

Realtors observe national Fair Housing Month

BY DOUG FUNK

Like twin sentinels, the Oakland County Center for Open Housing and the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit stand guard against discriminatory practices.

They're in the spotlight now because April has been designated Fair Housing Month by the National Association of Realtors. Both organizations are on the job all year round.

The overriding mission of the Oakland County Center in Birmingham is to help individuals find homes in integrated Oakland communities.

The Fair Housing Center investigates specific allegations of discrimination within the metro area and helps complainants recover financial damages.

"We provide for home seekers

information on communities, schools, city services, average price of homes, rental costs and, in more detail, racial and ethnic composition of schools and neighborhoods," said Terrie Perdue, co-director of the Oakland County Center.

"Our primary service is to provide counseling services to home seekers who want to make pro-integrative moves . . . to live where diversity exists, not all this or all that," Perdue said.

"Home seekers have many questions when they want to make a pro-integrative move. Most revolve around the community, questions about being accepted, how to network," she said.

Individuals can call the Oakland County Center (647-0575) for an appointment for assistance in their search. Those sessions last

about 90 minutes.

But the center does more than one-on-one counseling.

It offers free quarterly seminars on how to buy a house or rent an apartment, focusing on mortgages, credit and the application procedure. "It kind of reduces their chances of being deflected a loan," Perdue said of prospects.

A renter's expo has been scheduled 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 5 at the Southfield Pavilion.

Last fall, the Oakland County Center introduced a family volunteer program where families already living in an area agree to help mentor people who may want to move in.

Interactions would include personal visits, tours through neighborhoods, then introductions if a buy were to occur.

Recognizing differences and making efforts to get along are the

keys to making open housing work, Perdue said.

"We need to concentrate specifically on families and neighborhoods," she said. "The only way we can effectively tackle challenges is to work together and meet them head-on."

Clifford Schrupp has been director of the Fair Housing Center (963-1274) since 1977.

"The major practical thing we do is investigate complaints of discrimination based on race, creed, national origin, age, marital status," he said. "Most of our complaints involve allegations of racial discrimination, probably 65 to 70 percent against blacks or African-Americans."

Most are against landlords as opposed to sales situations, Schrupp added.

"The major way we investigate a complaint is the use of testers.

We compare the results of visits to identify if there are differences in treatment," he said.

Complaints have remained fairly steady over the years, Schrupp said. Some 270 were received last year and about half were tested.

"Ten percent of all complaint activity results in litigation," he said, adding that it can take months if not years for final resolution.

"We're encouraged all of the time for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is our success in litigation and response of the courts," Schrupp said.

"Home seekers who think they've been discriminated

against certainly can help the cause by filing complaints rather than forgetting about it," Schrupp said.

"People not looking for housing now can help us by volunteering to be a tester or other services. We're always looking for volunteers. Financial contributions are always welcome."

"People in the housing industry know that their best contribution to fair housing is to treat everyone equally and fairly," Schrupp said. "They would be well advised to clean up their own industry. What we're finding is many people in the industry want to do just that."

Parcel of vacant land stands on own merits

CONDO QUERIES



ROBERT M. MEISNER

We own some vacant land that is near a subdivision and wonder if we have any liability for negligence or attractive nuisance claims for persons that may traverse our property.

The Michigan Supreme Court has ruled that the Recreational Land Use Act's protection for a land owner from liability does not apply to owners of urban, suburban or subdivided land. But the Michigan Court of Appeals has ruled that the mere presence of houses around land does not make the parcel "suburban" and that the RULA would still apply.

In short, often a large tract of

open natural land becomes suburban because of its location. But the court seems to be saying that as long as you have a large undivided parcel of land, it is subject to the protection of the statute even though it is surrounded by subdivided property. In effect, the court is going to look at the land itself and not what the adjacent properties are being used for.

Robert M. Meisner is a Birmingham attorney concentrating his practice in the areas of condominiums, real estate and corporate law. You are invited to submit topics you would like to see discussed in this column by writing Robert M. Meisner at 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 467, Birmingham 48025. This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion. To learn more, please call 953-2047, or mail Box 1871.

Open housing concerns aired

The Oakland County Center for Open Housing presents a forum on "Diversified Families and Neighborhoods — Building Our Future 'Block by Block'" at 630 p.m. Friday, April 23, at Standard Federal Bank, 2600 W. Big Beaver, Troy.

Panel members will discuss community outreach (what concerns should be addressed), education (how should school systems address ethnic-racial relationships), housing counseling (how it would benefit a family), incentive loans (their roles in encouraging families to make pro-integrative moves) and volunteer programs.

Participants include Miriam Blanks-Smart, attorney and president of the South Oakland Chapter of the NAACP; Rebecca Holowicki, director of Oakland County Community and Minority Affairs; Sharkey Haddad, co-chair of Southfield/Lathrup Multicultural Coalition and representing the Chaldean Federation of America; Cliff Schrupp, executive director of Metro Detroit Fair Housing; Richard Lenthall, Midwest director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'Rith; and Shirley J. Bryant, director of community relations of Birmingham Public Schools.

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