Determined to Live Independently
By Jennifer Metzger Kimura

I often write about clients who experience discrimination based on race/color or familial status (the presence in a family of children under the age of 18). However, housing discrimination based on disability is unfortunately on the rise. The National Fair Housing Alliance noted that in 2011, both private and public fair housing organizations reported that 44% of complaints filed were based on disability discrimination. 15% of HOME’s cases in 2011 were based on disability discrimination, and Sarah Brice is one example.

Ms. Brice called HOME after she was refused an apartment because she uses a motorized scooter or a crutch to assist her with mobility impairments. She found an apartment in Lockport, New York advertised in The Buffalo News. She contacted David Castilloux, the owner of the property, and made an appointment to view the apartment. Ms. Brice and her partner, Crystal Gordon, met with the Mr. Castilloux. At the time, Ms. Brice was using her crutch for assistance. According to Ms. Brice’s complaint to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Mr. Castilloux made several comments regarding his concern about Ms. Brice managing the snow in the wintertime. Both Ms. Brice and Ms. Gordon assured him over and over that as a lifelong Western New Yorker, Ms. Brice is very independent and capable of managing in the winter. Ms. Brice fell in love with the apartment.

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HOME successfully closes the “CREATING STRONGER, DIVERSE COMMUNITIES” Capital Campaign
By Shannon M. Koehn

In 2006, members of HOME’s Program Operations & Planning Committee first envisioned a permanent, highly visible home for Housing Opportunities Made Equal. They knew that housing discrimination was not going to disappear, despite the best efforts of the courageous individuals who founded HOME and the dedicated volunteers and staff who fought for equal housing opportunity throughout the years. Buffalo’s continued appearance in lists of the most segregated US metropolitan areas bears witness to this reality. They realized that HOME needed to ensure its continued viability in order to advocate for housing discrimination victims, to educate the community, and to valiantly work towards creating stronger diverse neighborhoods.

Mayor Brown leads ribbon cutting. Phil Deterville, Sam Loliger, Scott Gehl and Shannon Koehn. Together this group developed materials and strategies to execute HOME’s first ever capital campaign, “Creating Stronger, Diverse Communities.”

Scott Gehl addresses standing-room audience

In partnership with HOME’s Board of Directors, HOME’s Executive and Associate Directors crafted a plan to establish a permanent “home for HOME” through the means of a capital campaign. To properly begin the project HOME secured the expertise of Eleanor Drury, capital campaign consultant. HOME then assembled a campaign cabinet consisting of dedicated HOME members John Hurley, George Hezel, Rita Capezzi, Sarah Brice is one example.

Lt. Eason offers prayer of dedication.

What began as a challenge to raise more than half a million dollars soon became an extraordinarily rewarding journey. Members of the cabinet sat down, often over meals, to discuss the new Home for HOME capital project with fellow HOME members. It was during these conversations that we heard individuals’ personal stories of their affiliation with HOME and what HOME meant to them. Through their sharing, each member of the cabinet was inspired to further the mission of HOME and this very important capital project. As the result of our efforts,

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From the Director:  
**THE ORIGINS OF SUPPORT**

*By Scott W. Gehl*

Three months ago I was embarrassed to learn that the long list of “Contributors to the Cause” published in our 2011 Annual Report omitted the names of Lillie and Edward Stephens—two particularly faithful members of the extended HOME family who had just concluded a generous multi-year pledge to the Capital Campaign.

I first met Lillie when she served on HOME’s Board of Directors in the early 1990s, however her name had been on our membership rolls long before and I only recently learned why. Decades ago, the Stephens had met housing discrimination.

In the middle of the 1960s Lillie and Edward Stephens lived in Buffalo on Girard Place, in the shadow of Deaconess Hospital. With their daughter Pam approaching school age, they were confronting the decision faced by countless city parents: should we enroll our kids in private schools or move to a suburban school district?

The Stephens spent their Sundays for the better part of a year looking at suburban listings. Finally, their realtor found a house that perfectly met their needs in terms of size, price and location—on a residential street off Niagara Falls Boulevard. Their realtor made an appointment for them to see it.

But when Lillie and Edward arrived at the appointed day and hour and rang the bell, a curtain opened and then closed again. After a few minutes delay, a woman finally opened the door—just a few inches—and said the house had just been sold. The Stephens suspected otherwise and called the all-volunteer Housing Opportunities Made Equal.

The person answering the HOME “discrimination hot-line” at the Friends Meeting Housing at 72 North Parade contacted the volunteer testing coordinator, who found HOME had a white tester who lived in the immediate neighborhood. When the tester went to the door, the house denied to the Stephens was—miraculously—still available.

With HOME’s help, Lillie and Edward Stephens filed a complaint with the then NYS Commission on Human Rights. While they ended up with the right of first refusal to buy the house they had been denied, instead the Stephens purchased another house on North Linden in Williamsville—where they live still. Like thousands of others, Lillie and Edward Stephens have been touched by HOME. Nearly a half century later, they remember the impact of discrimination and remain dedicated supporters.

**A GREAT DAY AT MAIN-FERRY**

While there might not have been a single iconic photograph to rival Art Kane’s “A Great Day in Harlem”, there were plenty of images recorded on July 10th—as HOME dedicated the Oxford Commons Apartments.

If the groundbreaking had occurred on a day one observer called “splendidly autummal,” this beautiful summer’s day event attracted a crowd of more than 100 to the parking lot at West Ferry and Oxford. Sitting or standing in the shade of architect Charlie Gordon’s stunning addition, supporters heard a succession of speakers—from Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown to Canisius College President John Hurley—talk about the significance of this project and the importance of HOME to Western New York.

I began my remarks telling three short stories about the project—thanks Janet Meiselman, Chuck Thomas, Rita Capezzi, Andrea-Mujahid Moore, and Gilbert Hernandez for having “the vision and chutzpah to think our nationally recognized but financially fragile civil rights organization could take on a project of this scope.”

After other stories of extraordinary care and even heroism and the remarks of Sam Hoyt (representing Governor Andrew Cuomo), Lenny Skril (representing Housing and Community Renewal Commissioner Darryl Towns), State Senator Mark Grisanti, Assembly Members Sean Ryan and Crystal Peoples-Stokes, and Buffalo City Council members Michael LoCurto and Demone Smith, I told the story of the chair.

When we first entered the historic building in 2007, we found that the entire northwest quadrant had been consumed by fire. Miraculously suspended from the charred rafters of the third floor was a kitchen chair, which (in the words of Associate Director Shannon Koehn) was “the symbol of life interrupted.” HOME would bring life back to this long vacant building.

In the spring of 2009, we were holding Saturday sessions for new clients of the Community Housing Center in HOME’s offices near Main & Tupper. While Mobility Coordinator Ken Gholston conducted the sessions, I was the nameless guy who ushered clients into the conference room and poured coffee.

One cold rainy Saturday, several clients had difficulty finding HOME’s offices. I introduced myself that day and—gesturing to a photograph on the wall—said that before long HOME would be moving to this building at Main and Ferry and clients would no longer have trouble finding us.

Among the dozen people in our conference room that day was a young woman named Sheila Gibson who said that as a girl she and her mother often passed the vacant building while riding the bus. Her mother told her that when Sheila was only two or three years old, they had lived in an apartment at 1542 Main—until the building caught fire and Sheila was carried down to safety by firefighters.

If the suspended chair was the symbol of life interrupted, HOME had—amazingly—found a living symbol.

Sheila Gibson honored us with her presence on July 10th. After a prayer of dedication offered by Lt. Kenneth Eason (Chaplain of the Buffalo Fire Department and long-time HOME member), Sheila joined Mayor Brown and a host of dignitaries in cutting the ribbon stretched across the door of Oxford Commons.

That moment marked the beginning of a new chapter in the storied history of HOME.
HOME CAPITAL CAMPAIGN
(Continued from Page 1)
more than 95 individuals contributed $225,000 through multi-year pledges and one-time gifts. Ten local foundations made generous donations to provide the remaining $352,500. The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation was the first to contribute $95,000 in 2007, followed by $2,500 by the Community Preservation Corporation in 2008. 2009 brought gifts including $50,000 from Mulroy Family Foundation, $30,000 from M&T Bank, $20,000 from The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, and $15,000 from The Western New York Foundation. In 2012, gifts included $15,000 from The Garman Family Foundation, $10,000 from The James H. Cummings, Inc., and $10,000 from KeyBank Foundation. Finally, a generous gift of $105,000 from The John R. Oishei Foundation, Inc. made possible the successful completion of the campaign.

This collection of generous gifts made HOME’s first ever capital campaign a huge success—we exceeded our $515,000 goal by raising $577,500! These additional funds will allow HOME to equip our offices, provide for additional signage on West Ferry, and cover escalating construction costs. Beyond monetary reward, the campaign exceeded our expectations by inspiring a renewed recognition of the vital importance of HOME’s mission. HOME remains the only comprehensive fair housing enforcement agency within our region to offer free, confidential, and bi-lingual services to landlords, tenants, and the community at-large. The successful completion of our “Creating Stronger, Diverse Communities” capital campaign helps ensure our ability to continue providing these essential services well into the future.

Please see page 5 for a full list of the donors who made this dream HOME’s new reality!

Save the Date!
HOME’s 50th Anniversary Gala
April 26, 2013
at 7:00 pm
It will be a celebration to remember — you won’t want to miss it!

DETERMINED TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY
(Continued from Page 1)
and immediately submitted an application to rent it. Eager to learn if her application was successful, Ms. Brice contacted Mr. Castilloux a few days later. Mr. Castilloux instructed her to mail a check for first month’s rent, last month’s rent, and security deposit. Uneasy about sending this much money in the mail, she asked to see him in person and he agreed.

Ms. Brice and Ms. Gordon met with Mr. Castilloux a few days later, bringing the requested full amount to secure the apartment. According to her complaint, Mr. Castilloux again raised his concerns regarding Ms. Brice’s ability to manage in the winter. She assured him that she was able to manage very well and she did not require a special accommodation. Once it became clear that Mr. Castilloux was not going to rent the apartment to Ms. Brice, Ms. Gordon started to record the conversation using her cell phone. Ms. Brice told him that his refusal to rent to her because of her disability was discriminatory. He allegedly said that he visited her current residence and noticed she had a carport, which he could not provide for her. Ms. Brice said that she did not ask for a carport and that she is extremely self-sufficient. According to Ms. Brice’s complaint, Mr. Castilloux continued to make reference to her disability, indicating that he it would be impossible for him to install a railing or ramp to facilitate access to the apartment. Once again, Ms. Brice stressed that she did not need any of those accommodations, but Mr. Castilloux allegedly refused to rent the apartment to Ms. Brice because of her disability, and despite her excellent rental qualifications.

Under federal and state fair housing law, it is unlawful to refuse to rent an apartment because of disability. HOME assisted Ms. Brice in filing a complaint with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development which was ultimately transferred to the NYS Division of Human Rights (DHR) to be investigated. DHR found that Probable Cause exists to believe that Mr. Castilloux engaged in unlawful discrimination based on disability.

HOME is happy to report that Ms. Brice recently settled her case with Mr. Castilloux. Ms. Brice is pleased she reported the discrimination to HOME, and said “I want to express my gratitude for HOME being in my corner.” Even though the legal process was long, she is happy that she followed through with it and now feels “vindicated”.

Visitors view apartment.
HOME’s Community Housing Center Faces Closure

By Ken Gholston

If you could live anywhere, where would you live, and why? Often, first time Section 8 participants, faced with a short time period in which to find housing or lose their assistance, will lease housing in areas with which they are familiar. Unfortunately these areas often contain high levels of poverty, crime, racial segregation, and limited opportunity. HOME’s Community Housing Center (CHC) was established in 1999 to assist families seeking housing to explore all of their housing options rather than allowing a lack of time or lack of familiarity determine their choices. In doing so, the CHC fights entrenched segregation and creates more diverse communities one family at a time.

Original funding for the CHC came from funds set aside from the landmark Comer v. Kemp housing desegregation case. Additional support over the years has also come via generous grants from the John R. Oishei Foundation, the Josephine Goodyear Foundation, HSBC Bank, and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. These organizations made it possible for the CHC to help over 3,500 families move from areas characterized by poverty to areas of great opportunity for themselves and their families.

In 2008, the John R. Oishei Foundation enabled HOME to expand their Community Housing Center’s success one step further, by adding a case management component called the Greater Opportunities (GO!) program. Through this program CHC staff provide

ongoing case management services in addition to assistance with locating housing. Very often, uncertain housing is not the only challenge facing a household. It is very hard to find a new job, go back to school, or establish a sound financial footing when where you live is in question. The GO! Program works help families fully take advantage of the opportunities that exist in their new communities, with the hope that these changes will help the client move toward greater self-sufficiency. HOME’s case manager now provides the critical support to identify and meet the additional challenges facing families through ongoing case management during the year each family participates in the GO! program.

The John R. Oishei Foundation commissioned an independent evaluation of the Community Housing Center. In June 2010, Community Development Professionals concluded “HOME’s Community Housing Center...program demonstrates the potential of well-managed proactive integration programs that help families and households to find safer living conditions in less poverty-affected neighborhoods do help break the cycle of poverty when support services are provided.” Despite this proven success and HOME’s commitment to housing desegregation and the creation of more diverse communities, we are now faced with the very real threat of closing the Community Housing Center.

Support for this program is needed because of women like Sara, who entered into the GO! Program in October 2009. Sara was a single mother living on the West side of Buffalo with her two daughters and her newborn granddaughter. She was reluctant to let her seven year old daughter go outside and play because it was just too dangerous. She worried about what her two daughters and her newborn granddaughter could possibly have living in constant fear of gang activity, drug activity, and crime. She wanted to make a change but didn’t know how. With help from the CHC,
Thank You Capital Supporters!

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HOME’S CHC FACES CLOSURE
(Continued from Page 4)

she was able to find a three bedroom apartment for rent in Blasdell. Sara loved her new apartment and the fact that there was fenced in yard for her youngest daughter to play in. Now that she felt safe in her home, she wanted to focus on long-term stability.

The GO! Program empowered Sara to set her own goals and gave her the tools to achieve them. Through the program she was linked with the CASH Coalition and worked on repairing her credit score so that she could eventually purchase her own home. She also found part-time employment at a grocery store and now feels like a real contributing member of the household. Sara’s new found self-sufficiency has led to greater self-esteem and a newfound confidence in her abilities. With this new assurance, Sara continues to work toward various other personal goals including obtaining her GED and even a driver’s license. There are dozens of success stories like those of Sara, which is precisely why this program must continue.

HOME’s Board of Directors has authorized maintenance for the CHC from HOME’s general operating funds only through the end of 2012. While Citizens Bank has stepped forward with a $5,000 commitment to continue this important program, more is required – and HOME continues to seek other donors who believe in the importance of diversity. For more information, contact Associate Director Shannon Koehn at 854-1400 ext. 17.
HOME welcomes two new staff members!

Mobility Counselor Monica Licea-Castro joins HOME from Hispanics United of Buffalo, where she served in a number of different roles, including Interpreter Coordinator, Immigration Specialist, and Assistant to the Executive Director. Monica is bilingual in Spanish and English, and is a native of Cuba, where she received her Bachelor’s Degree in Telecommunications Engineering. Monica chose to join HOME because she believes in the importance of the holistic approach of the Community Housing Center, which recognizes that housing needs often co-exist with other pressing needs for education, financial, and job readiness assistance. In her role as a Mobility Counselor Monica assists clients with finding housing in communities of their choice, and then assists them in identifying goals to address other areas of concern. She offers support and assistance toward the achievement of those goals through the CHC’s year-long case management program. Monica lives in Lackawanna with her husband, Rafael Gonzalez and their two youngest sons Brian and Alain. Their oldest son, Rafael, lives in Miami with his wife Yoanna and Monica’s granddaughter Anna Marie.

Education Specialist Hannah Holden come to us from HSBC Bank, where as a Premier Relationship Manager she assisted international and high net worth customers with their banking, mortgage, and wealth management needs. Hannah brings a host of useful experience to her new role, including in the areas of marketing communications, management, development, and education. As HOME’s Education Specialist, Hannah is responsible for educational outreach to the community, presenting to groups and organizations about fair housing in general and HOME’s mission in particular. She is also responsible for maintaining and updating HOME’s web site and social media presence, developing HOME’s brochures and collateral material, and editing our quarterly newsletter Insight. Hannah is bilingual in Spanish and English, holds a bachelor’s degree from Middlebury College, an MBA from Canisius College, and is ABD in Political Science from Rutgers University. In addition to her professional commitment to HOME, Hannah volunteers her time with St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral and the Frederick Law Olmsted Elementary School. She lives on the West Side of Buffalo with her husband John Harris and their children Eli, Samuel, and Madeleine.