

County agency's goal: open neighborhoods

By Ralph R. Echlinow
staff writer

A new government-funded agency aiming to bring black and white people together in neighborhoods throughout Oakland County is expected to begin operation soon.

Ann Wettlaufer of Birmingham and Barbara Talley of Southfield plan to open the Oakland County Center for Open Housing on 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills early next month.

The agency's aim will be to get black people to move into white Oakland County neighborhoods and vice versa by providing home shoppers with extensive information on what homes are available in the county. Although blacks and caucasians are expected to be predominant in the agency's work, all ethnic groups will be served.

Wettlaufer and Talley will give home, condominium or apartment shoppers information on housing opportunities in Oakland County. Wettlaufer said that real-estate agents don't always give home shoppers a complete picture of what homes are available in the county due to preconceived notions about where people want to live.

"Realtors sometimes make assumptions about where people want to live," she said. "I think they assume that white people want to live in white neighborhoods and black people want to live in black neighborhoods."

HOME BUYERS' conceptions about other races also play a role in preventing racial diversity in housing, Talley said. "People want to live where their own live," she said. "Oakland County has a tremendous housing market that has not been publicized to a lot of people."

Carol Frick, a real-estate agent with Max Brook Inc. of Birmingham, supports the open housing center, but said "steering" of home buyers to certain neighborhoods by Realtors doesn't happen often. "If steering happens, it is the rare exception," she said. "For years and years we have been inundated (with warnings) not to steer people to certain neighborhoods."

Wettlaufer disagrees. "(A customer) may not know that he's being steered," she said. "We need to educate people before they get to a Realtor."

Frick said that even though Realtors do all they can to accommodate minorities, the open housing center is a good idea. "Certain ethnic and

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— Ann Wettlaufer
Open Housing Center

religious groups are cautious (about moving into certain neighborhoods)," she said. "To extend a hand of welcome can only be a positive thing."

Another Oakland County real estate agent, Julie Nern of Cranbrook Realtors in Birmingham, said agents generally try harder to please minorities because they're afraid of being sued. She said minorities are generally very sensitive and quick to assume that a Realtor isn't trying hard enough to please them. "We go out of our way to accommodate any minority," she said.

The Oakland County Center for Open Housing plans to supply home shoppers with information on schools along with other community information to help them decide where to buy a home. Talley and Wettlaufer also hope to conduct neighborhood tours and put home shoppers in contact with residents of areas they might be interested in.

The City of Southfield and Southfield Public Schools have given \$80,000 to the open housing center, enough to operate for one year. Talley said she hopes to get state grants in the future as well as money from other Oakland County communities.

"WE BELIEVE in fair housing," said Nimrod Rosenthal, Southfield's director of community relations. Southfield's black population has increased steadily in the last 10 years, from 9 percent in 1980 to an estimated 25-30 percent now.

Rosenthal said this is not the harbinger of what eventually will be a predominantly black Southfield population, but rather the sign of a stable, integrated community. "Southfield is integrated, and so far it is a successful story," he said.

Talley, a former Southfield councilwoman who resigned last year, said Southfield is in the forefront of the integration move. "Southfield is what we consider a model city as far as racial diversity is concerned," she said. "It is working very hard to maintain its integrated diversity."

Talley said that other county communities also are becoming racially diverse. "Blacks are already moving into Farmington Hills, Birmingham

and Bloomfield Hills," she said.

The Oakland County Center for Open Housing operation is 100 percent subsidized by local government. Its services will be given free, Talley said. She stressed, however, that "We are not in the real estate business per se. We hope to work with people before they go to a Realtor."

The South Oakland County Board of Realtors supports the agency's effort, as does the Birmingham-Bloomfield Task Force on Race Relations and Ethnic Diversity, she said.



Ann Wettlaufer (left) and Barbara Talley will deal with all of Oakland County in pursuit of open housing.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer



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HUDSON'S

HUDSON'S OPEN MON. - SAT. 10-9; OPEN SUNDAY 12-6.

...commitment to fair housing binds 2 women

By Ralph R. Echlinow
staff writer

A 58-year-old black woman and former Southfield city councilwoman, Barbara Talley, said, "Fair housing has been something that's been very dear to me for many, many years."

She and her husband moved into a predominantly white Detroit neighborhood in the 1950s and "were faced with resentment," she said. "I guess it was just fear."

Later, in the late 1960s, Talley said she was turned away from a California neighborhood where she had hoped to buy a house. She said she was told that property values would decrease if she moved in.

Talley and Ann Wettlaufer of Birmingham met each other 28 years ago through the League of Women Voters but haven't teamed up together until now. Wettlaufer was one of the original board members who started the open housing agency. She resigned her place on the board when named co-director.

WETTLAUFER HAS made a career of fair housing advocacy, having waged a campaign for passage of Birmingham's fair housing ordinance in 1968. She served as a staff member of the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit for six years and now sits on that organization's board of directors.

Both women believe strongly in what they're doing. Talley has a special concern, having seen segregation and racial prejudice from a personal perspective.

"I see the effects of polarization and segregation in housing," she said. "How it impacts upon society. How it further impacts on unemployment, the cost of homes, the inability of people to learn from one another."

Blacks, Talley said, "have been put in a position of always having to prove ourselves. It's time that white people take us as we are. Let's get on with this integration that we say we believe in. Let's forget about the past and decide to live in harmony."

Weekend auditions set for county talent show

Open auditions for performers of all ages will be held March 10-11 for the Oakland Talent Extravaganza.

Auditions are at 2 p.m., Saturday, March 10, at the Oak Park Community Center, Oak Park Boulevard and Coolidge Highway and Sunday, March 11, at the Waterford Oaks Activity Center, Watkins Lake Road between Pontiac Lake and Scott Lake Roads near Pontiac.

The auditions are open to musicians, singers, comedians, dancers and actors. Group and individual acts will be welcome.

"Participants of all ages and skill levels will have the chance to win it up for a variety of prizes," said

Jackie McParlane, Oakland County Parks recreation supervisor.

The acts will be limited to five minutes with a maximum five-minute set-up period.

All applicants will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis, with a \$5 per act registration fee. Winners of each group will be eligible for competition in the Oakland County Talent Extravaganza Sunday, March 25 at the Mercy Center in Farmington Hills.

Prizes will be awarded in four age-group categories: 15 and under, 16-24, 25-55 and 55 and older.

For more information, call 858-0906.