
◆ Open House ◆

Newsletter of the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County

FALL 2000

The Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County is committed to ensuring equal housing opportunities regardless of race, religion, gender, age, disability, familial status or national origin.

We carry out our mission through education & outreach, complaint reception & resolution, advocacy, monitoring of discriminatory housing practices & assistance in finding open & affordable housing.

STAFF

Elizabeth Albert
Executive Director

Lily Chun
Assistant Director

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A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR!!!

Welcome Beth Albert to the Helm

First, let me begin by saying that I am very happy to be in Glenside working at the Fair Housing Council. Throughout most of my background, I have worked with people with disabilities. So I am well aware of the discrimination people face in trying to find affordable accessible housing.

For the past eleven years I have worked at Liberty Resources, Inc. the Center for Independent Living in the Philadelphia area. While my work at Liberty Resources concentrated on providing community-based services for people with disabilities, I was constantly pulled into working on housing issues due to the number of housing problems faced by people with disabilities.

I have a very strong commitment to advocacy and know my background in working on diverse housing issues will help in our mission to fight discrimination in housing. I am especially excited to be expanding our efforts into the disability area. It has been a challenging beginning (i.e. "We're Moving!"), but I am excited to be focusing on Fair Housing issues and am committed to ensuring equal housing opportunities in Montgomery County.

FAREWELL TO A GREAT FAIR HOUSING ADVOCATE

The Council bids farewell to our long-time Executive Director, Renee Lang-

September 11, 2000

To: Friends of the Fair Housing Council
From: Renee Langley, Executive Director

It is with some consternation that I write to you today to inform you of my resignation as Executive Director of the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County. After more than two years of debate and deliberation, my family and I have decided to relocate to the Atlanta area. We are excited about the move but I am saddened about leaving the Fair Housing Council.

My parting wish is that you continue to support the Fair Housing Council. The Council has a vary dedi-cated staff who provide a variety of services in Montgomery county including advocacy for victims of housing discrimination, encouraging compliance in the real estate industry, and teaching first time homebuyers how to avoid pitfalls in the homebuying process, just to name a few.

During my six years with the Council, we have worked hard to become a reliable and effective re-source for people hoping to make a home in Montgomery County. That effort has paid off in the form of new funding opportunities and community partnerships. You may have played a role in our past successes. My hope is that you will continue that involvement.

The council is looking forward to new challenges including looking for ways to better serve the hous-ing needs of people with disabilities. To that end, the Board of Directors has selected Elizabeth Al-ber, MSW, as my successor. We are all excited to have Ms. Albert on board. Ms. Albert is a highly regarded advocate for people with disabilities who has spent the past ten years at Liberty Resources, a center for independent living. She brings a wealth of knowledge and a burning desire to ensure that people with disabilities—and all people—have equal housing access.

It has been my pleasure to be of service in Montgomery county. If you didn't know, I landed here in Pennsylvania in 1992 to attend law school intending it to be just a three year stay. Little did I know that I would have the opportunity to work with such a wonderful organization and drive such an impor-tant cause. It is wonderful people like yourself that caused me to wear out my welcome. I have im-mensely enjoyed getting to know those of you who work each day to make our world a better place. I will miss you all and wish you the best.

Thanks for making my extended stay in the Delaware Valley a rewarding one!

Renee is currently working as Senior Compliance Officer for Georgia's Commission on Equal Oppor-tunity. Kudos to Renee!!!! We wish you the best and will greatly miss you!

CASE UPDATES

DISCLAIMER: In all settled cases reported in this newsletter, the defendant, unless otherwise noted, denies the allegations of discrimination made by the plaintiff and the parties have agreed to resolve the case prior to a trial or hearing.

Schmidt v. Gary J. Greco et al.

The Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, with assistance from the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County, has filed a complaint in the District court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania on behalf of Roslyn Schmidt against Gary J. Greco, Joseph

Greco, and Rosemarie Greco for refusal to rent an apartment to her because of the race of her young son.

Ms. Schmidt is a light skinned woman of mixed racial descent. Her son, whose father is black, is also of mixed race but would appear to most to be black. Responding to an ad for a two bedroom apartment, Schmidt contacted Gary Greco about the Norristown apartment and they arranged for an appointment for her look at the apartment. Schmidt's son and his father accompanied Ms. Schmidt to the appointment.

After seeing the apartment, Schmidt decided she would like to rent it. She filled out a rental application for her-

self and her son. A few days later she telephoned Greco to inquire about her application. Greco, who is white, informed her that he could not rent the apartment to her because he could not have black tenants in the building.

Ms. Schmidt called the Fair Housing Council for help. The Council undertook an investigation that confirmed Schmidt's allegation of racial discrimination.

**DISCRIMINATION
SUIT FILED
AGAINST NORRIS-
TOWN LANDLORD
Would Not Rent to
Woman Because of Her
6-Year Old Black Son**

"This kind of bias cannot be tolerated," says Beth Albert, Executive Director of the Council. "The apartment was available and suited Ms. Schmidt's

needs. You can't advertise your property to the public and then start chipping away at the applicants because they're not the right race. If you try it and we find out about it, we'll see that the case is pursued to the fullest extent of the law."

The Schmidt case is being handled by Marinda van Dalen, attorney for the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.

FHCMC & Complainant v. Forest Gardens Apt.

A complaint was filed by the FHC in August 2000 with the PA Human Relations Commission (PHRC) on be-

half of the FHC and the complainant. The complainant stated that in February 2000 she and her family had applied to Forest Gardens but her application was denied because the landlord would not allow children of opposite sex to share a bedroom.

Testing by the FHC provided evidence that Forest Gardens did discriminate based on familial status (having children in the household). PHRC finalized a settlement agreement which includes: monetary damages for the complainant & the FHC; mandatory fair housing training; & changes to the rental application to include "equal treatment" language.

FHCMC v. Abrams Run Apts. Et al.

In October 2000, the FHC filed a complaint with HUD against Abrams Run Apts., Gambone Brothers Development, Inc. and Continental Realty. Evidence gathered by the FHC indicated that Abrams Run Apartments has discriminatory policies against families with children, steering families with children to first floor apt. and subjecting families with children to different leasing terms and conditions.

Art Haywood, of Lord & Haywood Attorneys at Law, is handling the case for the FHC. Mr. Haywood, a long-

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time fair housing advocate, has also filed a related complaint with the PA Real Estate Commission.

*Kyle Spells, Special Research Project Coordinator &
Andre Guntzel, Project Assistant*

UPWARD BATTLE FOR ACCESSIBILITY WON!!



In a matter that began almost a year ago, the Fair Housing Council recently helped Ms. Josephine Petrecz and her son Keith Petrecz gain access to their home. The Council helped the Petrecz's obtain a proper curb cut and access to the mailboxes in their condominium in compliance with the Fair Housing Accessibility Guidelines.

Earlier this year, the Fair Housing Council helped the Petrecz's get a parking space near a curb cut designated as an accessible parking space. However, this did not solve the problem of traveling back and forth from their apartment

to the parking lot.

Such transportation was difficult because of the distance they had to travel - on an incline - from the apartment to the curb cut and parking space. Further, if cars parked too close to the curb, they would block the sidewalk along which they had to travel to reach the curb cut. Finally, the curb cut itself was improperly constructed and required a 90 degree turn to access the curb cut. In making the turn, one wheel of the chair would lose contact with the sidewalk.

Upon investigation of the Petrecz's situation, the Fair Housing Council also noted that the mailboxes - located just outside the Petrecz unit - were not accessible to people who use wheelchairs. Yet an-

other battle.

After assessing the problems, the Fair Housing Council has been able to work with the Maple Ridge Homeowners Association to extend the sidewalk from the Petrecz unit to the mailboxes and install a proper curb cut near the mailboxes. With this solution, the mailboxes are accessible to **all** people and the journey to the parking lot for the Petrecz's is a shorter and safer one that is in compliance with the Fair Housing laws.

The Petrecz's are very pleased to be able to go about their lives without these barriers.

PANIC-SELLING (BLOCKBUSTING)

The Fair Housing Council will be working with the Borough of Norristown to help remove housing discrimination as a barrier to finding or retaining housing. One project that has been identified as most beneficial to Norristown residents is the development of an awareness campaign about the prohibitions against blockbusting (inducement of "panic selling") in Norristown neighborhoods.

Blockbusting is a practice that can destroy the best of neighborhoods. The practice is typically

carried out by realtors who play on the fears of homeowners to induce them into prematurely selling their properties (thereby "busting up" the block). A common scare

tactic is the mailing of "friendly" solicitations from a real estate office asking the homeowner if they've thought about selling their home. More aggressive realtors will even call the homeowner directly and ask, for example, if they have noticed the number of Hispanics moving in lately. If this happens with enough frequency, the homeowner will naturally start wondering if it isn't time to relocate.

Rumors begin to circulate about the neighborhood starting to "change". Hysteria may set in about plummeting property values prompting homeowners to give in and sell their homes for all the wrong reasons. Property val-

ues may indeed decrease — not because of any specific negative characteristic of the person moving in, but rather, because of the stiff competition that has now been created between the panicked sellers. By this time, investors have also jumped in to the fray offering sellers quick cash for their properties — but at greatly reduced prices. When the dust clears, the neighborhood has indeed changed.

Such rapid turnover puts a community at great risk of losing its stability, its

Blockbusting causes rapid turnover which puts a community at great risk of losing its stability, its maturity, its tax base, its pride.

maturity, its tax base, and its community pride. Meanwhile, the realtors have gained easy commissions and the investors have

gained extra income on the homes that they later turn into rental properties.

Blockbusting seems to work best in older, working class communities, such as Norristown, where (1) the family home may be the only asset the family owns and therefore it upsets the family when its value is threatened; (2) the homeowners are less likely to check out the facts about recent home sales; and (3) the residents are less likely to welcome people of other races or ethnicities or who are in any way "different." Norristown has the indications of a community ripe for the practice of blockbusting.

The Fair Housing Council has developed flyers to educate people about this practice. We will send these flyers to homes in neighborhoods that already appear to be affected by blockbusting. We will also use them in our aggressive campaign to caution realtors against the practice. Additionally, we will post these flyers at Social Service Agencies, Community Centers and other high traffic areas in Norristown in the effort to educate the public at large and warn them against this practice. We are also using media outlets such as the local Norristown cable channel and advertisements on buses and in newspapers to warn the public about this practice.

At our December 7, 2000 seminar for real estate agents and brokers, entitled "How to Get Caught Complying with the Law", we will discuss the topic of blockbusting. In the spring we will also hold a homebuying seminar during which we will take questions about blockbusting as well.

Further questions about blockbusting or our Norristown campaign should be directed to us at 215-576-7711.

UPCOMING EVENTS & THINGS TO DO

EVENTS

December 1–2, 2000
 Conference: *Integration Works: Building Open & Thriving Communities*
 Location: Penn Tower Hotel Philadelphia, PA
 Contact: Don DeMarco
 Fund for an OPEN Society (215) 482-OPEN

Fund is sponsoring this conference to discuss how housing segregation is a threat to our nation and why it is urgently necessary that we create opportunities for open communities. The conference goals are:

- To bring together leaders in integrated and diverse communities to share best practices and ideas for improvement;
- To reach out to people in communities undergoing racial change;
- To involve representatives from government agencies such as HUD and not-for-profits, such as local and regional fair housing organizations, in the discussion of how to build thriving communities where a diverse range of people live;
- To begin a long-term process of increasing public awareness of the social and economic value of integration;
- To strengthen a movement and organization in support of efforts to increase number of stable diverse communities.

December 7, 2000
FAIR HOUSING SEMINAR:

How to Get Caught Complying with the Law (Best Practices)

Location: MontCo. Human Services Center
 Norristown, PA

Contact: FHC of MontCo.
 (215) 576-7711

Topics Covered:

- Overview of Fair Housing Laws
- Best Practices
 - Application Process
 - Serving Families with Children
 - Ad Placement
 - Serving Persons with Disabilities
- Panic Selling/Blockbusting



FUNDING UPDATE

The FHC has received two new fair housing grants, from Lower Merion and Norristown. We are pleased to be working with those communities.

The FHC, as part of the Delaware Valley Fair Housing Partnership with PILCOP, HCDI, and TAG's Fair Housing Action Center, recently learned that we were not refunded for HUD's Fair Housing Initiative Enforcement Project. Unfortunately, this funding allowed the FHC to broaden its scope of intake, counseling and enforcement of housing discrimination complaints. The Partnership is committed to looking for alternative funding to make up for the loss of this HUD funding.

On a happier note, the FHC has learned that the Partnership was awarded a FHIP Education & Outreach grant. The grant will be used specifically to work on providing information on protections under the Fair Housing Act and how it relates to people with disabilities in Montgomery County.

**IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST WHILE SEARCHING FOR A HOME, CALL US AT:
 (215) 576-7711**



We have an array of fair housing t-shirts!! Each design was taken from that year's winning poster of the "April Is Fair Housing Month" Poster Contest. We have been promoting this children's program on combating discrimination since 1997.

The 2000 t-shirt, created by Julia Cooper of Jenkintown Elementary, is our newest edition. All the t-shirts are available for \$10 and come in various sizes.

TO PLACE YOUR ORDER,

Mail a \$10 check to:

**Fair Housing Council of MontCo.
P.O. Box 578, Glenside, PA 19038**

**Help us fight against discrimination...
BECOME A MEMBER!!!**

The Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County invites you to become a member. The Council is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to fighting housing discrimination in Montgomery County. As the only local agency whose sole mission is to ensure equal housing opportunities in Montgomery County, the Council has been working hard for you! By becoming a member, you can help guarantee that fair housing remains a part of your community.

With your support, the Council will continue providing educational programs to consumers and real estate professionals, advocacy for victims of housing discrimination and access to information on open and affordable housing in Montgomery County.

YES, I'D LIKE TO BE A MEMBER OF THE FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL!

Name or Organization _____

MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Address _____

r Individual (\$25)

r Nonprofit Org. (\$35)

Phone _____ Fax _____

r Corporate (\$50)

Choose One: _____ 20% Seminar Discount

OR

_____ T-shirt (Choose style & size)

WHITE T'S: Red/Orange (___Sm) Green/Purple (___Sm___Med___L) Brown/Black (___Sm)

GRAY T'S: Pink/Green (___L___XL)

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

*MAIL TO: P.O. Box 578
Glenside, PA 19038*

Questions? Call us at (215)576-7711

**Thank you for supporting the fight against
housing discrimination!**



Fair Housing Council of
Montgomery County
P.O. Box 578
Glenside, PA 19038

email: fairhous@libertynet.org

In This Issue...

A Change of Guard: The Council has a new Executive Director



WE'RE MOV- ING!!!!!!

As of December 1st

NEW ADDRESS:

**115 E. Glenside Avenue
Glenside, PA
19038**

**SAME TELEPHONE #:
(215) 576-7711**

**WISH US
LUCK!!!!**