

# Discrimination issue heats up

## Landlords defy civil rights act

By TERESA BANAS

One young "condominium owner said he didn't want to rent to single people because they had wild, destructive parties. The ad read "married couples only."

A homeowner refused to rent his house to two single women on the assumption that they couldn't change a burned out lightbulb and would probably bother him late at night for minor home repairs.

Several newspapers also read "no children allowed." Some landlords reason that children are destructive and noisy, a nuisance to older residents.

One thing all these property owners have in common—whether they realize it or not—is that they are breaking the law.

The Michigan Civil Rights Act, amended last March, says discrimination on the basis of religion, race, national origin, color, age, sex, or marital status is illegal.

PHYLIS MACKESSAN, director of the public affairs division of the Michigan Civil Rights Department, says housing discrimination receives top priority because of its immediate need to the renter or buyer.

The department received 26 housing complaints in the October, 1977-January 1978 period. The majority were based on racial discrimination. About a third of the 26 originated in the Detroit-Pontiac area. Two-thirds were filed by women.

Ms. MacKessan says that although discriminating ads is not illegal, the actual discrimination is. Some newspapers have taken the responsibility to stop running such ads while the department continues discussions about their legality.

She says while race is still the top reason for discrimination, people with children, singles, and the handicapped are having trouble finding rental housing.

Many cases filed with the Civil Rights Department are closed because of lack of evidence, or because the potential renter loses interest. About a third, however, are settled in favor of the plaintiff before the trial ends.

GEORGE WIRTH is employed in the enforcement division of the Civil Rights Department. He says in such cases the complainant must prove that he or she was discriminated against.

In order to gather evidence, an investigator is assigned to check the landlord's records to determine if an apartment was available. If there's enough proof suggesting discrimination, a conciliatory session is called between the landlord and the renter. If the department finds enough cause at this meeting, then the attorney general's office is assigned the case.

The office holds a public hearing and an attorney is hired to make the final decision. The attorney is usually someone who has a private practice.

The decision goes to the Civil Rights Department.

If it is determined there was discrimination, the landlord can be fined up to \$1,000 and forced to pay damages, in addition to allowing the complainant to rent.

A COURT INJUNCTION can keep the house or apartment vacant while the case is pending. Management companies or landlords sometimes settle early to avoid the injunction.

The Northwest Inter-Faith Center for Racial Justice works with the Fair Housing Commission on discrimination cases. This group also receives complaints and investigates them.

If a pattern of discrimination is found at one apartment complex, a tester is sent in posing as a renter. The tester is while if the complainant is black. The evidence is then used in the court hearings to substantiate the complainant's claim.

John Renneis, vice-chairman of the organization, says in most cases, private homeowners do not know they are breaking the law under the Civil Rights Act. Then they try to settle the complaint out of court.

While Michigan law rules against discrimination by age, California law is different. There the courts have upheld the right of an apartment complex to rent units to middle-aged people with no children.

CLIFF SCHURPP, with the Fair Housing Commission, says the judge can keep a case open for a year after the decision is given. This keeps a check on whether the renter is later harassed by the landlord. One possible harassment technique is a undue rent increase.

Janet Cooper, deputy director of the enforcement division of the Department of Civil Rights, suggests some reasons why landlords discriminate.

She says some landlords discriminate against women because they believe the women have loose morals and don't earn enough to pay the rent.

"Some single men have been refused by landlords on the basis of a variety of suspicions," she adds.

According to Sec. 502 of the state Civil Rights Act, children of any age cannot be excluded by landlords. This clause and marital status was just included in the law in 1977.

Ms. Cooper explains that landlords can house families with children in certain pre-assigned buildings in their apartment complexes. But if those apartments are filled, another apartment must be offered.

Some landlords have discriminated against certain age groups, like 12 and younger.

Although landlords can't discriminate, they can still select certain types of renters as long as they're consistent and do not discriminate according to law. For example, a Detroit management company rates its tenants by income level, education level and profession. Each group is housed separately.

A New York apartment complex has been barring lawyers from its apartments for years. It's justified as long as this practice remains consistent. Others do not allow renters with motorcycles.

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## On The LIBRARY Line

By DENISE MOLL

If you haven't been to the library in a while, why not come on in, for this month the Farmington Community Library has much to offer for all ages.

The popular series "Roots" will be presented on Tuesday evenings, from 7:30 p.m. March 7-April 11 in the auditorium of the Farmington Hills Branch. If you missed any of this series on television or would just enjoy seeing it again, come take advantage of this unique presentation.

The adult book discussion group continues to meet bi-weekly on Thursday mornings at 10 at the Farmington Branch Library. Books to be discussed this month are Helen De Rosier's "The Book Of Hope: How Women Can Overcome Depression," on March 9 and "Coming to Life" by Norma Klein, March 23. Join us for a lively discussion, it's a great mid-morning break.

A new offering of children's programs will begin in April; registration for these programs will begin March 17. As always, registration will be in person by a parent from 9-11 a.m. that day; after that by telephone.

The new programs will include crafts, music, science, story hours, Peter Rabbit parties and cooking for

pre-schoolers and science, storytellers bags of tricks, puppetry and ethnic crafts for school-agers.

THE LIBRARY is pleased to offer a new service to patrons at both branches. We now have audio-visual equipment for in-library. Cassette players and filmstrip viewers are available in both the adult and children's rooms for use to preview material or for entertainment. The Farmington Hills Branch also has acquired an opaque projector which will project an enlarged image on a wall useful for either artwork or group presentations.

April 2-8 is a National Library Week, activities in celebration will be many and varied. One special program sponsored by the Friends of the Library will be a session with Joe Falls, author, humorist and columnist for the Detroit Free Press. Plan to come for this entertaining evening at 7:30 p.m., April 3 at the Farmington Hills Library.

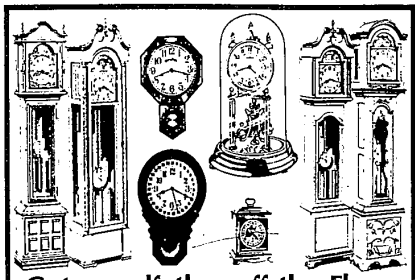
For children, the library will be sponsoring a Bookmark Contest. Elementary school children are asked to design a bookmark in honor of National Library Week. Entry forms are available in the children's room. All entries are due April 1.

### Matisse travels

Michael Farrell of the Detroit Institute of Art will present a lecture and slide presentation on the recent Matisse exhibit.

Farrell will present the program 4 p.m. March 4 at the Oakland County Service Center, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, a quarter of a mile north of Pontiac Mall.

The session is part of the Show on the Road program sponsored by the Michigan Council for the Arts.



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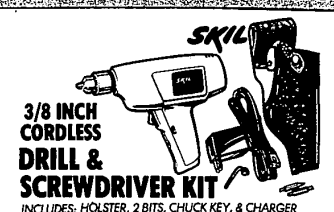
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