GRAND RAPIDS HOUSING COMMISSION
SUMMER 2018

GRAND RAPIDS HOUSING COMMISSION NEWS

GRHC Awarded HUD-VASH Vouchers to Serve Homeless Veterans

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) is one of 325 public housing authorities awarded a total of $43 million in HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers in early April. The HUD-VASH program combines rental assistance from the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) with case management and clinical services provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

HUD estimates that the newly awarded vouchers will provide permanent housing to more than 5,200 homeless veterans nationwide. The Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness has published a “point-in-time count” conducted on January 25, 2017, that estimates there were a total of 92 homeless veterans in the Grand Rapids/Wyoming/Kent County area on that date, among these five households that include one or more children; point-in-time data for 2018 has not yet been published.

Through the HUD-VASH program, VA Medical Centers assess veterans experiencing homelessness and then refer them to local housing agencies that can provide Section 8 rental assistance. Referral factors include the duration of homelessness and the need for longer term, more intensive support in obtaining and maintaining housing.

The GRHC has been awarded 22 HUD-VASH vouchers and plans to apply for an additional 28; these will eventually be leveraged to attract private investment that will fund the construction of a 50-unit Section 8 Project-Based program development tailored specifically to meet veterans’ housing and supportive needs.

The GRHC will receive veteran referrals through the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek. GRHC Resident Services staff will work with the Battle Creek VA Medical Center as well as local VA clinics and social services agencies to help the veterans served through our HUD-VASH program access needed housing and community resources.

The GRHC’s Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program also has a “preference” for veterans, which means that Section 8 applicants who have veteran status are served before other applicants to this rental subsidy program.

For the latest news about GRHC programs and development plans: www.grhousing.org.
"What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest Winners Announced

The GRHC is pleased to announce the winners of our local “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest:
Grades K-5: Omarion Minter
Grades 6-8: Olivia Nolasco

The “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest is held on local, state, regional and national levels, and is open to school-age children whose families participate in an affordable housing program administered by a National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) member agency. NAHRO is an affordable housing industry trade organization.

Our local contest winners each received a Winner’s Certificate and a $25 gift card, and the other local entrants received an official Certificate of Participation.

All local entries were sent to Michigan NAHRO for judging in the state contest; state winners were sent to the regional “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest and regional contest winners were sent to the national contest in Washington, D.C. Twelve national winners will each receive a $100 gift card, and one Grand Prize winner will receive an iPad and a trip to Washington, D.C. National winners will be announced in October, designated by NAHRO as “Housing America Month.”

Many thanks to all of the talented young residents who shared their thoughts about home with us!

Pictured above, clockwise from top left: Poster by grades 6-8 contest winner Olivia Nolasco; a young artist at work; poster by grades K-5 contest winner Omarion Minter; Roberto Perez shows his wonderful finished artwork.

GRHC Hosts USDA Summer Meal Program

Two Grand Rapids Housing Commission family housing developments are offering children ages 18 and under free weekday lunches through the USDA-funded “Meet Up and Eat Up” Summer Food Service program.

The Campau Commons Apartments Community Center, 821 South Division Avenue, and the Creston Plaza Apartments Community Center, 1080 Creston Plaza Drive NE, are providing lunch Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., through August 3. There is no registration for this program; children simply visit during the lunch period to enjoy a tasty meal.

Campau Commons and Creston Plaza are among 26 Grand Rapids “Meet Up and Eat Up” lunch hosts—visit www.grps.org/nutrition to find a complete list of meal locations.
Family Self-Sufficiency Program Offers Workshops, Job Fairs

A new “Passport to Success” initiative developed in association with West Michigan Works offers GRHC residents the opportunity to explore employment options or even find a job during job fairs held in conjunction with orientation meetings that explain how the GRHC’s Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program works. The FSS program makes it possible for participants in our housing programs to accrue funds in an escrow account when new employment or a job promotion results in higher income and an increase in the household’s share of monthly rent.

All “Passport to Success” events are held from noon-2 p.m. at Sheldon Apartments, 1010 Sheldon Avenue SE; the job fairs are open to the public. The orientation sessions for GRHC program participants include workshops about job search and interviewing skills, resume building and managing the family budget. There are incentive awards for GRHC program participants who find and maintain employment.

Upcoming “Passport to Success” event dates are:
   Tuesday, July 24
   Tuesday, October 23

Employers who will participate in each job fair will be listed on the GRHC Facebook page at facebook.com/grhousing a week in advance.

Many thanks to the employers who interviewed job seekers at our winter and spring job fairs:
   Alliance Home Health Care Services
   Dean Transportation
   Effex Management Solutions
   Head Start for Kent County
   Hope Network
   Management Business Solutions
   Manpower
   Michigan Turkey
   Pridestaff
   Snelling GR
   Spectrum Health
   Speedway
   Teleperformance
   Williamson Employment
   Wynalda Packaging

Homeownership Program Orientation Meetings Scheduled

The GRHC’s Section 8 Homeownership program offers Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher recipients the opportunity to use their rental subsidy toward home mortgage payments.

To be eligible to participate in the Section 8 Homeownership program, a resident must...
- Have received Section 8 assistance through the GRHC for at least one year and be in good standing with the GRHC.
- Have an annual income of at least $14,500 ($8,520 for families in which the head of household is disabled). Welfare assistance is counted as income for seniors and the disabled.
- Head of household must be employed at the same job for the past year (waived for senior citizens and the disabled).
- Be a first-time home buyer as defined by HUD and Fair Housing guidelines.
- Agree to use the home as a sole residence, having no ownership interest in any other home.
- Enter into a Statement of Homeowner Obligations agreement and comply with all provisions of that agreement.
- Complete the formal application process and meet all lender and GRHC program requirements.

GRHC staff will host Section 8 Homeownership program orientation meetings at Wyoming Public Library, 3350 Michael Ave. SW in Wyoming, on the following dates:
   9/18/18, 2 p.m.  |  12/11/18, 2 p.m.

For a program application and more information: www.grhousing.org/homeowner.html.
Leonard Terrace Holds Pool Tournament

Leonard Terrace resident Will Vandyke shows the form that earned him a first-place Pool Tournament win.

Leonard Terrace Apartments residents recently competed in the senior development’s first-ever Pool Tournament. Eleven sporting souls demonstrated their hand-eye coordination and strategizing skills during the friendly two-week competition.

Congratulations to men’s team winner Will Vandyke and women’s team winner Charlotte Parker! Winners were awarded a $10 Family Fare gift card along with the undying admiration of their peers.

Residents Give Back to Our Community

Leonard Terrace Resident Supports Council on Aging Event

Leonard Terrace resident Mike Favreau addresses attendees at the 2018 Council on Aging “Aging Well” Conference.

Leonard Terrace Apartments resident Mike Favreau was one of the featured speakers at the Council on Aging of Kent County’s “Aging Well Conference” held in early May at the Cultural Center of St. Nicholas.

Mike is a longtime community volunteer, lending his time and talents to Leonard Terrace, a veterans’ hospice program, the American Diabetes Association, Founders, and the Arthritis Foundation. He assured conference attendees interested in volunteering that it isn’t difficult to find opportunities to lend a hand in our community, noting that “once you get involved in volunteering, the opportunities find you.”

Kudos to Mike for sharing his experiences with other active seniors who want to volunteer, and many thanks for all of his contributions as a volunteer at Leonard Terrace!

Seniors Receive Free Computer Training

Comprenew IT professional Tyler Sajdak (standing) helps a Ransom Tower resident navigate popular computer software.

Many thanks to Comprenew and their IT staff for providing free on-site computer training at two of our senior housing developments. The five-week course at Leonard Terrace Apartments and Ransom Tower Apartments offers residents bi-weekly one-on-one help with computer basics, office software, email and Internet basics—including how to keep personal information secure—and how to access local schools, the public library and employment resources online.

Sheldon Apartments Residents Donate Newborn Caps

The Sheldon Apartments Crocheting Club has donated a total of 306 soft hand-crocheted baby caps to the birth centers at Metro Health Hospital and Mercy Health Saint Mary’s. Club members are now crocheting baby blankets they will donate! If you would like to provide yarn to assist these kind and thoughtful crafters, please call 235-2860, ext. 1308.

Kudos to this generous trio of talented residents for supporting young families in our community!
Resource Fairs Bring Health, Wellness Services to Adams Park and Leonard Terrace

Adams Park residents had the opportunity to get a screening mammogram thanks to the Metro Health Mobile Mammography unit.

Our residents and staff are grateful to the organizations that supported the resource fairs—many of the agencies listed below provided services at both events!
Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan
Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Care Resources
Disability Advocates of Kent County
Faith Hospice
The Grand Rapids Red Project
Making Choices Michigan
Metro Health Mobile Mammography
Patient First
Reliance Community
Care Partners
Samaritas
Simply A Loving Touch
Spectrum Health
Zylstra Medical Supply

Residents at Adams Park Apartments and Leonard Terrace Apartments had the opportunity to receive health screenings and get information about a variety of health-related services during on-site spring Resource Fairs in the community room at each development. Adams Park serves disabled adults and seniors ages 62 and older; Leonard Terrace serves ages 55 and older.

In addition to free glaucoma and vision screening provided by the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired at both developments,
Welcome, New Staff

Nikita Miner is the new Office Assistant for our administrative office. Prior to officially joining our team, Nikita volunteered with us as a Section 8 intern and also worked as a temporary Office Assistant. Her educational background includes studies in social work, English and communications at Calvin College where she was a resident assistant for the Entrada Scholarship program and a student coordinator for the Service-Learning Center.

Staff Transfers

Brooke Allen has transferred from Assistant Asset Manager to Section 8 Coordinator.

Linda Bigelow has transferred from Director of Asset Management & Finance to Financial Manager.

Resident Services Specialist Erin Shibley has transferred from Adams Park to Mount Mercy.

Resident Services Specialist Erin Wieczorek has transferred from Mount Mercy to Adams Park.

Student Interns Support Resident Services Efforts

Sarah O’Toole is the new Resident Services intern at Adams Park Apartments. Sarah is a senior-level social work major at Grand Valley State University. She is working to help GRHC staff plan educational and social programs for Adams Park residents and also helps link residents with needed community resources.

Our staff and residents are grateful to fall 2017 GVSU social work intern Savanna Wright for continuing to support Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program through the spring. Savanna is shown lending a hand with a recent “shopping spree” at The StoreHouse. We appreciate our wonderful student interns!

Margi Barnsdale Retires

Margi Barnsdale recently retired after almost 29 years with the GRHC. Margi has had a varied career with our agency and has served as the Housing Manager for several GRHC-owned developments. Most recently she was the Office Assistant for Mount Mercy Apartments.

GRHC staff saluted our talented co-worker with an early April retirement lunch at the GRHC main office. We wish Margi all the best as she embarks on her retirement adventures.

In Memoriam: Jerry Herrema

The GRHC leadership and staff were deeply saddened by the passing of Jerry Herrema early this year. Jerry worked to address the housing needs of our community for decades, first as the GRHC’s Director of Housing Management, and in his retirement as president of the Creston Plaza General Partnership, Mount Mercy Housing Corporation and Mount Mercy Phase I Housing Corporation. He also served on the boards of Adams Park Housing Corporation and Grand Rapids Scattered Sites Housing Corporation. We are truly grateful for Jerry’s many years of service.
Campau Commons Hosts Family “Field Day” Event

The Campau Commons Community Center offered a mid-June Field Day event for Campau Commons Apartments residents and their neighbors. Held in anticipation of Father’s Day, the celebration featured live music, ice cream and outdoor fun for everyone.

Many thanks to Leonard Leek and Main Street Association for providing our Field Day entertainment, including live performances by soul and blues singer Eddie Robinson and 2017 “The Voice” contestant Lucas Holliday.

Kudos to GRHC Resident Services Specialist Lena Agnew and Lead Resident Services Specialist Laura Oesch for organizing the Field Day and to the entire Resident Services team for hosting this fun family event!

Pictured clockwise from top: Young residents dance to live musical performances; Leonard Leek from Main Street Association entertains the crowd; singer Lucas Holliday performs; ice cream, sidewalk chalk and hula hoop fun; singer Eddie Robinson performs; a mother and her son share a treat.
Residents Celebrate “National Reading Month”

School-age residents of Campau Commons and Creston Plaza enjoyed March “National Reading Month” activities offered at the community center of each development. The fun included arts and crafts, movie nights, an Easter egg hunt, snacks, and of course... reading great books!

Many thanks to Grand Rapids Police Department Officer Ricky Urena for visiting Campau Commons to read “10 Rules of Being A Superhero”

2018 Scholarship Winners!

GRHC President Bobbie Butler (right) presents the scholarship to winner Kenia Veras.

Congratulations to the winners of our 2018 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition:

- Kenia Veras is a recent Wyoming High School graduate; she will explore social sciences careers at Michigan State University.
- Selena Corona is a recent graduate of Innovation Central High School; she will be a nursing major at Western Michigan University.

The scholarship was established in 2000 in memory of Jean McKee, an attorney and longtime champion of education who served on the Housing Commission board. Each year scholarships are awarded to GRHC residents who are graduating high school seniors or who currently attend or plan to attend college or vocational school as full-time students. Winners receive $500 annually for up to four years; the total scholarship award is $2,000. The scholarship is funded through private donations.

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/ AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

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