



HOMES AND DREAMS

OPENING DOORS TO EQUALITY SINCE 1975:

THE FAIR HOUSING CENTER'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

REGISTRY BISTRO
144 N SUPERIOR ST
TOLEDO, OH 43604

MAY 2, 2024
5:30PM EST

- COMPLIMENTARY STROLLING DINNER
- ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED BY MIKE WILLIAMS ON SAX
- CASH BAR



Celebrating Homes and Dreams at our Annual Fundraiser

We invite you to join us at our annual fundraiser, held at Registry Bistro, for an evening of fine dining and fun with entertainment provided by local artist Mike Williams on Sax. Each ticket purchase will provide you with a strolling dinner and access to a cash bar.

Together, we can make a difference by promoting fair housing and ensuring equal opportunities for all. Let's celebrate our achievements, share inspiring stories, and pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future.

[Purchase Your Tickets Here](#)

Lucas County Commissioners Give Their Insight on the State of Fair Housing



Recently, The Fair Housing Center had the opportunity to sit down with all three Lucas County Commissioners and interview them about the significance of the Fair Housing Act. We also

received their insight into what Lucas County can do to continue fighting housing discrimination in our communities. Here is what they had to say:

Q. In your opinion, what does "Fair Housing" mean?

Anita Lopez: That every individual, regardless of their background, gets to enjoy their dwelling, their home, and being king or queen of their castle. To have the right to live anywhere and be offered the same services.

Pete Gerken: Where fair housing becomes fair housing is when people have equal chances to access the same housing opportunities as everybody else, and there is certainly a class divide within this issue. It means establishing equity for people who don't have it so housing can become fair.

Lisa Sobecki: Fair housing to me means that every resident in Lucas County has an equal opportunity to seek housing where they choose, and they aren't discriminated against based on who they are.

Q. Housing discrimination is still widespread, and complaints of housing discrimination across the nation and locally have increased in recent years. What can Lucas County do to help with the enforcement of fair housing laws and reduce housing discrimination?

Anita Lopez: First, we must fund the correct organizations. Second, a great thing would be partnering with the state of fair housing in the community and showing people the number of cases we are seeing, the most atrocious cases we see, and the most simplistic that people may not recognize as discrimination.

Pete Gerken: Enforcement is about supporting the people and making them aware that they have those powers, and we need to identify those groups, such as the City of Toledo Code, inspectors, and the health department. I think we have to set an example that we are in the room, bring resources, money, and reputation, and use that platform to hold people accountable.

Lisa Sobecki: First, I think we all understand a lot of work needs to be done. When we look at COVID-19 and look through there, everyone came together to really tackle major issues. We must keep that momentum going and continue working together toward our common goals.

Q. What do you think are the biggest barriers to fair housing choice in Lucas County today?

Anita Lopez: I think, unfortunately, the historical decisions that had been made and the steering practices have kept us as a very segregated community. I don't think we have done enough to peel back all of the harm that happened when there were restrictions in covenants and deeds of who you could sell property to and that you couldn't own property if you were a member of certain protected classes. We haven't formally pushed those out to try and right those wrongs.

Pete Gerken: We have an extreme lack of housing stock. We are working hard at the county level and partnering with the city to create more housing. We have a housing problem in Lucas County, and so does everywhere else, but I'm just worried that we don't have enough of it here. We need affordable housing, we need public housing that is quality, and we need more market-rate housing. This is something we did invest in with our ARPA funding.

Lisa Sobecki: Bias. There are flaws in our enforcement systems. It's a lingering bias that leads landlords to continue to discriminate in a number of creative ways.

Q. If you could add one protected class at a state or federal level, what would it be?

Anita Lopez: Being a member of a union or organized labor members.

Pete Gerken: Persons in poverty.

Lisa Sobecki: Source-of-Income.

Q. Many people are surprised to hear that the Black homeownership rate is lower today—and the gap between the white homeownership rate and the Black homeownership rate is wider today—than it was at the time of the passage of the Fair Housing Act. What do you think Lucas County can do to change this trend?

Anita Lopez: I believe it goes back to the fact that we haven't peeled back the layers to really address the housing gap that exists. The county could easily buy down points on a mortgage and use funds to make it available to individuals who may have been victims of housing discrimination so that they can have affordable mortgages.

Pete Gerken: The county needs to put our money into things like financial opportunity centers and give protections for people who want to transition from tenant housing to homeownership. We need to work on the homelessness and eviction crisis in our communities.

Lisa Sobecki: First, we need to continue to crack down on housing discrimination in our community. We also need to be intentional and equitable about how we fund different community sources. We can also help empower minority business owners and ensure equality within the workforce exists.

Q. One of the most common complaints we receive at The Fair Housing Center is from tenants with concerns about housing conditions that are often caused by unresponsive or absentee landlords. What can Lucas County do to further help address these issues?

Anita Lopez: Right now, there are so many hoops that tenants have to jump through, and if we can eliminate those barriers we could start to solve these conditions issues faster. We need to do a better job of educating individuals on how to write complaints to their landlords and how they can file their rent into escrow. We could also use more housing courts. We need more than just one housing court, and we need it to be mobile. That way, the judges can go to these properties that are in disrepair, and the tenants can file all of the necessary paperwork on-site at the mobile court.

Pete Gerken: We need to stand in partnership with the city and the federal government to help with these issues and penalize the local bad actors as well as these out-of-town absentee landlords. Problems only get solved through coalitions. No one agency or one form of government has all the tools. We need the community, organizations, and local, state, and federal government officials to all come to the table to help solve these persistent issues.

Lisa Sobecki: I often hear about out-of-state investors who are not taking care of their properties. We need to make sure that we have easy access to find these landlords so that tenants aren't living in deplorable conditions while we wait and try to track down an owner across the country who is operating under an LLC.

Q. If you could do one thing to advance the fair housing movement in our community, what would it be?

Anita Lopez: We need to continue to break down the barriers that so many individuals in our community still face. We need to educate potential renters and buyers on their rights and equip them with knowledge of the law.

Pete Gerken: I want people to recognize that the Fair Housing Act has a voice and power. Power seeds nothing without a demand, and the demand has to be credible. I would also like to see landlords calling into The Fair Housing Center for education to understand what their responsibilities are under the law.

Lisa Sobecki: Education and engage the community. Until you need to use fair housing, let's face it, people don't think about it or even know about it. We need to do better as leaders in our community to talk about fair housing, bring light to this issue, and direct people to the correct resources in the community.

Justice for the People



Accusations turned Accommodations



The complainant, a person with multiple physical disabilities who had been residing in a group home, embarked on a journey toward independence as part of their physical recovery. Despite the challenges in finding suitable housing, their dedicated case manager located a unit in a senior housing complex.

The challenges began on the first night when the police were called due to a noise complaint about the complainant's music. Despite his efforts to be respectful, the incident foreshadowed a series of conflicts with his new neighbors. A birthday celebration for their child turned into a slumber party, resulting in warnings and disputes with the management.

Facing the prospect of eviction, the complainant came to The Fair Housing Center seeking help with filing a reasonable accommodation request for more time to find suitable housing due to his disabilities. Working with our Fair Housing Specialist an agreement was reached and the case was successfully resolved and allowed them to stay until they could secure a more suitable living situation.

Reasonable Accommodations Elevate the Rights of Everyone in the Building



The complainant, alongside fellow residents, faced the unsettling prospect of losing access to the elevator due to potential damages. A notice declared that elevator usage would be suspended until the responsible party was identified, coupled with mandatory meetings for all residents.

The complainant, grappling with both mobility and mental health challenges, came to The Fair Housing Center seeking two reasonable accommodations:

unrestricted elevator access and exemption from mandatory meetings. The Fair Housing Center quickly got in touch with the property management company. To everyone's surprise, the management company was unaware of the threat of elevator restrictions and mandatory meetings. Following advocacy on behalf of the complainant, both accommodations were granted. A letter addressed to all residents not only rescinded the threatened elevator access removal and canceled the mandatory meetings but also assured uninterrupted elevator use for everyone at the property.

To learn more about how individuals with disabilities can advocate for their housing rights, please click the button below.

[Disability Rights Brochure](#)



Community Reinvestment Act 101

In January we were able to work with the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the FDIC, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. They were able to help us host a workshop around the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). The workshop helped take an in-depth look at the CRA, its objectives, and the role it plays in encouraging community development. Through this workshop, the regulatory agencies were able to give our local nonprofit leaders the knowledge and tools to navigate the CRA landscape.



Are You Ready to Be an Ambassador for Justice?

Testing is an investigative tool using trained individuals to gather credible information about housing practices. Like mystery shoppers, testers pose as renters or buyers of real estate to determine whether unlawful housing discrimination is occurring. This work is vital to ensure equal housing opportunities in our community. The valuable experience of being a tester allows you to give back to the community and serve in the fight for justice.

The Fair Housing Center is currently recruiting testers. We are looking for diverse individuals of all backgrounds. Our upcoming tester trainings are scheduled for:

- **Saturday, March 16, 2024, from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**
- **Tuesday, April 23, 2024, from 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.**
- **Saturday, May 18, 2024, from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

All trainings are held at The Fair Housing Center, 326 N. Erie St. Toledo, Ohio 43604. For more information or to sign up, contact Jacqueline Banks, Testing Coordinator/Fair Housing Investigator, at 419-243-6163 ext. 114 or jbanks@toledofhc.org.

[View Our Testing Brochure Here!](#)

[For more information visit our website](#)

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