

GRHC Conducts Rent Survey

The GRHC is conducting a Fair Market Rent (FMR) Survey to get data we can use to make HUD aware of the gap between HUD-established voucher program FMRs and actual rents in our competitive marketplace. Details on page 2!

New MBE/WBE/SBE Policy

The Housing Commission has established a new policy that will help to ensure the GRHC offers equal opportunity to vendors that may struggle to compete with more established companies. Details on page 2!

Bobbie Butler Community Center Dedication Event

The Community Center at Creston Plaza Apartments was renamed in honor of retired Housing Commission President Bobbie Butler during a festive late-July celebration. Details on page 3!



GRAND RAPIDS
HOUSING COMMISSION

NEWS

Fall 2022

The GRHC's Award of Merit was presented during NAHRO's National Conference in San Diego. Pictured from left: NAHRO Senior Vice President George Guy, NAHRO CEO Mark Thiele, GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames, GRHC Director of Asset Management Felicia Clay, GRHC Asset Manager Ufoma Johnson, NAHRO President Patricia Wells



GRHC Earns National Award for Antoine Court Apartments Innovations

The GRHC was honored to receive a 2022 Award of Merit from the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), a housing and community development advocacy organization that supports affordable housing nationwide. The award is in the category "Program Innovation: Affordable Housing" in recognition of our Antoine Court Apartments development project; the 50-unit, \$13.5 million development opened in October 2021.

Antoine Court is innovative in a number of areas:

- Project financing utilized both public and private resources. Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) attracted private investment, and the GRHC also used monies from the HUD Capital Fund program to fill the gap between funds in hand and the total project cost.
- The development design uses innovative approaches to meet the needs of residents who are senior or who have a disability; the design incorporates five barrier-free units as well as zero-step entryways, lever door handles and wide entrances on all units.

- Antoine Court construction used green building materials and energy-efficient windows, doors and appliances. The development is LEED Gold Certified.
- The development has a preference for applicants who are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and this preference is reflected in the tiles that decorate the front entryway in the colors of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.
- Antoine Court Apartments is innovative in its focus on providing housing affordability and stability to some of our community's most vulnerable households: low-income veterans, seniors, people with disabilities and those experiencing chronic homelessness. This is accomplished through not only a building design that supports their needs but also the incorporation of on-site services that include assessment and case management provided by GRHC staff social workers as well as community partner organizations.

More information about Antoine Court Apartments:
www.grhousing.org/antoine-court-apartments.php

Housing Commission Conducts Kent County Fair Market Rent Survey



The GRHC has contracted with the research firm Econometrica to distribute a Fair Market Rent Survey to 25,000 Kent County households. The purpose of the survey is to collect data that reflects the actual market rental rates within the county; the data the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) used to calculate the 2022 Fair Market Rent (FMR) schedule for federally funded housing voucher programs was gathered in 2015-2019 and resulted in a maximum rent allowance that is significantly lower than what would be competitive in our current marketplace. The GRHC has been granted a temporary waiver to raise the allowable rent for its programs to 120 percent of applicable FMR—the maximum increase allowed by HUD—yet still many GRHC voucher program participants struggle to find housing.

“Only about 40 percent of the families who’ve received a rental subsidy through

our Housing Choice Voucher program during the past year have been able to find an affordable rental unit within the time frame prescribed by the program,” said GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. She noted that “affordable” rent is generally deemed to be not more than 30 percent of household income and that assisted households’ struggle to find affordable housing is in line with the findings of a 2020 housing needs assessment prepared for the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce which showed that more than half of all families renting housing in Grand Rapids pay more than 30 percent of their household income on rent and almost a third spend more than half of their income.

Reames noted that HUD recently published FMRs for Federal Fiscal Year 2023, which began October 1; in calculating these FMRs, HUD altered its

methodology to use additional private-sector data, with the goal of generating rent limits that more accurately reflect market conditions. Early GRHC survey results indicate that the Housing Commission will need FMRs three percentage points above the new HUD limits to make GRHC residents competitive with other families seeking rental housing.

Reames said the Housing Commission expects to have survey results finalized by late October. The Commission will then compare the new HUD Kent County FMRs with the GRHC’s FMR survey data and will work with HUD and affordable housing advocates to request that local HUD rent limits be adjusted as needed to reflect the actual rents in our very competitive housing market.

Watch for an update in the winter edition of this newsletter.

New Policy Supports Equal Opportunity for Minority- and Women-Owned Businesses



The Housing Commission recently approved a new Minority Business Enterprise/Women’s Business Enterprise/Small Business Enterprise Policy that will help to ensure the GRHC meets HUD regulatory requirements related to supplier diversity and also does our part to offer equal opportunity to vendors that may struggle to compete with more established companies.

The new MBE/WBE/SBE Policy has been incorporated as an attachment to the GRHC Procurement Policy and is available online:

<https://www.grhousing.org/pdf/MWBEpolicy.pdf>



Bobbie Butler Community Center Dedication Event

GRHC staff, board members and community partners joined retired Housing Commission President Bobbie Butler and her friends and family for a late-July event to dedicate the Bobbie Butler Community Center at Creston Plaza Apartments. The dedication ceremony included remarks by the guest of honor and GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames, and Housing Commissioner Patrick Miles Sr. spoke on behalf of the Commission. The ceremony was followed by a reception and facility tours.

Constructed in 2015 as part of the redevelopment of Creston Plaza Apartments, the Bobbie Butler Community Center houses community meeting space as well as management and resident services offices. The center has been renamed in appreciation of retired Commissioner Butler's 45 years of leadership and service to our agency. Bobbie was instrumental in the development and oversight of many major housing and client services initiatives undertaken by the GRHC over the years.

In her remarks during the ceremony, Bobbie referenced highlights of her long and successful career as a champion for not only housing equity but also equal employment opportunity in our city and state. Bobbie recognized retired GRHC Executive Director Carlos A. Sanchez for his leadership role in growing our agency's affordable housing programs and services.

In her remarks, Lindsey Reames noted, "During her decades of service, Commissioner Butler represented the Housing Commission as a champion for housing equity in the local, state, regional and national arenas. We appreciate all Bobbie has contributed to our agency and community."

Bobbie will continue to work with the GRHC as a member of the board that oversees several housing corporations associated with development projects.



Pictured clockwise from top left: Attendees give the guest of honor a round of applause; Bobbie Butler offers remarks; GRHC Director of Asset Management Felicia Clay leads a tour of Creston Plaza Apartments; Bobbie is flanked by GRHC Human Resources Manager Mia Guttridge (left) and GRHC Housing Corporation board member Ellen James; a relative offers a congratulatory hug; attendees gather for a post-ceremony reception; GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames and retired Executive Director Carlos Sanchez enjoy the reception; Housing Commissioner Patrick Miles Sr. speaks on behalf of the Housing Commission

GRHC Partners with Fuller Avenue CRC to Host Resource Extravaganza at Adams Park



GRHC Resident Services Specialist Eric Turkaleski partnered with Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church to offer a Community Health Care Resource Extravaganza at Adams Park Apartments. The event included a mobile vaccine clinic provided by the Kent County Health Department, more than a dozen community resource tables, refreshments, and last (but certainly not least) a mobile “Happy Lights Relaxation Station” van featuring a floor covered in Himalayan pink salt along with mood-boosting red lighting and contemplative music.

Many thanks to the organizations that provided information and resources during this event, including...

- Aetna
- Amplify GR
- Arbor Circle
- Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired Mary Freebed
- Black Impact Collaborative
- Catherine’s Health Center
- Cherry Health Heart of the City
- Exalta Health
- Family Outreach Center
- Grand Rapids Fire Department
- Health Care Associates and Community Care Givers
- Kent County Health Department
- Leaves Personal Care
- Making Choices Michigan
- The Red Project
- Reliance Integrated Wellness Center
- Renew Mobility
- South East Market
- Zylstra Medical



All aboard the Mobile Happy Lights Wellness Relaxation Station!



Partners provide a wide range of information and resources, plus raffle prizes and more!



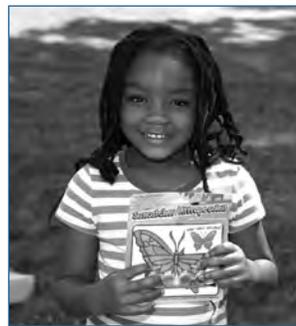
The Kent County Health Department offers COVID-19 testing and vaccination as well as take-home COVID test kits

GRHC Partners with Black Impact Collaborative for “Health & Unity in the Community” Event

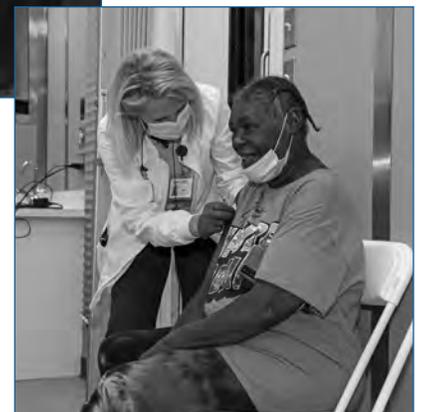
The GRHC joined forces with the Black Impact Collaborative and Cherry Health to host a very successful late-June vaccine clinic and family fun fair at Campau Park. In addition to health care and community services information, resources and support, the event featured a bounce house, children’s games, face painting, temporary tattoos, sno cones, popcorn, cotton candy, a “Dance Off” and a delicious lunch hot off the grill.

Many thanks to GRHC Resident Services Manager Joyce Williams for coordinating this event, to **Leonard Leek and Mainstreet Association** for emceeing, and to **National Nail CEO Scott Baker** for donating funds that made it possible to offer attendees free lunch. Thanks also to the organizations who provided services and resource tables at this event, including...

- Black Impact Collaborative
- City Impact
- Community Food Club
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC)
- Family Outreach Center
- GRCC M-TEC
- GRCC Workforce Training
- Grand Rapids Public Schools Nutrition Services
- Humane Society of West Michigan
- Life Beyond the Horizon
- New Hope Baptist Church
- Steepletown Neighborhood Services
- United Methodist Community House
- TL-Sea
- Vibrant Futures



Above, clockwise from top: A young attendee gets a temporary tattoo courtesy of a City Impact volunteer; Family Outreach Center staff offer information with a smile; a lucky game winner shows off her prize



Above: Cherry Health staff offer COVID-19 test kits and vaccines
Above left: “Dance Off” hosted by Leonard Leek of Mainstreet Association
Left: GRHC staff fire up the grills to provide a delicious free lunch made possible courtesy of a generous cash donation from National Nail



Above: Event co-sponsor Black Impact Collaborative provides resources and prizes; GRHC staff man the sno-cone machine. Left: a tot enjoys her icy treat



Grand Rapids Housing Commission Human Resources Update

Welcome, New Employees

Perla Benavides is an HCV Coordinator at the administrative office. Perla comes to the GRHC from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services where she was a Children's Protective Services Worker. She has a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Grand Valley State University.

Mallory Connor is the Office Assistant for Mount Mercy, Sheldon Apartments and Hope Community. Mallory comes to the GRHC from a position as a Business Office Coordinator for Mercy Health. She has a bachelor's degree in Health Care Systems Administration from Ferris State University.

Geanee Davis is the Asset Manager for Creston Plaza Apartments and Ransom Tower Apartments. Geanee comes to the GRHC from a position as an Affordable Property Manager with The Millenia Companies. She has also

worked as an Asset Manager for Lansing Housing Commission.

Gjenikwa Gonzalez is an HCV Coordinator at the administrative office. Prior to joining our team, Gjenikwa was a Family Engagement and Stabilization Coordinator for Family Promise. She has a bachelor's degree in Human Services from the University of Phoenix.

Keshia Hills is an HCV Coordinator at the administrative office. Keshia comes to the GRHC from the Black Impact Collaborative where she was a COVID-19 Tracer and Navigator. She has also worked as a Foster Care Licensing Worker for Arbor Circle and as a Case Manager for The Salvation Army. Keshia has a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Ferris State University.

Jameila McDonald is an HCV Coordinator at the administrative office.

Jameila joins our team from a position as a Juvenile Surveillance Officer with the 17th Circuit Court - Family Division. She has also worked as a Career Coach with West Michigan Works. Jameila has a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Ferris State University.

Shawanna Thompson is an HCV Coordinator at the administrative office. Prior to joining our team Shawanna developed her strong customer service skills as a Retail Sales Consultant with AT&T. She has a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Communication from Aquinas College.

Mikyla Webb, LLMSW, is a Resident Services Specialist for Antoine Court Apartments and Sheldon Apartments. Mikyla comes to the GRHC from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services where she was an Assistance Payments Worker. She has also worked as a Data Quality Coordinator, a Housing Resource Specialist and an Emergency Housing Liaison with The Salvation Army Social Services. Mikyla has a master's degree in Social Work from Grand Valley State University.

GRHC Seeks Cash and In-Kind Donations for Major Hope Community Renovation Project

The Housing Commission is seeking funding as well as in-kind donations of goods and services that will enable us to undertake extensive repairs and upgrades at our Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing program facilities, which include a 12-unit Service Center and 12 duplex units. Built in 1990 with labor and materials donated by the Home Builders Association of Greater Grand Rapids, Hope Community serves women and children who are experiencing homelessness.



The Hope Community Service Center

The GRHC has identified about \$1.2 million in improvements to the 32-year-old development. Renovations will include concrete work, HVAC, electrical, lighting, plumbing, insulation and flooring repairs/improvements, and roofing and window repair/replacement. Kitchen cabinets, counter tops and appliances are also needed.

Hope Community is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. If you or your company can support the renovation project in any way, please contact GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames at (616) 235-2600; email: lindsey.reames@grhousing.org.

Staff Transfer

Xochitl Jaimes has transferred from a position as an HCV Coordinator to a position as a Quality Assurance and Compliance Coordinator. In her new role Xochitl reviews records to ensure adherence to program requirements and also recommends procedures that help ensure regulatory compliance.

View the employment opportunities currently available with the GRHC:

<https://www.grhousing.org/employment-opportunities.php>

Hurst Mechanical Employees Host “Summer Smorgasbord”



Donations from the generous employees of Hurst Mechanical funded a special Summer Smorgasbord for the residents of Mount Mercy Apartments. In addition to paying for the feast, employees were on hand to serve the senior development’s residents chicken and beef, mashed potatoes with gravy, salad, green beans, rolls and a beautifully decorated cake! GRHC Resident Services donated a Weber grill that was raffled off to a lucky resident.



Many thanks to GRHC Resident Services Specialist Erin Shibley who worked with the Hurst Mechanical employee donors to coordinate this fun and tasty special event. Thanks also to GRHC Maintenance Technician Todd Heyboer and Custodian Will Blackmon for all of their work on setup and cleanup.



The friendly employees of Hurst Mechanical have been treating their north-side neighbors at Mount Mercy to festive events for decades. Our staff and residents appreciate their amazing support and generosity!



Humane Society Offers On-Site Pet Vaccine Clinic



The GRHC recently partnered with the Humane Society of West Michigan to host a pet vaccine clinic at Mount Mercy Apartments. The event was open to all Grand Rapids pet owners and offered great low prices on common vaccines for dogs and cats, plus heartworm testing and prevention, microchipping, flea prevention and more.

Many thanks to the Humane Society for helping our community keep our Very Good Dogs (and Cats) in tip-top shape!

Find us on 

The GRHC has a new Facebook Business Page!

Follow us for the latest Housing Commission program updates, special event highlights and more:

facebook.com/grhousing.org

Please note that the GRHC will no longer post updates on our original Facebook page, grhousing



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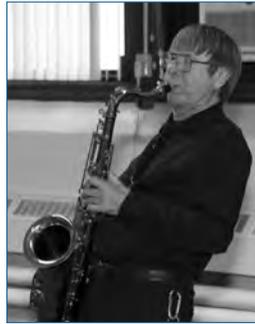
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Senior Sing-A-Long Brings Summer Concerts to GRHC Retirement Communities

Many thanks to Senior Sing-A-Long and the multi-talented Gary McCourry for his recent performances at Antoine Court Apartments and Sheldon Apartments! Gary treated residents and staff to thoroughly entertaining performances of big band, gospel and patriotic standards, with Gary on vocals as well as saxophone, clarinet and flute.



Thanks also to Senior Sing-A-Long vocalist/instrumentalist Martin Zyla for providing a summer concert in the Leonard Terrace Apartments Community Room!

HCV Homeownership Program Orientation Meeting

Registration for the next GRHC Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Homeownership program orientation meeting is open! The meeting is required for participation in the Homeownership program that's available to HCV program clients.

Meeting date/time/location:

Tuesday, December 13, 2:00 p.m.

Wyoming Public Library, 3350 Michael Ave. SW in Wyoming

For more information and a link to the online registration form:

<https://www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-program.php>

Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Initiative Welcomes First Summer Campers

The GRHC's Jean McKee Resident Scholarship program awarded summer camp scholarships to 16 young family housing site residents ages 6 to 18 who enjoyed day or overnight camp at the YMCA's Camp Manitou-Lin on Barlow Lake. GRHC Resident Services staff kicked off the summer fun by inviting the campers and their parents to Antoine Court Apartments to pick up backpacks that contained sunscreen, bug repellent, hygiene items and other camp essentials.



The YMCA offered help with transportation to Camp Manitou-Lin and also picked up a quarter of the camp cost for each resident. The Jean McKee Resident Scholarship was established in 2000 in memory of a longtime Housing Commissioner and is funded through private donations.

Our board and staff are sincerely grateful to the McKee family, the YMCA and all of the Jean McKee Resident Scholarship program donors whose generosity now fosters access to not only higher education but also invaluable summer outdoor educational opportunities.

Grand Rapids Housing Commissioners:

Monica Steimle-App, President; Betty Zylstra, Vice President; Jamon Alexander, Michael Bernier, Patrick Miles Sr.; Executive Director: Lindsey S. Reames

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