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# ◆ Open House ◆

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Newsletter of the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County

SUMMER 2001

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**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.**

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## *NIMBY* *Not In My Back Yard*

Recent events in Ambler have led us to devote some space to an article on NIMBYism. NIMBY stands for "Not In My Backyard". NIMBY is the symbol for neighborhoods that want to exclude certain people because they are homeless, poor, disabled, in transitional homes, or because of their race and ethnicity.

Over the past few months, a few Ambler residents, the Concerned Homeowners of Ambler, had sent letters to several nonprofit housing programs asking them to stop buying properties in Ambler. The group also approached the Ambler Borough Council and asked for assistance in stopping these agencies from buying houses or providing assistance to more low- to moderate-income people in Ambler.

The Concerned Homeowners have been voicing two concerns. The first concern is that affordable housing is being bought up by nonprofits, thus depleting the stock of affordable houses for people not involved in housing programs. The second concern is that housing values appear to be decreasing as a result of the first concern.

Ambler is not unique in having citizen opposition to affordable housing programs in particular neighborhoods. Many NIMBY concerns are articulated as fear that the presence of affordable or supported housing will decrease property values. In general, research has demonstrated that affordable housing has no impact on surrounding property values.

In the 2001 Spring Edition of the NIMBY report, which is published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Tim Iglesias, the Deputy Director of the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California writes that the assumption that affordable housing, including residential facilities and supportive housing, will lower neighborhood property values is a myth and incorrect. "Contrary to popular beliefs, studies indicate conclusively that affordable housing has little or no effect on neighboring property values."

There are many strategies housing advocates can use in preparing for or responding to communities when NIMBY concerns are raised. A useful strategy is to have public relation/media materials prepared ahead of time so that media or government officials can be given accurate information immediately when a concern is voiced. Providing a fact sheet about the history of the housing provider, geo-

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## 2001 FAIR HOUSING POSTER CONTEST

### *Congrats to Rebecca Normile!!!*

This year hallmarked our 5th anniversary for our children's program: FHC's Annual Fair Housing Poster Contest. The Council talks to 5th and 6th grade children teaching them about discrimination, fair housing, and open neighborhoods.

We have been fortunate to have the continuing participation of Elkins Park School, Jenkintown Elem., and Salford Hills Elem. Thanks to those teachers, administrators and volunteers who helped make the program successful.

Once again we have had the great fortune of having the support of the Montgomery County Association of Realtors. The Association itself donates the grand prizes as well as contributes money to help support the program. With the help of the Association, the Council has received assistance and support as well from individual Realtors.

Paul Barndt, a Realtor of the Barndt Agency, single-

2001 Regional Contest (L to R): Deborah Phillips, Weichert Realtors—Judge; Rebecca Normile, Elkins Park School—1st Place; Cassie Castner, Jenkintown—2nd Place; Liane Anderson, Education Coordinator of FHC holding poster of Tory Pavlichko, Salford Hills—3rd Place; and S. Van Wil-

handedly heads up the program in Salford Hills. Paul himself carries the message to the children and his agency donates the prizes. Many thanks to Paul for his grand efforts in promoting fair housing!

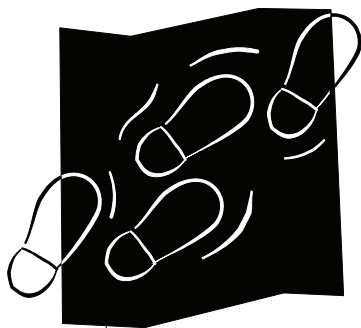
Anne Rubin, a Realtor of Century 21-Advantage Gold, has again donated prize money for the Elkins Park contest and helped judge. Pat Sherlock, a Realtor of Prudential, Fox &

Roach, as well donated prize money for the Jenkintown contest and helped judge. Thanks to Anne & Pat!

Congrats to Rebecca Normile, 6th Grader of Elkins Park School, who was our regional winner. Her design has been made into a T-shirt and her poster as well as the winners of the other two schools will be sent to HUD's regional contest. GOOD LUCK!!!

Elkins Park (L to R): Addy Sugarman—Judge; Sarah Adams—2nd; Rebecca Normile—1st; Laura Goldstein—3rd; Anne Rubin—Judge

Jenkintown (L to R): Pat Sherlock—Judge; Elizabeth Gates—2nd; Cassie Castner—1st; Shannon Kelly—3rd



## *RESOURCES ON THE WEB*

### **Montgomery County Dept. of Housing & Community Development [www.MONTCOPA.ORG/ MCDHS](http://www.MONTCOPA.ORG/MCDHS)**

This site offers a directory of the housing-related services and providers in Montgomery County.

### **Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County [www.fairhousing.com/ fhcmc](http://www.fairhousing.com/fhcmc)**

Remember, the Council offers our HOME-SEEKER'S LIST on our website. The List is a compilation of apartment listings from various Montgomery County newspapers. We take the most affordable, reasonable apartments and put them into our list. It can be accessed on our website:

[www.fairhousing.com/  
fhcmc](http://www.fairhousing.com/fhcmc). OR—call for a hard copy.

### **DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & URBAN DE- VELOPMENT**

**[www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)**

HUD's website offers a multitude of resources from fair housing to

homebuying to special programs regarding home purchases. HUD also offers a wealth of materials for free or low cost.

### **National Fair Housing Advocate on Line [www.fairhousing.com](http://www.fairhousing.com)**

This site offers current up to the date fair housing news from across the nation. It also has links to related fair housing issues and upcoming events.

The Council has re-

## *SPECIAL THANKS TO VOLUNTEER EXECUTIVE CON- SULTANTS OF RSVP*

cently been fortunate to have the services of Gabe Basch and Gene Presslor. Both are volunteers with RSVP. Mr. Basch is currently helping us upgrade our accounting systems. Mr. Presslor is working with the Executive Director on revamping our personnel policies.

RSVP stands for Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of Montgomery County. VEC is a program of RSVP which itself stands for Volunteer Executive Consultants. VEC describes themselves as "...knowledgeable, 'can-do' people who have retired from busy and successful careers in a wide variety of managerial, professional, technical and educational occupations. They have proven track records in helping nonprofit organizations solve problems and improve the effectiveness of their operations."

VEC's provide exper-

tise in many areas including: board development; strategic and long-range planning; marketing; human resources; and computer systems.

RSVP has helped our agency in the past through the assistance of Adelaide Sugarman—mentor Executive Director. Thanks to RSVP for connecting us up as well as to Addy, Gabe, and Gene for their combined wealth of knowledge.

The Council bids farewell to Nina Amster, FHC's previous part-time Housing

## *HOUSING ADVOCATE Changing of the Guard*

Advocate. Nina has moved on to the American Legal Institute—American Bar Association. We wish Nina well.

Welcome Konstantina Tatsis—the Council's new Housing Advocate. Konstantina recently graduated from West Chester University of Pennsylvania with a Masters Degree in Philosophy. She was hired as a full-time housing advocate and will be heading up our programs on homebuying and homeseekers assistance. As well she will be working closely with the Executive Director on fair housing complaints.

We are thrilled to have expanded our housing advocate position to full time. And, of course, we are pleased to have Konstantina as part of our team!

Welcome Konstantina!!

## *FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: Requesting Reasonable Accommodations*

The Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County receives numerous calls from people with disabilities requesting assistance in exercising their fair housing rights. We have worked with clients seeking various types of accommodations and modifications which would allow them to use and enjoy their home fully. The following is a short lesson focusing on how to request a reasonable accommodation. (Although quite similar in procedure, we'll save "modifications"—physical changes to a dwelling—for another time.)

### **WHAT IS A "REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION"—**

As described in a guide produced by the Bazelon Center, "A 'reasonable accommodation' is a change in rules, policies and practices or a change in the way services are provided. [The laws] require landlords to grant reasonable accommodations in order to enable a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling unit or any of a development's public areas, such as a community room or laundry service. Reasonable accommodations can be necessary when someone is applying for housing, during tenancy or to prevent eviction.." *What "Fair Housing Means" for People with Disabilities: A Guide for Consumers, Advocates and Landlords*, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, May 1999.

Accommodations are considered "reasonable" when they are practical and feasible. Landlords do not have to grant an accommodation request if it would pose an undue burden (financial or administrative) on the landlord or require a fundamental alteration of the property. However the costs of the reasonable accommodation (if any) are assumed by the landlord and NOT the tenant.

### **REQUESTING A "REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION"—**

Although it would be discrimination for a landlord to ask you first about your disability, you do need to disclose the fact that you have a disability upon requesting a "reasonable accommodation". In your request you need to describe the accommodation you want, note the nature of your disability only to the extent it clarifies your need for the accommodation, and explain how the accommodation would help you to fully use and enjoy your unit. You should **make your request in writing (and keep a copy)**.

The landlord may ask you to document your need for the accommodation. You must then provide the landlord with proof of your disability and that the accommodation you are requesting will allow you to fully use and enjoy your unit. You do not need to disclose the unnecessary specifics of your disability or provide a complete medical history. The type of "proof" you provide depends on your situation. For example, documentation or letters of explanation may come from a doctor or other medical professional, a health worker, or even a non-medical service agency.

### **EXAMPLES OF "REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS"**

- ◆ A landlord with a first-come, first-served, parking policy makes an exception by creating a reserved parking space for a tenant who, because of her disability, has difficulty walking and needs to park close to the building.
- ◆ A landlord notifies a tenant with multiple chemical sensitivity in advance of painting and pest treatments.
- ◆ A landlord waives "guest fees" and parking fees for a disabled tenant's home health care aide.
- ◆ A landlord assists an applicant with mental retardation in filling out the standard application form.
- ◆ If the applicant needs oral reminders to pay the rent, the landlord agrees to call or visit to remind the person before each month's rent is due.
- ◆ The monthly tenants' or owners' association meeting, usually held in an inaccessible building, is moved to a building with a ramp.
- ◆ A landlord permits a tenant with mobility impairment to move from a third-floor unit to the first floor.
- ◆ A landlord makes an exception to the building's "no pets" rule for people with disabilities who use

*(Continued on page 5)*

## *Requesting Reasonable Accommodations, cont.*

*(Continued from page 4)*

guide dogs or other "service" animals.

*(What "Fair Housing" Means for People with Disabilities, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.)*

### **REAL CASES—The Council's Experiences**

Over the years, the Fair Housing Council has helped many people achieve reasonable accommodations, both through counseling and intervention. Often times we find that it is merely a matter of educating both the tenant as well as the housing provider on the law regarding reasonable accommodations. It never hurts, though, to come up with creative, inexpensive solutions.

Most recently, the Council assisted a person with multiple chemical sensitivities seeking a reasonable accommodation which would enable her to stay in her apartment. In that situation the woman could not be around a multitude of allergens and chemicals. The Council helped the client negotiate an accommodation that suited the client. The reasonable accommodation that the client needed was allowing her to maintain her apartment in a way which would not aggravate her chemical sensitivities. As a result she was also able to renew her lease—something the landlord denied her prior to the Council's intervention.

In another reasonable accommodation case, the Council intervened on behalf of a woman who sought permission to keep her wheelchair in the lobby of her apartment building on the occasions where she would take her car. (Once or twice a month.) She is only able to walk short distances such as that from the lobby to her car. After denying the tenant's request, the apartment manager complied upon the Council's intervention. The Council educated the manager on fair housing laws and of their obligation to provide reasonable accommodations.

The Council strives to resolve these types of fair housing complaints in whatever way best serves our clients. Fortunately, most reasonable accommodation cases are resolved without having to file a complaint. Intervention, education, and a little creative thinking go a long way towards amicable solutions.

**IF YOU ARE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE IN REQUESTING A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION,  
PLEASE CALL: (215) 576-7711**

**ENJOY YOUR HOME TO ITS FULLEST!!!!**



### ***TESTERS WANTED!!***

We are seeking individuals of all backgrounds to work as testers on an as-needed basis. Testers are needed to visit rental properties in Montgomery County, and helps us monitor Fair Housing compliance. Testing is an investigative tool that is used to verify incidents of housing discrimination.

Testers are paid a flat rate of \$50.00 per site visit, (\$25 for a phone test). A typical site visit takes approximately 2-3 hours. Work hours are very flexible and may be done when it is convenient for you. This is a great way to earn extra cash while supporting an important cause!

In order to participate, testers must first attend a training session.

**If interested, please call Lily Park at: (215) 576-7711**

# NIMBY, continued

(Continued from page 1)  
 graphic locations of other housing offered by the provider, a description of services, success stories of previous tenants, and even quotes from neighbors or current tenants about the housing is essential. Also, providing the name of a media spokesperson that can be contacted for more information minimizes the risk

rectly to the residents by stating that to limit affordable housing or housing providers from providing housing in the borough would be discriminatory under the Fair Housing Act. Federal Fair Housing laws protect the housing rights of people regardless of race, age, religion, national origin, disability, or familial status. The types of limitations sought by the Ambler group are

discriminatory and protected by the Fair Housing Act. People have the right to live where they choose without regard for whether or not the housing is



**IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST WHILE SEARCHING FOR A HOME,**

**CALL US AT:  
 (215) 576-7711**

that misinformation is spread. Telling the story to the media in a factual, quick way is crucial in addressing and de-escalating concerns.

In Ambler, the Borough responded cor-

supported by non - profit housing agencies or homebuyer's assistance programs.

## FAIR HOUSING PRESENTATIONS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

The Fair Housing Council offers presentations, workshops, and trainings on fair housing and housing-related issues. We offer our assistance to: community groups, housing providers (realtors, landlords, property managers), businesses or schools/children's programs.

Generally the topics covered are:

- overview of fair housing laws
- housing providers' fair housing responsibilities;
- consumers' fair housing rights;
- the rights of disabled persons regarding reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications;
- the rights of families with children;
- consultation on affordable housing
- how to go about searching for a home to rent;
- general homebuying counseling; and
- diversity workshops.

Most of the programs offered are free of charge.

**If you would like to arrange for such a program, please call our office at: (215) 576-7711.**

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## FAIR HOUSING SCHOOL PROGRAM

Since 1997 we have held our annual Fair Housing children's program on combating housing discrimination. T-shirts have been made of the winning posters every year. All the t-shirts are available for \$10 and come in various sizes. Call for details & orders.

The newest design was created by Rebecca Normile, 6th Grade, Elkins Park School—the 2001 winner!!!

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Choose One— T-shirt

SIZE: \_\_\_ Small \_\_\_ Large \_\_\_ X-Large

### MEMBERSHIP RATES:

r Individual (\$25)

r Nonprofit Org. (\$35)

r Corporate (\$50)

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...**

FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: Requesting Reasonable Accommodations

## GRANT UPDATES—

### WOMENS WAY

We recently received our first grant from **WOMENS WAY**, an agency that supports organizations whose programs are run by women, for women. Our funding will support our outreach program of placing public service announcements on the SEPTA busses that travel in and around Montgomery County.

### BOROUGH OF NORRISTOWN

The Council is pleased to have continuous support from the Borough of Norristown through a renewed Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The Council will continue its outreach efforts and awareness campaign combating blockbusting and predatory lending particularly in the low-income neighborhoods of Norristown.

### LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP

We are also pleased to have the ongoing support from Lower Merion Township again through a renewed CDBG grant. We will continue our fair housing educational activities—consumer workshops, housing provider compliance trainings community awareness programs—as well as provide counseling and advocacy.

**Thanks!!**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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