

## Vouchers Awarded to Partner Housing Developments

The GRHC is working to increase the availability of affordable housing in our community by awarding 67 Project-Based Vouchers in support of partner-owned developments. Details on page 2!

## City Grant to Fund Hope Community Renovations

The City of Grand Rapids has awarded the GRHC's Rapid Re-Housing program facilities a \$500,000 grant in support of a major capital improvement project. Details on page 2!

## Policymakers Tour GRHC and Partner Developments

The GRHC was pleased to offer community partners and policymakers a bus tour of agency-owned and GRHC-supported affordable housing developments. Details on page 3!



GRAND RAPIDS  
HOUSING COMMISSION

# NEWS

Spring/Summer 2023



## GRHC Takes Action to Help Residents Cope with Rising Rents

In March the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published updated Fair Market Rents (FMRs) for Kent County and the Grand Rapids-Wyoming Metropolitan Area, increasing the maximum allowable rent for all unit sizes by nine percent; the FMRs set by HUD annually establish a rent ceiling for HUD rental subsidy programs, including the Housing Choice Voucher program that serves thousands of low-income households in our area.

HUD revised the FMRs after the Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) provided the agency with the results of a Fair Market Rent Survey our staff conducted with the help of a contracted research firm. The survey was distributed to 25,000 Kent County households and demonstrated that while the original local 2023 FMRs set by HUD increased 17 percent from 2022, they still fell short of actual local rents.

The updated HUD FMRs will not only benefit Grand Rapids Housing Commission program

participants but also households that participate in HUD-funded programs administered by various agencies in Kent County, including HOME Investment Partnership developments, the Emergency Solutions Grant program and Continuum of Care Fund recipients.

“Our board and staff are sincerely grateful to the 1,560 households that responded to our recent FMR Survey,” said GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. “Their participation has made an important and tangible difference for GRHC program participants and for all of the assisted families in our area that struggle to attain a basic need many of us take for granted—decent, affordable housing for ourselves and our families.”

The GRHC continues to analyze local market conditions and recently amended the maximum rents for our voucher programs to 115 percent of the HUD FMRs. Current GRHC Voucher Payment Standards can be viewed at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org).

## GRHC Expands Project-Based Voucher Support of Affordable Housing Developments

The Housing Commission recently awarded or committed 67 Section 8 Project-Based Vouchers (PBVs) to local affordable housing developers as part of a strategy designed to increase the availability of affordable housing in our community; this brings the total number of partner units supported by the GRHC to 262. A component of the federal Housing Choice Voucher rental subsidy program, PBVs provide a monthly rental subsidy for low-income households, with rent typically 30 percent of adjusted monthly household income. A PBV award provides a significant advantage to developers seeking federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.

The developments that received Project-Based Voucher awards:

- Academy Manor, 6 vouchers, 2025 Fulton Street East; owner/manager: PK Companies. The project will split the five-story Dominican Sisters Mother House building on the Marywood Campus into condominiums that will include 108 senior units.



*Kingsbury Place Apartments is a 44-unit Dwelling Place development that serves individuals with mental and physical disabilities*

- Belknap Place Apartments, 4 vouchers, 310 Trowbridge Street NE; PK Companies and Third Coast Development. Awarded Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, this 50-unit apartment building is in the historic Belknap Lookout neighborhood.
- First Hope at 10th Apartments, 11 vouchers, 91 and 100

West 10th Street, Holland. This Dwelling Place property will feature 46 one- and two-bedroom units for very low-income families.

Construction starts in February 2024, with occupancy in December 2025.

- Kingsbury Place Apartments, 11 vouchers, 730 North Center Court NW; owned by Genesis Non-Profit Housing Corp. and managed by Dwelling Place. Includes 44 units and outdoor green space. A collaboration with Pine Rest Christian Services provides on-site supportive services to residents with mental and physical disabilities.
- Leonard Avenue Apartments, 13 vouchers, 851 Leonard Street NW. In development, the 55-unit property is owned by Genesis Non-Profit Housing Corp. and will be managed by Dwelling Place. Will serve ages 55 and older and have a preference for Native Americans.
- Shea Ravines, 20 vouchers, 2929 Burlingame Avenue SW, Wyoming; co-owned/co-developed by WODA Cooper Development Inc. and Cherry Health. One- and two-bedroom units will serve people with disabilities. Anticipated opening in 2025.
- Well House Rising, 2 vouchers, various southeast-side locations. Well House is a not-for-profit corporation that develops and rehabs units to provide permanent, shared, low-cost housing for families experiencing homelessness.

## City Awards \$500,000 Grant in Support of Renovation



*Constructed in 1990 with donated labor and materials, the Hope Community Service Center includes 12 housing units as well as management offices and resident meeting space. The program serves families experiencing homelessness and also includes 12 duplex units.*

The City of Grand Rapids has awarded the GRHC a \$500,000 grant in support of our plan to undertake extensive renovations at Hope Community, a 24-unit Rapid Re-Housing program facility that was constructed in 1990. The funds are made available through the City's Fiscal Year 2024 Neighborhood Investment Plan, HOME-American Rescue Plan (HOME-ARP) Allocation Plan, and Economic Resiliency and Recovery Investment Strategy (ERRIS).

The GRHC has identified \$2.4 million in capital needs at Hope Community, so this grant represents a partial but very significant step toward making much-needed repairs and improvements. Staff are in the process of prioritizing renovations that will get underway this summer—watch for details in a future edition of this newsletter.

## Bus Tour Highlights Affordable Housing Developments and Partnerships



*Above: GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames (left) shows Representative Hillary Scholten and other community leaders a typical unit at Antoine Court Apartments*



*Left: The tour group, led by Senator Mark Huizenga, arrives at Antoine Court via a DASH Bus provided by The Rapid*

Grand Rapids Housing Commission President Monica Steimle-App and Executive Director Lindsey Reames were joined by local, state and national policymakers and partners for a bus tour of the affordable housing developments owned or supported by our agency. Many thanks to The Rapid for providing a DASH bus for our use and to all who joined us on the tour, including state Senator Mark Huizenga and U.S. Representative Hillary Scholten.

## Community Centers Host “Meet Up & Eat Up” Program

Two GRHC family housing developments are once again offering children ages 18 and under free weekday lunches through the USDA-funded “Meet Up and Eat Up” summer food service program. The program is administered locally by the GRPS Nutrition Services Department and strives to ensure that children who rely on school meal programs during the school year don’t go hungry in the summer months.

The Campau Commons Community Center, 821 Division Avenue South (Division at Martin Luther King Jr. Street) and the Bobbie Butler Community Center at Creston Plaza, 1080 Creston Plaza Drive NE, are serving lunch Monday through Thursday, 12:00-1:00 p.m., through August 17. There is no enrollment or registration for this program.



## FSS and Homeownership Program Resources



*Frame from the video introduction to the GRHC Family Self-Sufficiency Program*

With the goal of encouraging families to take advantage of a tool they can use to build personal financial well being, the GRHC has developed a short video introduction to our Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. The video highlights the benefits of participation in the HUD-funded program, which offers GRHC clients an opportunity to accrue funds in an escrow account when an increase in earned income increases the portion of monthly rent a household pays. FSS Program participants receive the escrowed funds upon graduation from the program.

Check out the video introduction to the FSS Program and learn how to sign up for a program Orientation Meeting here: [www.grhousing.org/family-self-sufficiency-program.php](http://www.grhousing.org/family-self-sufficiency-program.php)

The GRHC’s HCV Homeownership Program offers eligible Housing Choice Voucher recipients the opportunity to use their Housing Assistance Payment toward a home mortgage payment rather than rental housing expenses. The program will offer two additional Orientation Meetings this year; both will be at the Wyoming Public Library. Registration is required. Orientation meeting dates/times:

9/19, 2:00 p.m. | 12/12, 2:00 p.m.

Details and meeting registration form: [www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-program.php](http://www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-program.php)

## GRHC In the Community: Teaming Up with Partners to Provide Information, Services, Support

GRHC staff planned or supported a variety of community events and programs in recent months.

### Community Tax Day Event at Campau Commons



A few members of the Community Tax Day crew, from left: HCV Coordinators Kim Brown and Erica Kurban, Heart of West Michigan United Way Program Manager Brenda Brame and HCV Coordinator Lauri Parks

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Special Programs team partnered with the Kent County Tax Credit Coalition, a program of Heart of West Michigan United Way, to offer a mid-February Community Tax Day at the Campau Commons Community Center.

IRS-certified volunteer tax preparers were on hand to help the three residents and 17 other households that stopped in to take advantage of this valuable free service.

### Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit

GRHC staff once again participated in the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit. The event, held in mid-May at GRCC's M-TEC facility, brings Grand Rapids residents and stakeholders together to learn, strategize and connect to strengthen neighborhoods and belonging in community, with the overall goal of making Grand Rapids a more equitable place for all to live, work and play. Our team was grateful for the opportunity to gain information and insight into local housing issues that will help us to better meet our community's current and emerging housing needs.

## Lindsey Reames Elected to MI NAHRO Leadership Role



Members of the Michigan Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) recently elected GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames Region III Vice President serving on the MI NAHRO Board of Directors.

Lindsey will serve a two-year term representing the GRHC and other West Michigan housing commissions.

NAHRO is a professional membership organization that represents more than 19,500 housing and community development agencies—see related story on facing page!

### Mental Health Awareness Month “Party in the Park”

Staff from the GRHC Resident Services team provided information about GRHC programs and services at a mid-May “Party in the Park” mental health awareness event at Garfield Park.



Resident Services staff provided information about GRHC programs to “Party in the Park” attendees. From left, Erin Shibley, Eulondon Reeves and Latasha Maberry

### Mobile Happy Lights Tour at Adams Park Apartments

GRHC Resident Services Manager Joyce Williams and Resident Services Specialist Eric Turkaleski teamed up with Amplify GR, the Black Impact Collaborative and the Mobile Lights Relaxation Station created by Kent County Commissioner Monica Sparks to bring the “Mobile Lights Happy Tour” to Adams Park Apartments for a mental health and stress relief event. The Mobile Relaxation Station van offered mood-boosting red lights and massage therapy as well as an inviting, comfortable place to “take ten.”



## Housing Commission Hosts Michigan NAHRO Conference Reception, Maintenance Tour



The GRHC was pleased to host a reception for housing industry professionals attending the Michigan NAHRO Spring Conference in Grand Rapids. NAHRO is the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, a professional membership organization that represents more than 19,500 housing and community development agencies nationwide.

Conference attendees from housing authorities throughout Michigan joined local community partners, GRHC staff and GRHC board members for an enjoyable late-afternoon gathering at the Rendezvous in the Amway Grand. Many thanks to Mayor Rosalynn Bliss for offering our group a warm Grand Rapids welcome, to Housing Commission President Monica Steimle-App for her help with event planning and to reception sponsor Rockford Construction.



*Pictured from top: NAHRO Spring Conference attendees gather at the Rendezvous; Mayor Rosalynn Bliss welcomes the group; Port Huron Housing Commission Deputy Director Tyrone Charles chats with GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames; a friendly team from Allen Park Housing Commission*

### GRHC Developments Host Maintenance Tour for NAHRO Members



*Top: GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames and Mount Mercy Maintenance Technician Todd Heyboer (center) greet tour attendees  
Bottom: Mount Mercy Custodian Will Blackmon (right) with attendees in the historic Mount Mercy chapel*

The Michigan NAHRO Spring Conference included a Maintenance Tour of GRHC housing developments. A busload of maintenance and management professionals from housing authorities around the state toured Antoine Court, Leonard Terrace, Mount Mercy and Ransom Tower, and drove by Adams Park, Campau Commons, Creston Plaza and Sheldon Apartments.

Many thanks to all of the GRHC maintenance and custodial staff who worked overtime to ensure that our housing sites looked their very best!

## Human Resources Update

### Staff Promotions

**Mallory Connor** has been promoted from Office Assistant to HCV Coordinator. In her new role Mallory will be the HCV staff assigned to Adams Park, Antoine Court, Campau Commons and Mount Mercy.

**Janae Couch** has been promoted from HCV Coordinator to Lead HCV Coordinator at the Administrative Office.

**Madelyn Johnson** has been promoted from HCV Customer Service Intake Coordinator to HCV Coordinator at the Administrative Office.

**Stev Lewis** has been promoted from Maintenance Technician to HCV Inspector. In his new role Stev will conduct required inspections for the Housing Choice Voucher program to ensure compliance with HUD Housing Quality Standards.

**Jacob Varela** has been promoted from HCV Coordinator to Lead HCV Coordinator at the Administrative Office.

### Welcome, New Staff

**Ryan Allman** is the Financial Analyst at the Administrative Office. Ryan comes to the GRHC from a position with Model Coverall Service, Inc., where he was the Billings & Accounts Receivables Manager.

**Bridget Bisel-Wells** is the Asset Manager for Creston Plaza and Ransom Tower. Bridget comes to the GRHC from a position as a Multi-Site Property Manager for the Michigan Asset Group in Lansing. She has managed properties converted or funded under HUD programs as well as the LIHTC program. Bridget has a bachelor's degree from Davenport University and is a Certified Occupancy Specialist and a Tax Credit Specialist.

**Kenneth Davis** is the Custodian for Adams Park Apartments. Kenneth comes to the GRHC from a position with Harbor Churches in Hudsonville where he managed multiple projects as Custodial Manager, including cleaning, ordering supplies and maintaining all repair requests.

**Damir Delic** is the new Maintenance Technician for Adams Park Apartments. Prior to joining the GRHC, Damir was an independent contractor in commercial transportation. He has experience in construction, repairs and remodeling, and he has also completed technical training for the Heating/Ventilation and Air Conditioning/Refrigeration (HVACR) certificate program at Grand Rapids Community College.

**Annette Howell** is the Office Assistant for Creston Plaza Apartments. Annette has worked as a temporary Office Assistant at Creston Plaza since last December, and her work history also includes similar positions with Body Builders Collision, Pine Rest Christian Services and River Valley Orthopedics.

**Nathan Jindra** is the HCV Coordinator for Creston Plaza, Hope Community, Mount Mercy, Ransom Tower and Sheldon Apartments. Prior to joining our team, Nathan was a Tech Resource Developer and AmeriCorps VISTA member with Bethany Christian Services. He has a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Calvin University.

**Christopher "CJ" Lewis** is a new HCV Coordinator at the Administrative Office. CJ's work experience includes a position as a Leasing Consultant for Northview Harbor Apartments and he has also worked for RE/MAX of Grand Rapids. He has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Calvin University.

## GRHC Receives MCAH AmeriCorps Program Award



*The Grand Rapids EnVision Center is hosted at the Campau Commons Community Center*

The Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness recently awarded the GRHC two AmeriCorps member placements for the 2023-2024 program year. AmeriCorps is an independent agency of the U.S. government that engages millions of Americans in service through a variety of stipended volunteer work programs.

The Grand Rapids EnVision Center our agency hosts within the Campau Commons Community Center was awarded one full-time AmeriCorps Resource Generation & Management Specialist who will work with GRHC staff to build services designed to help low-income Grand Rapids residents achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. Duties of the Specialist will include networking with employers to create access to employment opportunities, supporting clients with job searches, teaching life skills classes and more.

The GRHC's Housing Choice Voucher program was awarded one full-time AmeriCorps Housing Search and Information Specialist. This individual will help with landlord engagement and serve as a housing navigator for assisted families that are struggling to locate an affordable rental unit in our competitive housing marketplace.

Both positions will run October 2, 2023–September 27, 2024. Complete position descriptions and application information are posted on the GRHC website: [www.grhousing.org/employment-opportunities.php](http://www.grhousing.org/employment-opportunities.php)

## GRHC 2023 “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest Winners Announced



Winning GRHC poster contest entries, from left: grades 9-12 winner, Breanna Cervera; grades 6-8 winner, Maritza Cervera; grades K-5 winner, Olivia Duke. Congratulations to each of these talented young artists!

This past winter the GRHC invited young residents in grades kindergarten through 12 to participate in the “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest sponsored annually by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), a professional membership group serving the affordable housing industry.

The GRHC sponsored a local poster contest that awarded a \$25 gift card to one winner in each of three age categories. Our three winning entries and information about the artists who created them are shown above.

All eligible entries received were sent on to the state “What Home Means to Me”

Poster Contest. State winners are entered in a regional contest and regional winners compete in a national poster competition for a chance to win an iPad and a trip to Washington, D.C.

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

## Resident Services Corner: Senior Residents Celebrate Valentine’s Day with Dance Parties!



The GRHC Resident Services team hosted resident Valentine’s Day parties at Antoine Court, Leonard Terrace and Sheldon Apartments. The Sheldon event was a “Senior Sweetheart Dance” that featured tasty treats as well as information tables staffed by representatives from Humana, Oak Street Health and CoreWell Health. Many thanks to all of the partners who supported these events, and a “twist and shout out” to the staff and partners who joined residents on the dance floor!

Pictured above: Sheldon Apartments partiers hit the dance floor



Left: GRHC Resident Services Specialist Rachel Siebert (center) and a resident strut their stuff; Humana rep Amanda Allen and a resident bust a move; a resident shows that these boots are made for dancin’!



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## GRHC Partners with GRPL to Bring Mobile Library to Family Housing Developments



The GRHC is partnering with the Grand Rapids Public Library (GRPL) to bring a summer Mobile Library to the community centers at Campau Commons and Creston Plaza. Services are free, open to all and include browsable library material for checkout, holds pickup and library card registration.

GRPL Mobile Library Schedule:

**Campau Commons Community Center**  
821 Division Avenue South  
**Tuesdays, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.**  
Service runs through August 15

**Bobbie Butler Community Center at Creston Plaza**  
1080 Creston Plaza Drive NE  
**Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Service runs through August 17

## 2023 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Winners Announced

The Housing Commission is pleased to congratulate the winners of our 2023 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition:

- Sarah Dorris, a Family Self-Sufficiency Program client who is currently an undergraduate student in Paralegal Studies at Bryant Stratton College.
- Michelle Johnson, a Family Self-Sufficiency Program client who is attending Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, with the goal of becoming a professional baker.

The scholarship program 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 the program offers scholarships 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 must maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA and full-time enrollment to receive \$500 annually for up to four years; the total potential scholarship award is \$2,000.

The Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Program is funded through private donations, and we thank our generous donors for making it possible to distribute \$43,000 to 41 scholarship winners over the years.

The Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Program also offers YMCA Summer Camp Scholarships to young residents of the GRHC's family housing developments—watch for details of this year's Summer Camp program in the fall edition of this newsletter.

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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