Thornton received at her workplace an anonymous letter that contained a staff member’s list of prospective renters. The list contained the names of the Thorntons as well as many of the GNOFHAC’s undercover testers. Next to the names of the African American people, including the Thorntons, the landlord had written racial and other pejorative slurs.

The Lime Investment Co. entered into a consent judgement in which it also agreed to receive fair housing training, adopt a non-discrimination policy, and let the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) review its rental applications and lease agreements. One of the firm’s staff members agreed to, as part of the settlement to end litigation, never again work in real estate.

East Grand Rapids Expands Protections under Local Ordinance

The City Commission of East Grand Rapids added sexual orientation and gender identity to its existing anti-discrimination ordinance earlier this year. The ordinance prohibits discrimination in housing, accommodations, and employment and includes some exemptions. East Grand Rapids joins other west Michigan communities which also have such protections: Grand Rapids, Saugatuck, Saugatuck Township and Douglas.



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Fair housing rights for people with disabilities

Throughout 2015, the FHCWM has had the opportunity to work with over 25 people with disabilities on a reasonable accommodation or reasonable modification request. The FHCWM assisted these individuals in advocating for their fair housing rights, and here are a few of the outcomes:

Late Fees Waived

A woman who is unable to work receives her disability check from Social Security by the third day of the month. Her landlord informed her that she would incur a \$25 late fee each month if her rent was not received by the first and that “chronic late payment” would result in eviction. FHCWM staff assisted the woman in requesting a waiver of the late fee as long as she pays rent by the third of the month. The landlord agreed and also agreed that payments made by the third would not count toward “chronic late payment”.

Assigned Parking Spots Granted

An elderly man with physical disabilities lived in HUD-subsidized housing for seniors and people with disabilities. He was unable to walk more than 100 feet and asked his landlord for an assigned parking space in a parking lot that was open to residents on a first-come first served basis. For several months he was not given an answer. The FHCWM contacted the landlord, and the request was subsequently granted.

Another man with significant mobility limitations lived in a market-rate apartment complex where he had an assigned parking space in a carport. This space was nearest to his building entrance and located on an accessible route. A new management company took over the property and did away with all assigned parking. The man was left unable to leave his home, and asked to retain his parking space as an accommodation, but was denied. The FHCWM wrote a letter to the management and the man got his original space re-assigned to him.

Notice to Quit Rescinded

A woman with a disability lived in her apartment for 10 months, and was, by all means, an excellent tenant. A new management company took over the property and issued her a 30-day Notice to Quit so that they could make improvements to the property. The FHCWM helped her negotiate an additional 6 months of tenancy to give her adequate time to find housing that meets her disability-related needs.

Wheelchair Ramp Approved

A man with a deteriorating physical disability recently began using a wheelchair. His wife asked their landlord if they could install a ramp so that her husband could use the front door. The landlord denied the request and told them that they could move out. The FHCWM assisted the wife in advocating for her husband’s fair housing rights, and the landlord agreed to allow the ramp.

Pet Fees Dropped

A woman moved into a mobile home in August 2013. After significant health struggles and a disability diagnosis, her healthcare provider wrote her a prescription in October 2014 for an emotional support animal. The woman’s mobile home community prohibited pets. She provided her prescription to them asking for an exception to allow her support animal. She did not receive a response, and assumed it had been approved. In August 2015 the client received a letter from the mobile home community owner assessing her \$750 in “pet fees” dating back to her move-in date in 2013 and stating that she would need to pay \$25 per month. The FHCWM wrote a letter to the owner asking for the \$750 to be dropped and that she not be required to pay the monthly fee for an assistance dog. The owner agreed to drop all fees.

Transfer to Larger Unit Approved

A woman with severe claustrophobia lived in a small, subsidized one-bedroom apartment with her nephew. Her request to transfer to a larger unit had been ignored. The FHCWM wrote a letter requesting an accommodation and the woman and her nephew transferred to a two-bedroom unit.

Breed Restriction Waived

A man received a notice from his mobile home community that he needed to immediately remove his assistance dog due to their perception that it was a pit bull, a breed prohibited by community rules. FHCWM wrote a letter indicating that assistance animals were not subject to breed restrictions. The man was allowed to keep his assistance dog.

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Government.

Please visit our web site: www.fhcwm.org

...FHCWM News & Events...

29th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series

Thursday, May 19, 2016

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 All the Light We Cannot See, Arc of Justice, Esperanza Rising, Out of My Mind, and others! Read along with us: www.fhcwm.org/booksweread 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 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. Shorter “update” classes and other topics are also available!

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 stipend 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 any other questions contact Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980.

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