

### Antoine Court Construction Begins

Antoine Court Apartments is under construction, with projected completion in fall 2021. The 50-unit development will provide Permanent Supportive Housing to veterans, seniors and people with disabilities. Details on page 2!

### COVID-19-Related Operational Changes & Partner Collaborations

The GRHC has instituted operational changes and has partnered with numerous organizations to safely support our residents during the pandemic. Details on pages 3-5!

### Carlos A. Sanchez Announces August Retirement

GRHC Executive Director Carlos A. Sanchez will retire August 31. Carlos has led the GRHC for more than 36 years, growing the number of units we offer from 818 to 4,580. More on page 7!

# GRAND RAPIDS HOUSING COMMISSION

Summer 2020

# NEWS



Homes for sale, clockwise from top left: 58 Caledonia Street NE (three bedrooms), 431 Grant Street SW (three bedrooms), 816 Innes Street SE (three bedrooms), 912 Dunham Street SE (three bedrooms), 1659 Godwin Avenue SE (three bedrooms), 325 Donald Place SE (four bedrooms)

## Home Ownership Units Available to Eligible GRHC Families

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) has six single-family homes available for sale through a U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) initiative that allows for the disposition of units when the sale promotes operational efficiency and is in the best interests of the public housing authority and its residents.

The three- or four-bedroom homes are available to GRHC residents who meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Household is qualified to rent a three- or four-bedroom unit.
- Household's monthly Housing Assistance Payment is \$100 or less.
- Household is able to prequalify for a home mortgage loan.

- Household is in good standing with the GRHC.
- Household completes a home ownership class taught by the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF). For information about the class: [www.iccf.org/classes](http://www.iccf.org/classes).

Units are being offered first to tenants currently living in the homes, then to participants in the GRHC's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, then to other eligible GRHC residents. Eligible residents will be able to use their Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher subsidy toward home mortgage payments rather than rent.

Interested residents can get additional information and view photos of the homes online at [www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-units.php](http://www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-units.php).

## GRHC Closes Family Site Waiting Lists



*Campau Commons Apartments*

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission has temporarily suspended accepting new applicants to three of our agency-owned housing developments due to the length of existing waiting lists.

The waiting list closures affect Campau Commons Apartments (92 units), Creston Plaza Apartments (100 units) and the Scattered Sites program (20 units). Applicants already on the waiting list for these developments will continue to be served in the order their application was received. Applicants who have moved since submitting an application should update their mailing address online at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org).

The GRHC currently maintains extensive waiting lists of more than 9,000 households each for its Campau Commons and Creston Plaza developments and more than 3,400 households for the Scattered Sites program. To avoid imposing an untenable wait for assistance upon needy families and to enable staff to more effectively serve current GRHC residents, the Housing Commission has closed the lists.

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission will continue to accept and process new applications for other agency-owned developments, including Adams Park Apartments (188 units, adults with disabilities and ages 62 and older), Leonard Terrace Apartments (125 units, ages 55 and older), Mount Mercy Apartments (180 units, ages 55 and older), Ransom Tower Apartments (153 units, ages 62 and older) and Sheldon Apartments (45 units, ages 55 and older).

Applications are also being accepted for a number of partner-owned affordable housing developments for which the GRHC administers Project-Based Voucher rental subsidies.

A Waiting List Pre-Application form and more information about both GRHC- and partner-owned housing developments are available on the web at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org).

## Antoine Court Construction Begins



*Site preparation at Antoine Court*

The GRHC is pleased to announce that construction of Antoine Court Apartments is underway! Located on Division Avenue between Antoine Street SW and Delaware Street SW, the three-story building will feature fifty 690-square-foot one-bedroom apartments, including five barrier-free units; all units will meet accessibility standards and be designed so that they can be converted to barrier free as needed.

Antoine Court will house 18 units for households that are eligible for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH); these are for individuals with disabilities who are experiencing chronic homelessness, with a preference for veterans. The annual income limit for the PSH units will be 30% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI), currently \$16,850 for a one-person household. The remaining 32 units will be available to people with a disability who are age 55 or older, with an annual income limit of 60% or less of AMI, currently \$48,120 for a one-person household.

The GRHC leveraged \$1.4 million in federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to fund the \$13.5 million development project. LIHTC equity is being provided by InSite Capital and construction financing is being provided by Chemical Bank, a division of TCF National Bank.

The GRHC is the developer for Antoine Court; the project architect is Isaac V. Norris & Associates and Triangle Associates is the construction manager/general contractor.

Construction will continue through early fall 2021, with an opening target of mid-September 2021. To view updates: [www.grhousing.org/development-news.php](http://www.grhousing.org/development-news.php).



## GRHC Institutes New Office Protocols to Keep Community Safer During Pandemic

Because many of the residents we serve are at risk for experiencing the more serious health effects associated with COVID-19, the GRHC is taking a measured approach to reopening our offices, utilizing technology to help us safely interact with families, vendors and community partner organizations.

### How to Contact Us During Temporary Office Closures

While GRHC offices remain closed to the public, all administrative, Section 8, Housing Management and Resident Services staff are in the office and available to work with you. This will be the case as long as the COVID-19 situation in our community improves or at least remains stable.

- To contact the administrative office, phone (616) 235-2600; phone extensions for specific departments are provided in the “welcome” message at that number. The administrative office fax number is (616) 235-2660.
- To contact Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program staff, please email [ic@grhousing.org](mailto:ic@grhousing.org) or leave a message at (616) 235-2620. Staff will respond to messages within 2 business days.
- Office hours for GRHC housing developments (weekdays only):
  - » Adams Park, Mount Mercy and Ransom Tower Apartments: 8 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-5 p.m.
  - » Creston Plaza, Leonard Terrace and Sheldon Apartments: 8 am.-12 p.m.
  - » Campau Commons: 1:30-5 p.m.Phone numbers for Housing Management offices:
  - » Adams Park Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2865  
Fax: (616) 235-2938
  - » Campau Commons Apartments and Scattered Sites  
Phone: (616) 235-2879

- Fax: (616) 301-1029
- » Creston Plaza Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2646  
Fax: (616) 235-2874
- » Hope Community  
Phone: (616) 235-2893  
Fax: (616) 235-2897
- » Leonard Terrace Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2890  
Fax: (616) 235-2876
- » Mount Mercy Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2843  
Fax: (616) 235-2851
- » Ransom Tower Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2881  
Fax: (616) 235-2944
- » Sheldon Apartments  
Phone: (616) 235-2860  
Fax: (616) 243-1185

### COVID-19-Related Operational Updates

Staff are following CDC and Kent County Health Department recommendations related to preventing the spread of COVID-19, including sanitation protocols and the use of personal protective equipment.

On a temporary basis, the GRHC is implementing the following changes to our operations:

### Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

- How to get paperwork to the GRHC administrative office:
  1. Email paperwork to [ic@grhousing.org](mailto:ic@grhousing.org)
  2. Fax paperwork to (616) 235-2660
  3. Deposit paperwork in the secure drop box located to the left of the main door at the administrative office, 1420 Fuller Avenue SE
  4. Mail paperwork to: Grand Rapids Housing Commission, 1420 Fuller Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507
- The GRHC anticipates that all

Housing Assistance Payments will be distributed as usual.

- The GRHC continues to conduct initial unit inspections; the unit must be vacant and clean. Emergency inspections for issues that pose a potential health or safety hazard will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- The time frame and procedures for annual inspections and recertifications may change; if you are a GRHC Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program client and are due for recertification, you will be contacted with additional information.
- The GRHC continues to process moves, voucher transfers to a new city, and applicant paperwork when a voucher becomes available and the applicant is at the top of our Housing Choice Voucher program waiting list.
- Orientation meetings and hearings are being held virtually. Clients will receive an email with a link to the meeting and additional instructions.

### GRHC Housing Developments

- The GRHC has implemented additional cleaning and sanitation protocols for all Housing Management offices and common areas. Please wear a face mask and observe social distancing guidelines when using elevators and in any public space.
- All group meetings and activities are canceled until further notice. Computer labs, libraries, craft rooms, community rooms and on-site Meals On Wheels cafés are closed.
- Resident Services staff are available for phone consultations.
- Meals On Wheels continues to offer service to Home Delivered Meal clients. For complete information, please call Meals On Wheels at (616) 459-3111.

*(Continued on next page)*

(New Office Protocols, continued from page 3)

- The GVSU Health Center at Mount Mercy is seeing patients (including new patients) by appointment only. The Health Center serves ages 55 and older. To set up an appointment, please call the Center at (616) 331-9830.
- Rent continues to be due the first of each month. Please deposit your rent in the secure drop box at your Housing Management office. You will be mailed a receipt.
- If you are a GRHC resident and need emergency maintenance services, please call your Housing Management office. Maintenance staff will wear a face mask and gloves; we ask that you also wear a mask, if possible, and maintain social distancing during the service call.
- Application to GRHC developments is online only, with exceptions made for those unable to apply online.

#### Vendors Working at GRHC Developments

Please report to the management office of the property at which you are working before visiting your work site. GRHC Housing Management staff will administer a temperature check and require that you complete a brief questionnaire. We require that all visitors wear a face mask.

#### Housing Commission Governing Board Meetings

Monthly Housing Commission meetings are temporarily being conducted virtually. The agenda for each meeting will be posted online at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org) the Friday before the meeting. A link to the meeting will be provided at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org) on the meeting day. The GRHC will use technology to facilitate typed public comments that may be shared with our board and other meeting participants. The rules that govern speaker comments at Housing Commission meetings will apply.

#### Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Staff Will Schedule Appointments Beginning in August



Campau Commons Community Center

Effective August 6, Section 8 staff will be available for in-person appointments; call 235-2620 to schedule an appointment. All appointments will be at the Campau Commons Community Center,

821 South Division Avenue (Division at Franklin, same building as the Rental Assistance Center). Face masks will be required and strict social distancing protocols will be observed.

## GRHC Human Resources Update

### Staff Promotion

**Felicia Clay**, LMSW, has been promoted from Resident & Family Self-Sufficiency Services Manager to Director of Asset Management. Felicia has been with the GRHC since 2008 and had been serving as Acting Director of Asset Management since last August, overseeing the operation of the GRHC's eight agency-owned housing developments and our Scattered Sites program. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work.

### Welcome, New Hires

**JohnRyan Bajema** is the new Office Assistant at Ransom Tower Apartments. JohnRyan comes to the GRHC from a similar office position with the Inner City Christian Federation. He holds a bachelor's in political science from Calvin College.

**Jenn Boerman**, LMSW, is our new Resident & Family Self-Sufficiency Services Manager. Jenn holds a master's degree in social work from GVSU. She has taught BSW Field Seminar and Chronic Health Care in Social Work courses at GVSU and is the former Associate Director of Community Action House, an agency that serves low-income households.

**Jose Capeles** is the GRHC's new Housing Choice Voucher Manager. Jose comes to the GRHC from the City of Grand Rapids Community Development division where he was a Contract Administrator. He holds a bachelor's degree from GVSU and is working toward an MPA degree from the same institution.

**Kris Endres** is our new Financial Manager. Kris comes to the GRHC from Nutra Food Ingredients where she was the Accounting Manager. She holds a bachelor's degree in management from Davenport University.

**Karry Gaston** is our new Waiting List Specialist. Prior to joining the GRHC team Karry was a Patient Registration Specialist for Cherry Health.

**Katie Head** is the new Office Assistant at Campau Commons and Creston Plaza. Katie comes to the GRHC from Ricoh USA where she was a Print Services Specialist. She has a bachelor's degree from Saginaw Valley State University.

**Jania Lang** is the new Resident & Family Self-Sufficiency Services Specialist for Leonard Terrace Apartments. Jania comes to the GRHC from Wedgwood Christian Services and has a Master's of Social Work degree from GVSU.

**Rosie Sosa-Cortez** is the new Office Assistant at the GRHC Administrative Office. Rosie has worked as a temporary employee with us since last fall and has prior experience as a Receptionist.

## GRHC, Partners Join Forces to Help Vulnerable Families Weather COVID-19

### New Hope Church Supports Rent Needs

The GRHC's Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program recently received a \$4,646 cash donation from the congregation of New Hope Baptist Church, a generous longtime community partner that supports a neighborhood which includes Hope Community.

Hope Community serves homeless women and their children, and the congregation's donation paid off rent balances for these families during a time when many have experienced a significant or even total loss of income. GRHC programs allow a \$50 minimum rent for households that have no income; so, in addition to covering April balances, New Hope Baptist Church provided each resident with \$50 toward May rent, greatly easing the financial stress experienced by families working to attain self-sufficiency during uniquely challenging times.

### Meijer Supports Resident "Hope Store"

Meijer donated twenty-five \$20 gift cards GRHC staff are using to stock a resident incentive store at Hope Community. The "Hope Store" is stocked with hygiene essentials, toiletries and basic household items. Residents earn "Hope Bucks" by meeting established goals and then use these to make purchases at the store. The Hope Store encourages residents to work toward achieving their personal goals and also alleviates resident concerns related to meeting basic family needs.

### Kids' Food Basket Closes School Meal Gap

A wonderful nonprofit organization stepped up to assist the young residents of our family housing developments,



*GRHC Resident & Family Self-Sufficiency Services Specialist Allison Wenk readies backpacks provided by Kids' Food Basket, all loaded with healthy meals and personal hygiene essentials.*

many of whom rely on the school meal program to meet their nutritional needs. When schools closed and these children and their young neighbors no longer had the safety net provided by school meals, Kids' Food Basket provided sack lunches each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the GRHC's Creston Plaza Community Center on the city's northeast side and at our Campau Commons Community Center in southwest Grand Rapids.

### Partners Promote the Health of Seniors

The GRHC continues to promote good nutrition among our senior residents with the help of several faith-based organizations that assist on-site food pantries. The pantries supplement the non-perishable foods provided through the USDA Commodities Supplemental Food Program with fresh meats and produce to help residents enjoy great meals and optimal health.

GRHC residents and staff are grateful to the congregations of **Boston Square Christian Reformed Church** and **Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed**

**Church** for their longstanding support of the Adams Park Food Pantry; Adams Park serves adults with disabilities and seniors ages 62 and older. Boston Square Christian Reformed Church pays for food the pantry procures through Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank and Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church donates fresh produce monthly.

We are also grateful to **North End Community Ministry** for continuing the ministry's many years of donations to the Leonard Terrace Apartments Food Pantry; Leonard Terrace serves ages 55 and older. **Meals On Wheels Western Michigan** continues to serve many of our elderly residents, providing meal delivery three times weekly.

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission is dedicated to supporting our residents during these unprecedented times, and we are sincerely thankful to the many organizations that continue to partner with us to help safeguard the well-being of the families we serve.



## Community Centers Host Summer Meal Program

Two GRHC facilities once again served as distribution sites for the USDA-funded “Meet Up & Eat Up” summer meal program spearheaded in our area by the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) Nutrition Services Department. The program strives to ensure that children who rely on school meal programs during the school year don’t go hungry in the summer months.

Meals were distributed Mondays and Thursdays at Campau Commons Community Center and Creston Plaza Community Center from June 22 through August 6.

The Meet Up & Eat Up program serves children ages 18 and under and is open to all Grand Rapids families. Families received 3 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and half a gallon of milk per child at each visit. All meals were “grab and go.”



GRHC Resident Services Specialist Eulondon Reeves (left) and a GRPS Nutrition Services staffer deliver meals at Campau Commons.

This is the third summer the GRHC has hosted the “Meet Up & Eat Up” program at Campau Commons and Creston Plaza. We are grateful to the GRPS for giving us this opportunity to serve our residents and their neighbors!

## GRHC “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest Winners Announced



Posters pictured from left: GRHC and Michigan NAHRO winner, grades 6-8, by Yadiel Ayala; GRHC winner, grades K-5, by Ta’Chyia Getter; Michigan NAHRO winner, grades K-5, by Melody Escobar. Congratulations to all!

This past winter the GRHC invited young residents in grades kindergarten through 12 to participate in the 2020 “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest sponsored by the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO). NAHRO is a professional membership organization that represents about 17,000 housing and community development agencies nationwide.

The GRHC sponsored a local poster contest that awarded \$25 to one winner in each of two age categories. Congratulations to:  
Ta’Chyia Getter, winner, grades K-5  
Yadiel Ayala, winner, grades 6-8

All eligible entries received were sent on to the state “What Home Means to Me” poster contest, and the GRHC recently received the exciting news

that Yadiel was also the grades 6-8 winner of the state competition and Melody Escobar won the state grades K-5 competition! Yadiel’s and Melody’s posters were sent on to the regional poster contest, and regional winners will be sent to the national contest. National winners will be announced in October.

Many thanks to all of the children who shared their artwork with us!

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## GRHC Executive Director Carlos A. Sanchez Announces August Retirement



*Carlos A. Sanchez with GRHC President Bobbie Butler at a winter 2018 staff event that celebrated Carlos' then 35 years of service to the GRHC.*

Grand Rapids Housing Commission Executive Director Carlos A. Sanchez will retire on August 31.

Carlos has led the GRHC since 1983. Under his direction, the number of affordable housing units available to low-income households in Greater Grand Rapids has grown from 818 to 4,580; this represents a 460 percent increase in the number of affordable units the Housing Commission makes available to low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities. The GRHC's annual budget has grown from \$3.8 million in 1983 to \$29.1 million in 2019.

"I am sincerely grateful to the Housing Commission board and staff and to all of the local, state and national partners that have worked with us throughout the years to meet the housing and supportive needs of low-income families," Carlos said. "Your support and dedication to housing equity have been and will be incredibly important to our agency's ability to meet current and emerging community needs. Thank you!"

### Board Seeks Community Input

The Housing Commission governing board is working with Carlos to ensure a smooth transition to new leadership and expects the selection process for the next Executive Director to take several months. Deputy Executive Director Hattie Tinney will serve as Acting Executive Director beginning September 1.

The board invites the public to offer input regarding recruitment for our next Executive Director, including ideas about the recruitment process and future activities of the Housing Commission. A position description can be viewed online at [grhousing.org/executive-director.php](http://grhousing.org/executive-director.php). Comments can be provided by calling (616) 235-2651 or via email at [BoardMeeting-QA@grhousing.org](mailto:BoardMeeting-QA@grhousing.org).

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## Linda Bigelow Retires After Thirty Years with the Housing Commission

Financial Manager Linda Bigelow retired in May after more than 30 years with the Housing Commission.

Linda started with the GRHC in 1989 as an Accountant I during a time when our agency was a department within the City of Grand Rapids. When the GRHC became the employer of record in 1996—operating independently, with a governing board appointed by the City Manager—she was promoted to Financial Manager. Linda has overseen an always challenging budgeting process with exceptional expertise and grace under pressure over the past three decades. As Financial Manager she also managed our IT operations for more than a decade and for several years held the dual role of Financial Manager and Director of Asset Management.

We wish Linda all the best as she begins her well-deserved retirement. Her plans include continuing longstanding volunteer work with Crash's Landing and spending more time with her lovely family. Congratulations, Linda!





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## Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Winner Announced

The GRHC is pleased to announce the winner of our 2020 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition: **Rodney Cancler** is a 2020 graduate of City High Middle School. Rodney will attend Michigan State University as a Computer Engineering major.

In a reference letter, City High Middle teacher Philip Beckwith praised Rodney for both his determination to succeed and the “calm serenity” with which he works to achieve his goals, noting that he “...really tries to excel in a deeper level. We have plenty of students who get good grades, but the rarer student is the one who goes beyond the stated requirements.”

Congratulations, Rodney, on all of your successes in high school and best of luck as you begin your college career!

Funded by private donations, the Jean McKee Resident Scholarship program provides college scholarships of up to \$2,000 to deserving college-bound residents of the GRHC’s affordable housing programs. The scholarship was established in memory of Jean McKee, a local attorney, former teacher and longtime champion of education who served on the Housing Commission for many years. To date the program has awarded a total of \$40,000 to 39 scholarship recipients.

Information and application materials for the 2021 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition will be available in late February at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org).



## GRHC Website Is Now Mobile Friendly

The Housing Commission website, [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org), now has a mobile friendly design, making it easier than ever to update a housing application, check the status of a waiting list or get the latest GRHC news. In addition to up-to-date information about our programs and services, visitors will find...

- Commonly requested GRHC and HUD forms.
- The Housing Commission board meeting schedule, meeting agendas and meeting minutes.
- Information about employment opportunities.
- Requests for bids/proposals/qualifications.
- GRHC newsletters, annual reports and fact sheets.

Check it out: [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org)

## New Resident Advisory Board Member

The Housing Commission is pleased to welcome Campau Commons Apartments resident Yesica Robinson to our Resident Advisory Board.

The Resident Advisory Board meets several times a year to help review and refine policies and practices so that we can more effectively meet the needs of the families we serve.

Grand Rapids Housing Commissioners:

Bobbie Butler, President; Betty Zylstra, Vice President; Angela Bunn, Patrick Miles Sr., Monica Steimle-App; GRHC Executive Director: Carlos A. Sanchez

Editor: Joyce Smith; Staff Contributors: Lena Agnew, Jenn Boerman, Judy Cannon-Groce, Felicia Clay, Wanda Couch, Mia Gutridge, Maria Lara, Eulondon Reeves, Carlos A. Sanchez, Erin Shibley, Hattie Tinney, Michael Weaver, Allison Wenk

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