A THIRD YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY

By Kenneth Gholston

Housing Opportunities Made Equal is proud to announce that the John R. Oishei Foundation has decided to provide a third year of financial support for HOME’s Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center, raising the Foundation’s total investment in this program to $562,475 over three years. The support from the Oishei Foundation allows the good work of the Community Housing Center to continue for the next year.

For the first nine years of the CHC’s existence, the program was primarily supported by funds set aside from the settlement of the landmark Comer housing desegregation case. Thanks to a referral from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, in the spring of 2008—faced with the prospect of scaling down services (or shutting the doors altogether)—HOME was given the chance to talk to the John R. Oishei Foundation about the successes of the Community Housing Center and the importance of diversity in the communities of Greater Buffalo.

Oishei responded to HOME’s presentation by asking us to ‘dream big’: they did not want to fund an already-successful program; they challenged us to take our successful program and make it bigger and better.

For many of our clients, it’s very hard to think about finding a new job, or going back to school when where they live is in question. With that in mind, HOME sought to create a program that would use a client’s new home as a springboard to other successes in life. The result was the creation of the Greater Opportunities (or GO!) Program. GO’s case management program is designed to link clients with agencies that can help them achieve their goals—be it returning to school to further their education (University at Buffalo’s Educational Opportunity Center), improving credit scores (Creating Assets Savings and Hope Coalition) or finding a job (The Goodwill). Clients meet with HOME’s Case Manager to devise a family plan, which identifies the goals the client would like to work on for the coming year. The case manager provides regular follow-up and support throughout the year.

After the first year of operation, Oishei was impressed enough with HOME’s progress to provide a second year of support, but wanted to see concrete evidence that the program was making a difference in the lives of our clients. That proof came in the form of an analysis conducted by Community Development Professionals, an outside evaluator hired to study the effectiveness of the GO! Program. As detailed in the last edition of Insight, the evaluation found: “HOME’s Community Housing Center... program demonstrates the potential of well-managed pro-active 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.”

Investing two years of funds from the John R. Oishei Foundation in an innovative and creative program, HOME has helped hundreds of families move from areas characterized by poverty and despair to areas of greater opportunity. The Community Housing Center has helped many achieve their goals and move toward greater self-sufficiency. HOME looks forward to continuing this work in the next year and beyond.

THE “HOME FOR HOME” PROJECT MOVES FORWARD

By Mark D. Evans

Professionals in the legal, financial, real estate, business and construction fields assure us that protracted delays in a major rehabilitation project involving an architecturally significant building are quite normal and to be expected. However, for the staff and board members of HOME, who are tasked with shepherding the “Home for HOME” project through the thickest and maze of the approval process, it seems excruciating.

In fact, a new vocabulary word has entered the HOME lexicon: abstruse. It means difficult to understand and impossible to explain. This project has generated hundreds of telephone calls, memos, letters, emails, forms, documents, meetings, site visits, assurances, guarantees, reports and what seems like an equal amount of hair-pulling and head-banging along the way.

As we go to press, the scheduling of a construction loan and real estate closing for HOME’s acquisition of the Main-Ferry property is tantalizingly close. Once that happens, interior work on environmental remediation can begin and the long-awaited sights and sounds of heavy equipment rolling in will be music to the ears of...
From the Director:

AN INAUGURAL ADDRESS CHALLENGES AND INSPIRES

by Scott W. Gehl

Presidential inaugurations tend to be grand affairs whether they occur in January on the west front of the Capitol or a Saturday in October in Koessler Center. Sitting amid an accidental gathering of HOME members, I was one of nearly 2,000 people who watched as another HOME member, John J. Hurley, became the 24th president of Canisius College.

The platform party included the Bishop of Buffalo, a Member of Congress, the Mayor of Buffalo, trustees, regents, delegates from other colleges, and representatives of the Jesuit Order. Faculty processed into the hall in the order in which their own colleges had been established. Members of student organizations marched too in this inclusive ceremony intended to officially mark the beginning of the first lay presidency in the history of this 140-year-old Jesuit-founded institution.

Beyond the spectacle and the historic significance, there were the words of President Hurley—which included a thread from his speech before HOME’s 47th Annual Meeting six months before. Here are a few of those words:

Father Kolvenbach [former superior general of the Jesuit Order] noted that ultimately the real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become. He urged us to develop students who have a well-educated solidarity, whose hearts are touched by direct personal involvement with innocent suffering, and whose contact with the gritty reality of the world cause them to feel it, to think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively. This is the essence of the promotion of justice.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed it so eloquently the night before he died in Memphis in 1968. Interpreting the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, Dr. King said that the essential question was not the questions that presumably crossed the minds of the priest and the Levite who passed by the beaten man: “If I stop to help this injured man, what will happen to me?” Instead Dr. King said the essential question is the one that motivated the Samaritan to put aside his fear, prejudices and preoccupation...and ask “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?” This, Dr. King said, required us to display a kind of “dangerous unselfishness” in response to evil and injustice. And does that not resonate deeply with a Jesuit university committed to educating men and women for and with others?

To be more concrete, the promotion of justice means that Canisius—here in the heart of the city of Buffalo and surrounded by poverty, hunger, racism, violence and despair—must reach out and allow this “gritty reality” to inform our work with students. All of us at Canisius—faculty, staff, students and alumni—must be dangerously unselfish and ask ourselves: “If we do not stop to help those in need, what will happen to them?” We must bring our resources—intellectual, spiritual, financial and manual—to bear on these pressing issues.

And so today, we must pledge to work with others in our city to respond to injustice, suffering and despair, to engage it constructively, and to provide hope. And while our backyard is vitally important, we must challenge ourselves and our students to go further and to engage the wider world.

It is when we take seriously our responsibility for the service of the faith and the promotion of justice that we become the leaders that our world needs.

Of course, it’s one thing to speak stirring words and quite another to put them into action. No one who has known and worked with John Hurley will question his determination to so.

HOME’s Loss

A few days before receiving her MSW degree from the University at Buffalo, Rayna Grossman began working for HOME in the temporary title Community Educator, performing many of the duties of Education Coordinator Grace McKenzie during her maternity leave. Rayna did so well that when Mobility Counselor Melissa Sommerville requested a maternity leave of her own, we made the decision to shift Rayna into the new title. Rayna functioned well in this new role too.

Once Grace and Melissa returned, HOME was left without a regular position for this talented young social worker. On October 20th, the HOMERS (as our staff is collectively known) took Rayna out to lunch to say thanks and a reluctant good-bye to a colleague who had shown so much ability and commitment.

I’m happy to report that within less than three weeks of leaving HOME, Rayna was hired by Prevention Focus. We certainly intend to stay in touch.

THE “HOME FOR HOME” PROJECT MOVES FORWARD

(Continued from Page 1)

HOME’s staff and board.

When complete, the rehabbed and expanded three-story building will provide more than 3,000 square feet of barrier-free office space for HOME as well as ten barrier-free, energy-efficient, affordable housing units for low-income households. For HOME—which has survived for 47 years in borrowed or rented space—it will be a dream come true.

To report discrimination, call 716-854-1400.
HOME SWEET HOME:
AN EVENING OF
CHOCOLATE AND
WINE TASTING!

By Shannon M. Koehn

It’s been said that there are five basic food groups: milk chocolate, dark chocolate, white chocolate, orange chocolate and chocolate truffles. HOME agrees and we’re hoping you’ll join us for a unique and very special fund-raising event, Wednesday, February 9, 2011 at ChocoLogo, downtown Buffalo’s only chocolate factory.

ChocoLogo is located at 141 Broadway between Elm & Michigan. Chocolatier Dan Johnson works in small batches to create delicious artisan chocolates that are sold in major department stores nationwide as well as select gift shops, hotels and casinos in the Niagara region and beyond. Some ChocoLogo signature pieces feature: Truffles with rich creamy centers naturally flavored with French liqueurs coated with imported chocolate; Nutcorn which is freshly-popped popcorn drizzled with homemade buttery caramel and studded with your choice of almonds, cashews, macadamias or pecans and then drizzled with homemade chocolate; Salty Turtles which has been deemed by The New York Times as “a scrumptious blend of ingredients.” Who can argue with The Times?

Now that your taste buds are ready, mark your calendar and plan to come to ChocoLogo on Wednesday, February 9th for a Wine & Chocolate Pairing Party. For only $25 you’ll be whisked away on a tour of the factory with Chocolatier Dan Johnson, dip and decorate your own chocolate-covered pretzels, sample two wines, European drinking chocolate and more than six types of chocolate including truffles and specialty chocolates...YUM! You’ll also have a chance to enjoy dynamic conversation with Dan about trends in chocolate usage and new products. Souvenir photos and chocolates for your loved ones will be available. It would be the right thing to do!

This would be a perfect way to celebrate Valentine’s Day a few days early and avoid the crowds. It promises to be a very different, memorable and delicious experience, and, best of all, it raises funds for fair housing.

So don’t delay! Register for this tasty tour now. Currently, two time slots are available, the first tour will begin at 5:15pm and the second at 6pm. Tours book fast and can only accommodate 25 people. An additional tour is optional pending reservations. To RSVP contact Shannon M. Koehn, skoehn@homeny.org or call at 854-1400. Free customer parking is available. You’ll have time to take your valentine out to dinner afterwards, if you’re still hungry, that is!

If you’re unable to attend but would still like to participate, you may order milk chocolate candy bars and/or Nutcorn on HOME’s website: www.homeny.org or by contacting the office. This event gives new meaning to the adage “HOME Sweet HOME!”

SCHOLARSHIP FOSTERS YOUTH COMMITMENT TO CIVIL RIGHTS

Now is the time when graduating seniors are rushing to submit applications to colleges and chart future careers. In this time of planning and anticipation, HOME once again fosters the humanitarian spirit in younger generations by offering the Joanne Champion Granger Scholarship.

Ms. Granger was a teacher at Mt. Saint Mary’s Academy, who encountered discrimination in finding housing in Buffalo. She later became a civil rights activist. The scholarship was established in her memory by her husband and HOME member, Dr. Carl Granger.

The scholarship will be awarded to a graduating high school senior who exemplifies the ideals of academic achievement, civic responsibility, and commitment to human rights.

This year’s $1,000 scholarship will be awarded at HOME’s Annual Meeting and Dinner on Thursday, April 28 at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center.

The deadline for applications is February 18. Contact Grace McKenzie at 716-854-1400 ext. 22 or gmckenzie@homeny.org. Download applications and qualification guidelines at HOME’s website: www.homeny.org.
BEING A GOOD LANDLORD MADE EASY

By M. DeAnna Eason

Thanks to a generous grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, HOME is offering a free, comprehensive, Landlord Training Course to housing providers and housing industry personnel. The 3-hour training covers federal, state and local fair housing laws, applicant screening techniques, the evictions process and other topics every housing provider should know.

Although the course has been advertised with much success on HOME’s website (www.homeny.org) and in the Buffalo News Home Finder, it is interesting to note that many landlords registered for the course only after reading the Buffalo News articles that reported alleged discriminatory practices of landlords and the consequences they had to face.

One such Buffalo News article, in the May 25, 2010 edition, (“Rental bias costs landlord $1,000”) described how a landlord in the city of Buffalo asked an investigator sent by HOME if she had children and if her husband were Black. A landlord at a training session this spring stated that she registered for the course after seeing that story because she did not want to ask any illegal questions and because she wanted to know how to properly screen tenants. She has since referred other landlords to HOME’s training opportunities.

Although in the business of providing housing, it is not uncommon for a landlord to be unaware of the laws that govern their business. Landlords are often surprised to discover that they cannot ask a tenant if she has children, or that it may be unlawful to restrict the number of tenants in an apartment in New York State, regardless of the number of bedrooms, or that a tenant may install an additional lock but must supply the landlord with a copy of the key.

As a civil rights agency, HOME realizes that it is not just the tenant who needs to know applicable rights but the housing provider should be apprised of his/her rights and responsibilities under the law as well. HOME provides guidance and examples of proper advertising language and tenant-screening techniques to help landlords comply with fair housing laws.

Training sessions are usually offered on the third Thursday of the month from 2 – 5pm at HOME’s 700 Main Street office. If you are interested in registering for this free course, call HOME at 716-854-1400. Participants will receive a complimentary copy of the Buffalo Housing Group’s book, A Guide to Landlords’ Rights, as well as other resources provided by the Erie-Niagara Tobacco-Free Coalition and the Erie County Department of Health. Registration is required as seating is limited.

Most landlords have discovered that complying with fair housing laws is easy, once they understand the details and see examples of good versus bad practices. HOME stands ready to assist both tenants and landlords in Western New York’s housing market.
WHAT BOUNDARIES TO BIAS?

By Scott W. Gehl

New York's 27th Congressional District begins at the Pennsylvania line and extends north through the Southern Tier into Erie County and a portion of the City of Buffalo. Since 2005, the District has been represented by Brian Higgins, a former member of the Buffalo Common Council and New York State Assembly. This year Congressman Higgins was challenged by Leonard Roberto, an Alden business owner and ordained minister.

What the challenger said

On October 14, Jamestown's The Post-Journal reported on remarks by Mr. Roberto at a town hall meeting at the Lakewood American Legion Post in which, according to the reporter, he "called homosexuality a practice condemned by God."

A day later, Mr. Roberto explained he had made those comments not thinking media was present, but then added he wanted his opinions to be "crystal clear." According to The Post-Journal: "[Roberto] said he is not a 'hatemonger' adding 'God loves homosexuals, but not homosexuality; God loves murderers, but not murder."

"Roberto said he wants people to know his position instead of relying on ambiguities that surround social issues. 'Truth often offends people,' he said, adding the truth of his stance is that homosexuality is not acceptable as people do not have the right to 'corrupt themselves.'"

Sadly, Mr. Roberto is not alone in holding such beliefs—nor was he the only candidate for public office to advocate such positions this year.

Another view

Gregory P. Rabb has been on the faculty of Jamestown Community College for the last 25 years. Three years ago, he was elected Council President of the City of Jamestown. He is also a Friend of HOME.

In a letter to the editor of The Post-Journal, Professor Rabb wrote: "Mr. Roberto apparently stands by his remarks...and seems to be proud of [them]...and, what is worse, hides behind God. I was raised a Catholic...and taught to respect all people and celebrate the diversity of human life and not judge others, lest ye be judged yourself. I was also taught that it was blasphemous and sacrilegious to claim to know the unknowable: the will of God.

When elected to office you are there to represent all the people including those who are different than you. You have an obligation to reach out to and get to know all the people even when they disagree with you. But you never, I repeat NEVER, resort to...ignorant remarks and...prejudicial comments about people you never met or about whom you apparently know nothing.

Mr. Roberto compares homosexuals to murderers when he said that God loves homosexuals and murderers, but does not love homosexuality or murder. Mr. Roberto says homosexuality is not acceptable as people do not have a right to corrupt themselves. He finishes by saying the 'truth' often offends people.

The truth (or my version of it) is to inform people. God, however you conceive of God, made me gay. Being gay is not an act of corruption. Being openly gay is an act of liberation.... Just as there is no Republican or Democratic way to pick up the garbage, there is no gay or straight way to do so. But I know garbage when I hear it—especially after the last couple of weeks when we have experienced an epidemic of young gay males committing suicide and a particularly brazen attack on gay men in New York, in part because of reckless and irresponsible remarks by candidates for major political office..."

Newspaper's response

Whereas often newspapers will air differing views from readers in letters to the editor or by publishing an op-ed piece, The Post-Journal chose not to publish the response offered by the City's Council President. Instead, 12 days after publishing their account of the candidate's incendiary remarks the newspaper published an endorsement editorial headed: "Elect Roberto to the U.S. Congress."

The newspaper wrote (in part): "Without question, [Roberto's] opinions on some topics, such as border control and war, derive from the far right. However, we agree with his sentiment on out-of-control spending, which is putting future generations in debt."

Apparently the candidate's view on discrimination due to sexual orientation (prohibited by the New York State Human Rights Law), neither affected The Post-Journal's endorsements nor even warranted a mention.

In the 21st Century, in what some have optimistically termed a "post-racial" society, fair housing proponents frequently face the challenge of exposing covert discrimination. But in some quarters, prejudice feels no need to hide at all.

CREATIVE WAYS TO GIVE TO HOME

Have you received gift cards for businesses and restaurants that you likely will not use? Chances are they'll expire before you know it. Don't let that happen!

HOME is seeking donations to support our annual events. Your contribution will help ensure our success! HOME's development staff can make a little go a long way. Gift cards and certificates, bottles of wine, nice baskets, supplies of tissue paper, cellophane and ribbons are all greatly appreciated and will be put to good use.

Some HOME members have even cashed in their accumulated credit card reward points to purchase items for our basket raffles and auctions. It's no cost to you, but priceless to our mission.

If you can help, contact Shannon Koehn to arrange a pick up. Call 716-854-1400 or email skoehn@homeny.org. HOME is always grateful for your support and re-gifting is a great way to support our fair housing efforts.
STANDING UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS
JUST GOT EASIER

THE SITUATION:
You’re searching for an apartment and scheduled an evening appointment to view an available unit. When you show up with your two children, the property manager refuses to let you view the unit, saying: “This place is not suitable for children.” You and your family walk away, hurt, discouraged and frustrated.

BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?
At this point, it’s late at night and HOME’s office won’t be open until the next morning. Yet, you have a need to act – your rights were violated, you want justice and you want to do something while the information is fresh in your mind.

THE SOLUTION:
Simply go online to HOME’s website: www.homeny.org, and complete the new discrimination report form. This easily-accessible form is a flexible tool to help you make a report of discrimination at any time. You submit the report and HOME does the rest — investigating the situation, gathering information, and giving you options as to how HOME can best help you to get justice. It’s easy! It’s empowering! And it works!

Don’t let discrimination go unchallenged. Know your rights and stand up for yourself — it just got easier. Go online and let HOME help you to get justice today!

Leave a Legacy...
Housing Opportunities Made Equal exists because of the continuing support of our members who desire to live in a community free of discrimination. For all those who share this belief, there is another way to support HOME’s mission — by Leaving A Legacy to HOME. For more information on making a planned gift to HOME’s John Howland Koekkoek Endowment for Fair Housing Education, contact Shannon Koehn at 854-1400 extension 17.