

INSIGHT

Western New York's Source for Fair Housing News

VOLUME 45 NO. 1

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL 700 Main Street Buffalo NY 14202

Spring 2008

Cases in Brief:

Windsong Place

By Grace Smokowski

Knocking on the door of Windsong Place Apartments was like knocking on the door of opportunity. All the way from New England this family traveled to stand at the front door of opportunity, the gateway to a new life in Buffalo. They were excited about the potential and the possibilities that were waiting for them in Buffalo.

The father was a Ph.D., who had graduated from a prestigious New England University. The family was excited to move to Buffalo to further his career as a college professor. Thrilled to move his family for greater opportunity, the family began their housing search. After extensive research on the internet, the father decided to contact Windsong Place Apartments. The appointment had been arranged by telephone, where the race of the caller is sometimes difficult to discern. The agent had said they could view a model unit, submit a pre-leasing application, and leave a hefty pre-leasing deposit. They arrived as scheduled on April 15, 2007.

According to the complaint, when the door

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Student Housing Charged with Discrimination

By Scott W. Gehl

Kensington Village Apartments is a 928 unit complex which crosses the boundary of the City of Buffalo and the neighboring Town of Cheektowaga, New York. Once predominately white, the complex is now home to increasing numbers of African-American households.

In 2006, HOME received a series of complaints that Kensington Village Apartments was turning away Section 8 voucher holders in violation of the City of Buffalo's Fair Housing Ordinance, which prohibited source of income discrimination. HOME threatened legal action and Kensington Village agreed to accept Section 8—but only in the Buffalo portion of the complex. Soon thereafter, Kensington Village reported there were no vacancies there.

On April 14, 2007, the *Buffalo News* published an article headlined: "Student housing complex planned", which described Kensington Village's plan to create a gated student housing complex on the Cheektowaga side of

the property. Within an eight foot wall there would be amenities available only to students living there. Kensington



Village Apartments would rent by the bedroom, not by the apartment, charging excessive rates for the Buffalo market: \$848 per month for a one

bedroom apartment; a two bedroom apartment would rent for \$1484 per month, and a four bedroom apartment would rent for \$2484 per month. The gated student housing was to be financed through the sale of tax-exempt bond because it was portrayed as low-income housing.

On June 26, 2007 and again on September 15, 2007 HOME posed questions to Renewal Housing Corporation LLC, the managing agent for Kensington Village Apartments, about the proposed student housing complex and its occupancy standards.

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HOME's 45th Anniversary Celebration: Dinner, Dancing and More!

This year on April 15th there is so much more to enjoy than getting your taxes done! It is the date for HOME's Annual Meeting and dinner. This year's meeting has much more to offer and to please a variety of tastes.

Spinning around the dance floor to your favorite tunes from The Old School B Boys is a great way to celebrate HOME's 45th anniversary! From the basket raffle to dinner to the live auction, HOME's Annual Meeting will present a new look toward the

future while reflecting on our past achievements. This year the theme of the Annual Meeting is "Reflecting the Past, Envisioning the Future."

For more information about the Annual Meeting and Dinner or for information on how to contribute to the Annual Meeting, please call Shannon Koehn at 854-1400 ext. 17 or through our website at www.homeny.org. Please consider joining the festivities as we celebrate 45 years.

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From the Director: Movement on Main-Ferry

By Scott W. Gehl

The quest for a permanent "Home for HOME" took a great leap forward in the final days of February when the City of Buffalo committed \$395,000 in federal funds to the project. With funds previously donated or committed by the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation, the Community Preservation Corporation and members of HOME—who have come forward even in advance of the formal kick-off of the Capital Campaign—HOME has raised well over a half million dollars for the project.

The letter of commitment from the Office of Strategic Planning cited the project's potential impact: redeveloping two long vacant buildings (complimenting the Artspace and Packard Building projects on the Main Street corridor), creating much needed affordable housing, furthering neighborhood stabilization, and "providing permanent office space for HOME, [which] serves the most neglected citizens of our city and addresses issues of fair housing and equity".

We have special thanks of the Office of Strategic Planning's Carla Kosmerl and Mary Lesniak, who championed city support for this important community development project. Meanwhile HOME's development team, led by Janet Meiselman of Oxford Consulting and architect Charles Gordon, is moving forward with an application to the State of New York. The odds of success have increased dramatically by the significant funds already committed to the project.

The last piece of the puzzle will come from members of HOME and other supporters of fair housing, who will be invited to participate in the agency's

first Capital Campaign. The dream of a permanent Home for HOME becomes more tangible with each passing month.

Newest faces of fair housing

I have written before that the one constant at HOME is change—and that remains the case in these last days of winter.

No auto-attendant (or even disembodied voice) can compare with the warmth and helpfulness of a human answering HOME's telephone. Thanks to the Supportive Services Corporation, 20 hours each week those phoning HOME for assistance speak with Gwen Neal. Gwen comes to us with a wealth of experience gained during work with community agencies and as a legislative aide with the Buffalo Common Council.

For too many years day-to-day bookkeeping responsibilities have

rested on the over-full plate of Shannon Koehn. As the result of an initiative by HOME's Program Operations and Planning Committee, we have hired a bookkeeper to work with us a few hours per week.

HOME has been incredibly fortunate to find Faith Perry, who earned an MBA from St. John Fisher University, to fulfill this critical role. What's more, Faith is a HOME member who hails from the best of families.

A year ago in the space I wrote about Margaret Brown, a 13 year HOME veteran who had recently returned from "retirement" to become our secretary. Circumstances now require Margaret to begin a period of leave, however we all—staff and board alike—look forward to the return of "Sheriff Brown".

Fair Housing Month Activities at a Glance Come Celebrate with Us!

***March 28, 2008** at 1:30 pm there will be Fair Housing Month Proclamations at the HOME art exhibit at the Gallery of the Buffalo International Airport.

***April 2, 2008** from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm there will be a conference, "Building Bridges to Affordable Housing" sponsored by the Erie County Fair Housing Partnership. Continuing Education Credits are available for attorneys and real estate agents who attend.

***April 3, 2008** from 6 pm to 7 pm at the United Way of Buffalo, 742 Delaware Avenue, a Housing Fair by HomeFront will be offered.

***April 4, 2008** from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Save Our Streets Task Force will sponsor a landlord training session at Belmont Shelter Corporation, 1195 Main Street, Buffalo. Lunch will be provided.

***April 15, 2008** at 5:30 pm HOME will have its 45th annual meeting and dinner at the Buffalo Convention Center with live auctions, basket raffles, dancing, and more. It promises to be a great evening!

***April 25, 2008** at 6 pm the Erie County Fair Housing Partnership will sponsor a free movie night at the Frank L. Meriweather Library, 1324 Jefferson Avenue at East Utica Street, Buffalo. The movie is "The Pursuit of Happyness" starring Will Smith.

***May 5-31, 2008** at the Hamburg Library, 102 Buffalo Avenue, Hamburg, HOME's traveling art exhibit, "From My House to Yours: Children's Views on Fair Housing" will be on display for the month of May.

For more information on any of these activities,
Please contact Grace Smokowski at 716-854-1400 ext 22.

Kensington Village

(Continued from Page 1)

Although families were being displaced and construction was underway, they responded: "The eligibility criteria for admission to the planned student housing development, as well as the occupancy standards have not yet been prepared."

In the process of preparing the complex to be rebuilt into a student housing complex, many residents were displaced including families with children, older people, and African-Americans. According to published reports, 42 children were displaced from the Cleveland Hill School District by this forced relocation.

HOME investigated and on December 19, 2007, filed a federal complaint against the owners, operators and developers of the Kensington Village Apartments charging discrimination due to discrimination of familial status, race and age. On December 27, the New York State Division of Human Rights followed with its own complaint against Kensington Village, Chasin Affinity Companies, and the Town of Cheektowaga, Village of Kenmore alleging the municipalities had aided and abetted the discrimination. Then on December 28, HOME filed three related complaints with HUD on behalf of African-American college students who had been displaced by the development of this housing for college students.

The three African-American students had been tenants in good standing at Kensington Village. One student asked if she could stay in the new complex and was told that she had to check with the local college in which she attends. When she asked at the college, they had no idea what she was talking about and said it was not their place to say where she lived. Similarly, two other students who are African-

American did not have their leases renewed with Kensington Village Apartments due to the renovations. Although offered the chance to move into the Buffalo section of the complex into apartments, they were quoted higher rents for smaller units with fewer amenities. There were few efforts made by Kensington Village to retain these African-American students for the new student complex.

HOME stands firm in pursuing justice for the African-American students who lost their homes at Kensington Village and to pursue the complaints against the complex to the fullest extent of the law.



INSIGHT

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Contributors

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 Kenneth J. Gholston,
 Shannon M. Koehn,
 Grace Smokowski, *Editor*

Cases in Brief: Windsong Place

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of opportunity opened, the two white agents told the black family there was nothing available now, not even to view. The father explained that he had made an appointment by phone only days before to see a model unit, to complete a pre-leasing application and to leave a pre-leasing deposit. Reportedly, the two white agents said that nothing would be available for months and denied them the pre-leasing application.

After a day-long drive to Buffalo, the three children were disappointed and confused. Embarrassed in front of his family, the professor called Housing Opportunities Made Equal in search for justice. He should never have had his family witness such a degrading incident.

HOME assisted the family in filing a federal complaint, charging the Windsong Place Apartments, 25 Spring Meadow Drive, Williamsville, New York with racial discrimination. The federal complaint was referred to the New York State Department of Human Rights for investigation.

Without any findings or admission of wrong-doing, Windsong Place Apartments agreed to market itself as equal opportunity housing, to undertake fair housing training for its staff, and to compensate HOME for the cost of its investigation. Terms of the settlement between the complainant family and Windsong Place Apartments are confidential.

It is unlawful to discriminate based on race and/or color. If you or someone you know has been a victim of such discrimination, call HOME today.



Please Renew Your Membership to HOME by Completing and Returning this Form. Thank you!

Prefix: _____ Professional Title: _____
 Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City/State/Zip: _____
 Phone: _____
 E-mail/Fax: _____

Categories of Membership (check one)
 _____ Students, Limited Income..... \$10.00
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_____ Yes _____ No

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 700 Main Street
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Special Corporate/Business
 memberships are available.

Visit www.homeny.org for details.

Contributions to HOME are Tax-Deductible.

Celebrate 45 Years With Us!

Tuesday, April 15th ★ Buffalo Convention Center
 "Reflecting the Past...Envisioning the Future"

★ Enjoy Dinner, Awards, Dancing
 to the sounds of
 ★ The Old-School B-Boys,
 Winning fabulous prizes by
 participating in our
 Basket Raffle & Live Auction!
 ★ Tickets are \$55
 Call to RSVP 716.854.1400
 by Friday, April 4th

If you missed the "From My House
 to Yours" Art Exhibit come check it
 out at the event!

5 p.m. Basket Raffle & Cocktails
 6 p.m. Dinner, Live Auction,
 Awards & Dancing ★

★ Prizes Include:
 ♦ Autographed Sports & Celebrity items
 ♦ I-Pod with neat accessories
 ♦ Local restaurant gift certificates
 ♦ Buffalo Philharmonic Tickets
 ♦ Jewelry
 ♦ Weekend Getaways
 ♦ Money Trees
 ♦ Fun things for the kid in all of us
 & Much Much More! ★
 STILL ACCEPTING DONATIONS!
 Call Shannon @ 716.854.1400 ext. 17

HOME Receives Community Foundation Grant for \$33,176

The mission of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo is to strengthen and improve the quality of life in the eight counties of Western New York. The mission of Housing Opportunities Made Equal is to ensure the people of Western New York an equal opportunity to live in the housing and in the communities of their choice through education, advocacy, enforcement of fair housing laws, and the creation of housing opportunities. These missions have come together to provide a positive impact on our community and to work together to make positive changes in the Western New York region.

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo has awarded HOME's Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center a grant of \$33,176 to help transition low-income families from areas of high poverty into the housing of their choice within areas of opportunity. The Community

Foundation for Greater Buffalo gave this grant to HOME to achieve its goal of reducing racial and social disparities in the Western New York region.

The Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center has received funds from the City of Buffalo which are depleting. While searching for further funding, this grant from the Community Foundation has come at a critical time. This grant is the second largest grant that the Community Foundation gave out this year. HOME's Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center was grateful to receive the grant from the Community Foundation.

Upon receipt of the grant, HOME Executive Director Scott W. Gehl said: "We are honored to have the support of the Community Foundation for HOME's efforts to improve lives of low-income families and break down barriers which undermine the future of our region."

A Special "Thank You" ...

In the Winter 2007 Issue of Insight, there was an article and photographs of the October 11, 2007 Membership Appreciation Party, "Together We Can Make a Difference."

HOME would like to thank its sponsors for making the evening very special. Without the donation of the venue by Canisius College we would not have been able to have the membership event. Also, People, Inc. supplied the refreshments for the event. Without these sponsors the membership event would not have been as successful as it was.

Thank you to everyone who attended the event as well as our sponsors for being so supportive of our ventures and true to the mission of HOME.

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 information on a making a planned gift to HOME's John Howland Koekoek Endowment for Fair Housing Education, contact Shannon Koehn at 854-1400. Ext. 17 or skoehn@homeny.org.

SPOTLIGHT STORY: A Historical Reflection

By Kenneth J. Gholston, Mobility Coordinator

One of the striking things about the Western New York region is the distinction between words and reality. While we can truthfully call ourselves the "City of Good Neighbors", we have what one might call a "segregation problem". According to the 2000 Census, the Buffalo-Niagara region is the seventh most segregated metro region in the nation.

As a third-generation Buffalonian this comes as no surprise to me. I can recall stories from my parents and grandparents warning me not to "get caught on that side of town" simply because of color. As a young child I remember being with my family in a shopping mall and getting stares from shoppers

and store clerks alike simply because we were the only African-American family. As I moved into grade school and high school, though things had changed a bit. Thanks to legislation and changing social opinions, I found myself in classes with children of all different races and economic backgrounds.

When I came to HOME seven years ago, all of those issues about race, class and segregation resurfaced because of the sheer nature of the program. The goal of the Community Housing Center is to assist people who are living in higher poverty areas to find housing in low poverty areas. Unfortunately those low poverty areas are also highly segregated. Over the years I have lost count of

the number of people telling me that they don't want to move to a place because "we (as African-Americans or Hispanics) don't live there." Despite the progress that has been made those same stories of caution and alienation have been passed down from generation to generation, and segregation remains a problem that many in our community don't want to face. That is what makes the work of the CHC so remarkable. We are helping to destroy the old lines of division in our community, while at the same time transforming the lives of thousands in Western New York-one family at a time.

March 2008: "From My House to Yours" Art Exhibit at The Gallery

During the winter months, first, second and third graders at Poplar Academy, Bilingual Academy and Westminster Community Charter School read the storybook, *Dots: A Fair Housing Tale*. Discussion of fair housing followed the reading. After the lesson and discussion, children created posters to reflect on fair housing and to envision a future without barriers to fair housing. This exhibit is the culmination of the children's vision and HOME's dream of a society free from discrimination. What better way to celebrate than with future generations, instilling in them the sense of justice that the fair housing law represents. The exhibit will be on display during March in the Gallery at the Buffalo International Airport. Thank you to all of our sponsors: National Fair Housing Alliance, Genesee Framing, Butler Library, Erie County Fair Housing Partnership, Royal Printing, and Tops Markets. Notecards of the children's artwork are for sale: a six pack of cards for \$8.00. To purchase notecards, call Grace Smokowski at 854-1400 ext 22. Thank you for your support! Enjoy the exhibit!



HOME supporters viewed the art exhibit.



Students love to see their work!



Opening Reception was on March 1, 2008.



Teachers & parents are proud.

MEMBERSHIP IS OUR STRENGTH!



www.home.ny.org
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Housing Opportunities Made Equal



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HOME'S WISH LIST: 125 MB Thumb Drive, CD-ROM Burner, Writable CD's, postage stamps, volunteers for board committees.

The Town of Amherst, the City of Buffalo, the Erie County CDBG Consortium, the Town of Hamburg, HSBC Bank USA, M&T Bank, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Donor designated contributions made through the State Employees' Federated Appeal, the Combined Federal Campaign and the United Way.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR PATRONS...

HOME's Mission: Housing Opportunities Made Equal is a not-for-profit, civil rights organization working to ensure fair and equal housing. HOME promotes equal opportunity in housing without restrictions based on such factors as race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, marital status, military status, sexual orientation, age, gender identity or expression, lawful source of income or the presence of children within a family. HOME's mission is to assure the people of Western New York an equal opportunity to live in the housing and in the communities of their choice through education, advocacy, enforcement of fair housing laws, and the creation of housing opportunities.

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