Wheatfield, NY has come under quite a bit of media scrutiny lately due to the reactions of some residents and town officials to the development of affordable family housing units at Shawnee Landing. Why all the controversy?

The main players in the controversy are: The Town of Wheatfield (“Town”) and Timothy Demler, Town supervisor; Belmont Shelter Corporation (Belmont); the Church at Shawnee Landing, (The Church); and Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME).

The Town is a small municipality set between Buffalo and Niagara Falls. According to the most recent census, the town has a population of 14,086 which is 97.5 percent White Non-Hispanic, 1.3 percent Hispanic and 0.8 percent African-American. The median household income is $51,700.

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The Church, formerly known as the Payne Avenue Christian Church of North Tonawanda, purchased the 20 acres of land at Shawnee Landing to build a new church and housing. After an unsuccessful effort to develop market rate senior housing, the Church entered into a partnership with Belmont to develop affordable housing which included family and senior units.

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At Last: A Home for HOME

By Kenneth Gholston

Some might call it an ironic twist of fate, but the fact is, the organization known as HOME has never had a home of its own. Thanks to months of planning and some innovative thinking, however, that will soon change and Housing Opportunities Made Equal will finally have its own home. Plans are underway to purchase and renovate the building located at the corner of Main and West Ferry in Buffalo and convert the building into a dual purpose development.

Throughout its history, HOME has always been a tenant. Its first location was in the Buffalo Friends Meeting House at 72 North Parade. In June 1970, HOME moved into space occupied by the Niagara Frontier Housing Development Agency located at 126 Pearl. When they moved their offices to 250 Delaware in February 1972, HOME went along and remained there until the summer of 1973.

From there, HOME moved into 1490 Jefferson, a location which contained the Housing Assistance Center (an organization founded by the board of HOME) and other community organizations. The building remained the home for HOME for the next 16 years. During that time, HOME grew by leaps and bounds in both size and stature—so much so, in fact, that it became necessary to move into a larger space. So in September 1989, HOME packed up and moved again into its current location at 700 Main

HOME’s 44th Annual Meeting: Diversity Starts at HOME

Nearly 40 years ago April, in the midst of some of the worst racial violence this nation has ever known, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act giving to many Americans the legal right to rent buy or build the housing of their choice without facing discrimination. Consequently, April has been designated Fair Housing Month, a time to recognize the accomplishments of the men and women who fought for this fundamental right and to re-commit ourselves to furthering this cause.

Five years prior to the passage of the National Fair Housing Act, HOME was already working to combat discrimination on the Niagara Frontier. This small organization was seeking to expand housing opportunities for individual families through fair housing education and enforcement. Fueling the (then) volunteer staff was the knowledge that ending discrimination in housing would lead to healthier, more diverse neighborhoods. Even without a National Fair Housing Act, they knew that diversity starts at HOME.

On the evening of Thursday, April 26, 2007, HOME invites you to join us in celebrating 44 years of working for a fair and diverse community by attending our 44th Annual Meeting and Dinner. Themed “Diversity...
In the autumn of 1988, a young woman came to work in HOME’s nearly windowless offices in 1490 Jefferson. Margaret Davis, who had been an executive secretary at Trico before joining HOME’s four person staff as administrative assistant, grew tremendously in her job. Her duties expanded from primarily clerical to office management, to bookkeeping, to mastering HOME’s first primitive computer. Her warmth made her a favorite of our members as she staffed a decade’s worth of annual meetings.

As HOME’s staff gradually grew from four to five to seven and—with the opening of the Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center—finally to 14, Margaret adapted well to changing circumstances. Whereas she had once provided all of HOME’s clerical support, Margaret came to supervise a small support unit and to administer our newly installed computer network. There seemed little this woman, now Margaret Davis Brown, couldn’t figure out how to do.

Then in June of 2000, Margaret was suddenly confronted with a life threatening illness. I spent some time in an emergency room on a summer’s Sunday with Margaret’s husband Marcus, sister Laura and brother Leon—waiting, wondering, hoping and praying.

Margaret not only survived, but returned to work before year’s end. While we all enjoyed having her back with us, the fast paced work environment—as HOME literally doubled the number of clients served each year—had become too stressful. In 2002, Margaret reluctantly decided to leave HOME.

No one who knows Margaret would describe her as “retiring”, and after leaving paid employment Margaret took an even more prominent role in assisting Marcus, who heads Buffalo’s Juneteenth Festival. Margaret also threw herself into church and family affairs. And, of course, Mr. & Mrs. Brown became celebrity guests at each HOME annual meeting.

The job of administrative assistant no longer exists at HOME. Some of those responsibilities are now performed by the coordinator of development and administration. However in December both that position and a half-time secretarial position were vacant. When we advertised the part-time position, HOME received a resume from Margaret Brown.

The high point of our January was the return of Margaret Brown—who has proved you can come HOME again.

Uncommon dedication

I have previously used this space to write of the challenges faced by HOME as the result of staff downsizing. Today our budget authorizes 7.5 positions. However, due to transitions and medical leave for an extended period HOME struggled along with only five staff. In the week between the holidays there were only three of us in the office.

Yet, despite challenging circumstances—there’s a euphemism—services continued for our clients because of the extraordinary efforts of our staff. I want to thank my colleagues Andrea Mujahid-Moore, DeAnna Eason, Ken Gholston and Miriam Figueroa.

HOME is fortunate to have people of their caliber and quality.

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### You Are The Future of Civil Rights!

**Become a HOME member today!**

- Student/limited income ................. $10
- Individual membership ................ $30
- Family membership ..................... $40
- Contributing membership ............ $50
- Sponsor .................................. $200
- Benefactor ................................ $500

**Your Name_______________________________**

**Your Address_____________________________**

**City________________ State____ Zip________**

**Phone_____________email________________**

Ask about our organization and corporate membership packages!

For more information: 854-1400 ext. 17 or www.homeny.org

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**I Want To Leave A Legacy of Civil Rights Support**

- I’ve include HOME in my estate plan
- Please send information on how I can include HOME in my estate plan

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**From the Director: You Can Come Home Again**

By Scott W. Gehl

YOU ARE THE FUTURE OF CIVIL RIGHTS!

Become a HOME member today!
When the Numbers Just Don’t Add Up

By DeAnna Eason

According to HOME’s end of the year statistical report, the number of reported incidents of housing bias in our community increased 34% (from 165 to 223) from 2005 to 2006. Although we are pleased that more people are reporting discrimination, we believe that the number of reports we receive is only the tip of the iceberg compared with the number of people who have experienced housing discrimination.

The numbers

Reports of discrimination based on religion, marital status, familial status and disability decreased from 2005, incidents of racial bias increased by 42% and national origin 86%. The largest growth was found in reported incidents of source of income discrimination which rose 447%.

The most probable explanation for this increase is the introduction of the Buffalo Fair Housing Ordinance that prohibits “the refusal to sell, rent, lease ...or otherwise to deny or withhold from any person ...housing accommodations...” due to source of income. Source of income is defined as: “Payments from a lawful occupation or employment, as well as other payments including, but not limited to, public assistance, supplemental security income, pensions, annuities, unemployment benefits, government subsidies such as Section 8 or other housing subsidies.”

Of the 223 reports of discrimination, 16 complaints were filed with the United States Division of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and 31 were successfully conciliated with staff intervention. While most of the reported incidents occurred in Buffalo, 47 happened in Erie County (outside of Buffalo) and 18 in other counties.

The reality

As HOME’s investigation coordinator, I monitor newspapers, websites, and apartment rental magazines for discriminatory ads. Unfortunately, each week I find ads that discriminate even though the advertiser may use subtle language. For example: the phrase “students preferred” is easily translated to “no minor children”; “no pets or animals allowed” could be read as “not available to any person with a disability needing a service or companion animal” and “request working tenants” generally means “I will not accept Section 8 or social services”.

Am I the only person reading these ads? Absolutely not! These ads fill the classified sections. They deny housing not just to individuals, but to entire categories of home seekers. These ads are read daily by potential renters who, for whatever the reason, do not call to report discrimination, they just move on to the next ad.

These statistics from HOME’s report include only the clients who contacted HOME. The numbers do not include the people who were denied housing because of membership in a protected class but did not recognize the signs of discrimination. They do not include people who felt they were discriminated against but did not know what to do with that feeling, nor people who knew they were being discriminated against but believed the need to find adequate housing was more urgent for them than pursuing a complaint.

Anecdotal evidence of unreported bias incidents is heard during nearly every fair housing presentation. HOME staff conducts well over 100 fair housing presentations each year. When examples of how to detect discrimination are given, the meeting could easily turn into a mini-testimonial as clients recognize that they have experienced similar discriminatory treatment. Given that in every presentation at least two or three people have been victims of discrimination, why then don’t our statistics reflect these numbers? Something just isn’t adding up.

This discrepancy between anecdotal and reported incidence of bias is reflected in national statistics. According to a study conducted by the National Fair Housing Alliance in 2006, of the estimated 3.7 million incidents of discrimination that occur annually, less than one percent are actually reported.

How many people saw the ad in the community newspaper that advertised a 3 bedroom apartment as being perfect for a young married couple just starting out? Maybe HOME received a call from an individual who saw the ad and felt that her children were not welcome to live there, but what about the 10 – 20 other families who eliminated that housing choice because they felt excluded? What about all of the potential applicants for the Wheatfield housing project? How many people who need good housing are turned away because certain residents of the town don’t want them as neighbors?

Yes discrimination is still running rampant in Western New York, and yes, the agency’s call volume has increased by one third over the last year, but do these numbers add up? Not at all.
Show Your Support For . . .

At HOME’s 44th Annual Meeting
“Diversity Starts at HOME”
April 26, 2007 • 5:30pm • The Buffalo Convention Center

Place an advertisement in the souvenir journal.

AD DEADLINE: Friday, April 6, 2007

- FULL PAGE INSIDE COVERS (Front or Back) ................. approx. 5” x 8” .......... $200
- FULL PAGE ........................................................................ approx. 5” x 8” .......... $150
- HALF PAGE ....................................................................... approx. 4” x 5” .......... $80
- QUARTER PAGE .............................................................. approx. 4” x 2½” .......... $50

Please Attach Your Camera-Ready Copy (Kindly call to confirm dimensions).
or we will design an ad for you — Please write your ad copy below:
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

ORDER TICKETS!

TICKET DEADLINE: Monday, April 16, 2007

(Check one): 
- $50 Per Person
- $75 Silver Patron
- $150 Gold Patron
- $250 Platinum Patron
- $500 Table of Ten

(Please Print)
First Name: ___________________________________________ Last Name: ____________________________
Title: _______________________________________________________
Corporation Name: ___________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________________
City: __________________________________ State: _______ Zip Code: _______
Phone ( ) ___________________________ E-mail: __________________________

Please make checks payable to: HOME, INC.
and mail to: 700 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14202 • 716.854.1400 • 716.854.1140 Fax • www.homeny.org
HOME Charges Wheatfield with Discrimination

(Continued from Page 1)

housing units with rents ranging from $400 - $575 per month without subsidies. Town leaders were initially receptive, and for about two years, the project underwent an extensive site plan review after which the Town Board and Supervisor Demler granted all the requisite approvals and building permits to begin construction.

Soon after construction started, some residents of the town began questioning Town officials about the project. Anonymous flyers and letters went out stating the need to “freeze the Shawnee Landing low-income housing units from being built”. The Town held a public meeting on December 19, 2006 to address the residents’ concerns.

From all accounts, the meeting was heated and chaotic. According to Channel 7 news, “Residents were angered that the project’s developer switched the townhouse-style housing from low-income seniors to low-income families.” Channel 7 also reported that “some residents received a racially-charged letter which stated “The low-income housing development will bring people of all colors into our neighborhood” and that there was “a heated battle over a low-income housing project”

Rick Pfeiffer of the Niagara Gazette reported, “They shouted, they hooted, they howled and at times, they screamed red-faced at town board members.” Mary Fasciak of the Buffalo News reported, “…anonymous fliers were distributed, some of them asking: ‘Did you know this project will bring people of all colors into our neighborhood, which would lower our property values and be beneath the high standard of living that we are trying to preserve?’” Other concerns that were reportedly raised included school overcrowding, disruptive students coming into the district, increased traffic, and tax breaks for the project.

What color is the law?

At the conclusion of the meeting Town Supervisor Timothy Demler issued a three-week moratorium on all development projects in the Town, but then appeared to apply the moratorium only to the Shawnee Landing project.

In addition, the Town Board also voted to place barriers in the road to block access to the construction site. Supervisor Demler penned a letter to state and federal funders of the project asking them to delay the promised funding. The Town leaders’ actions prompted Belmont to file a lawsuit in State Supreme Court to enjoin the Town from interfering with the ongoing construction.

HOME had serious concerns that ostensibly discriminatory statements and actions had persuaded Town officials to delay or halt construction on a project they had already approved.

HOME Executive Director Scott W. Gehl stated, “For 50 days, our organization watched with alarm as Wheatfield’s town government operated under the color of law to deny housing opportunities for low-income families merely because they might include people of color. These acts of discrimination can not go unchallenged.”

HOME joined Belmont in filing HUD discrimination complaints against the Town and Supervisor Demler alleging discrimination based on race, color, and national origin.

Town representatives were initially dismissive of HOME’s challenge, labeling the organization “flaky.” As this issue of Insight is going to press, settlement discussions are underway.

At Last A Home for HOME

(Continued from Page 1)

Street. Nearly 20 years later, HOME will finally move home – to West Ferry and Main.

Like its current location, the new site will be accessible to clients reliant on public transportation. The corner is on two bus routes and a quick walk from the subway and several other bus lines.

The building, which faces onto Main Street, will be refurbished to blend into the surrounding area. The first floor will contain HOME’s offices. Plans include adding a third floor onto the two-story building and developing the second and third floors for 10 units of affordable housing. Current designs call for six one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units.

INSIGHT

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Anne Huiner, Education Coordinator

Contributors
M. DeAnna Eason, Kenneth J. Gholston, Scott W. Gehl, Andrea Mujahid-Moore, Anne Huiner, Editor

So what does this new building mean for the future of HOME? At a time when many funding sources across Western New York have all dried up, these apartments will give HOME a continuous revenue stream that can be used for operational expenses. Additionally, HOME will finally have control over signage in front of a building in one of Buffalo’s growing neighborhoods.

Funding for the project relies heavily on a grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal. If all goes according to plan, HOME will have its own home by spring of 2008. If you would like to contribute to the “Home for HOME” fund, or would like to see the architectural designs for the new building, please call HOME at 854-1400 or stop by our current office at 700 Main Street in Downtown Buffalo.
Starts at HOME,” the event will be held at the Buffalo Convention Center and will feature a keynote address by Bryan Greene, HUD’s Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

Mr. Greene made his first journey to Buffalo last year when he joined us for our 43rd Annual Meeting. His short address to the attendees was so effective that he was invited to keynote the event this year. He was aware of the significance of the Niagara Region to the history of civil rights and urged us to build on the foundation laid by our predecessors as we continue the struggle for civil rights.

Mr. Greene states that he has spent his entire professional career fighting for fair housing. While he was a student at Harvard University, he worked at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination investigating cases of discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. He then worked briefly at HUD’s Boston office before transferring to HUD headquarters in Washington, DC. Before becoming Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, he worked at Harvard University as a research assistant. He then served for a time as an assistant to the director of the National Fair Housing Assistance Program (NHAP), a division of HUD. In his current position, he oversees enforcement of the Fair Housing Act and the Fair Housing Assistance Program (NHAP), a division of HUD.

We are pleased and honored to have Mr. Greene as our speaker this year. He was visibly moved by our client testimonials last year, and we will again be highlighting those experiences in our program. He has also expressed his desire to continue the tradition of inviting clients to speak at the event.

During the sit-down dinner, entertainment will be provided by the St. Martin de Porres Gospel Choir under the leadership of Ella E. Robinson, Minister of Music. The choir celebrates the richness of African American traditional and contemporary sacred music.

After the dinner, elections for the board of directors will be held and awards will be given. Among the awards is the Joanne Champion Granger Scholarship for academic achievement and commitment to human rights. Three area high school students will receive this prestigious award.

Demonstrate your commitment to civil rights and to HOME by buying a ticket, taking out an ad in our program journal, buying a patron listing, or purchasing a table of ten for your organization. HOME needs your support.

For more information about the Annual Meeting, or to purchase tickets, patron listings, or advertising in our souvenir journal, please use the form on page 4 of this newsletter, call HOME at (716) 854-1400 or log on to our website at www.homeny.org.

We look forward to seeing you there.