

## GRHC Forges Ahead with RAD Program Conversion

The conversion of Campau Commons Apartments to Section 8 Project-Based housing has been completed. Improvements at Campau Commons, Leonard Terrace Apartments and Mount Mercy Apartments are underway. Details on page 2!

## GRHC, City Partner for "Age-Friendly Grand Rapids" Initiative

A "Listening Tour" designed to help Grand Rapids city planners devise programs and services to meet the needs of our community's older adults will include stops at four GRHC senior housing communities. Details on page 3!

## 2017 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Winners Named

The Housing Commission was pleased to award Jean McKee Resident Scholarships to three deserving resident scholars in June. Winners receive \$500 per year for up to four years in support of their college studies. Details on back page!

# GRAND RAPIDS HOUSING COMMISSION

SUMMER 2017

# NEWS



*Pictured from left: Leonard Terrace residents Barb Smalley (left) and Benita Gray add to the lunchtime fun with a door prize drawing; resident Shelley Wisdom visits the salad buffet; resident volunteer Mike Bernier prepares fresh hot pizza.*

## New Meals On Wheels Dining Center at Leonard Terrace Apartments!

Residents of Leonard Terrace Apartments are enjoying a new on-site Dining Center thanks to the expansion of a partnership between the Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) and the Meals On Wheels program (formerly Senior Meals Program, Inc.). Residents and GRHC staff celebrated the opening of the new center in early April. Leonard Terrace serves ages 55 and older.

Located in the Leonard Terrace Community Room at 1315 Leonard Street NE, the new Dining Center serves lunch each weekday at noon and features a menu of comfort foods that range from pizza and spaghetti to roast beef and citrus-glazed salmon. The suggested donation per meal is \$2 for Leonard Terrace residents and visitors ages 60 and older; the donation for younger visitors is \$3.50. No diner is turned away for lack of ability to donate.

The new Dining Center at Leonard Terrace builds upon the success the Meals On Wheels program

has had with "Café On the Mount" at the GRHC's Mount Mercy Apartments senior community. Located in Mount Mercy's commercial-style kitchen and cafeteria at 1425 Bridge Street NW, the Café opened in 2009 as a three-days-a-week program and quickly expanded due to its popularity with residents. Café On the Mount serves lunch each weekday at noon and breakfast Wednesday mornings at 8:30; like the Leonard Terrace Dining Center, the requested donation is \$2 for residents and ages 60-plus, \$3.50 for younger visitors, and the Café is open to seniors who are unable to donate.

In addition to offering healthy hot meals, the Dining Center and Café provide wonderful opportunities for seniors to connect with their neighbors, either while enjoying lunch or by volunteering to help prepare or serve meals. For more information about Meals On Wheels Dining Centers and to view menus: <http://mealsonwheelswesternmichigan.org/meals-on-wheels/dining-centers>.

## 5,000 Households Added to GRHC Section 8 Waiting List

More than 7,400 households submitted applications during the Grand Rapids Housing Commission's late-June Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program open enrollment period.

The Housing Commission held a computerized random lottery to add 5,000 applicants to our Section 8 waiting list. Since our Section 8 Administrative Plan requires that we serve Kent County residents before we serve those applying from outside of our area and the GRHC received more than 5,000 applications from within Kent County, out-of-county applicants were not included in the lottery. Applicants were notified of the status of their application via U.S. Mail during July. New applicants can also check the status of their application securely online at <https://grhc.apply4housing.com/status>.

The GRHC is currently serving the last of the applicants who applied to our Section 8 program in 2014. We anticipate that we will start serving applicants who applied in June by late 2017.

GRHC Executive Director Carlos A. Sanchez noted that our agency administers 3,382 Section 8 vouchers. "The 7,000-plus households that recently applied for Section 8 demonstrate the significant gap that exists between demand for affordable housing and our supply of housing units," Sanchez said. "The Housing Commission is committed to working with the City, our community partners and HUD to maximize the affordable housing programs that are a critical resource for the working poor as well as low-income senior citizens and disabled persons in our community."

Section 8 offers a federal rental subsidy to low-income households renting privately owned property. The GRHC's Section 8 program served 3,343 households during 2016, including 1,727 disabled persons, 4,028 children and 665 senior citizens. The average household income of Section 8 participants during 2016 was \$14,322.

## Campau Commons Apartments RAD Conversion Completed, Improvements Underway

HUD Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Program awards are making it possible for the GRHC to convert 300 agency-owned housing units from the Low-Income Public Housing Program to Section 8 Project-Based Program housing. Conversion provides 20-year contracts that are compatible with the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program, making it possible for the GRHC to attract the funding that will enable us to undertake much-needed capital improvement projects.

The conversion of 92 units at Campau Commons Apartments was finalized in late May, with \$100,000 in improvements slated to be completed by year end, including parking lot repaving, concrete repairs and energy conservation enhancements.

The GRHC is in the process of converting 20 Scattered Sites units, with \$448,000 in improvements planned.

The GRHC continues to seek the funding needed to convert 188 units at Adams Park Apartments under the RAD Program. Applications for a total of \$3.4 million in LIHTC have been submitted to fund numerous improvements at Adams Park, including flooring replacement, roofing and window replacement/repairs, and new kitchen and bath cabinets and counter tops. Improvements will

get underway when the necessary funding is in place.

Mortgage loan refinancing is making it possible for the GRHC to make much-needed upgrades at Leonard Terrace Apartments and Mount Mercy Apartments. Parking lot improvements at Leonard Terrace have been completed, and the parking lot at Mount Mercy will be resurfaced within the next few weeks. Additional improvements will get underway soon.

Kitchen remodeling is among the many upgrades Leonard Terrace residents will soon enjoy. The GRHC plans to reconfigure all 125 units to replace each kitchen pantry with an island and a bank of overhead cabinets; this will maintain needed storage while creating an inviting open floor plan.

Mount Mercy units will get needed kitchen cabinet and bathroom cabinet door replacements as well as walk-in bathtubs. The development will also get exterior lighting and landscaping improvements, and common areas will be painted and refurnished as needed.

No planned improvements will require displacing residents from their homes.

Updates regarding development activities are available on the GRHC website: [www.grhousing.org/development.html](http://www.grhousing.org/development.html).

## GRHC Partners with City to Explore Ideas for Keeping Grand Rapids “Age Friendly”

Four GRHC senior apartment communities will participate in a City of Grand Rapids “Listening Tour” series that seeks ideas on how to make Grand Rapids more hospitable to older adults.

“Age-Friendly Communities” is a global initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) that’s focused on two trends: the rapid aging of populations and increasing urbanization. Grand Rapids is in the preliminary stage to become a global Age-Friendly Community; the City plans to join the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Network of Age-Friendly Communities program, which is the U.S. affiliate to the WHO’s age-friendly initiative.

The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, a key supporter of “Age-Friendly Grand Rapids,” has compiled demographic statistics that show the population aged 60 and older in Kent County grew 32% between 2000 and 2012; 29 percent of households included at least one person aged 60 or older in 2010.

The City of Grand Rapids Planning Department will host “Listening Tour” meetings to seek input about how best to support older adults as they strive to live active and healthy lives in their homes and neighborhoods. Small-group discussions facilitated by city staff will allow older adults to



*The GRHC makes our agency-owned senior developments “age friendly” by working with community partners to offer social opportunities as well as health and wellness, nutrition and transportation support.*

have their voices heard on topics such as housing, transportation, buildings and outdoor spaces, employment, volunteerism, social events, communication, multigenerational inclusion, and health and community services. The information gathered will be used to inform a Grand Rapids City Master Plan update; the Master Plan is a planning document used as a general guide for future development.

In a city informational flier regarding the Age-Friendly Communities initiative, Second Ward City Commissioner Ruth E. Kelly noted that public input is important to improving the quality of life in Grand Rapids: “Seniors are living longer and there are more of us. We need to learn from older adults what their needs and wants are as we plan for the future. Community conversations are one way to

engage residents and assist local leaders who are working diligently to meet the challenge of an aging population.”

All interested organizations and individuals are welcome to attend the Listening Tour meetings, which are scheduled in September and October at 18 locations throughout our community.

Listening Tour events at Grand Rapids Housing Commission properties by date:

9/13/17, 2-4 p.m.:

Ransom Tower Apartments  
50 Ransom Avenue NE

9/21/17, 1-2:30 p.m.:

Mount Mercy Apartments  
1425 Bridge Street NW

9/28/17, 2-4 p.m.:

Adams Park Apartments  
1440 Fuller Avenue SE

10/11/17, 1:30-3 p.m.:

Leonard Terrace Apartments  
1315 Leonard Street NE

For a complete list of Listening Tour dates, times and locations, contact the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department at (616) 456-3051.

## Mount Mercy and Ransom Tower Residents Share Artistic Interests

Creative residents at the GRHC's Mount Mercy and Ransom Tower senior developments have been finding new ways to exercise their artistic skills.

### Mount Mercy Apartments Resident Coloring Club!



A group of Mount Mercy residents has been meeting at the on-site Café On the Mount weekly since last September to create beautiful coloring pages. The group has held several contests featuring all members interpreting the same abstract design, an “all crayon” contest and other interesting twists that add to the friendly fun. There is no cost to join the Coloring Club, and all residents are welcome. For additional information, please contact Erin Wiczorek at 235-2677.



### Flower Arranging Workshop at Ransom Tower

Residents recently gathered in the Ransom Tower Community Room to enjoy an ice cream social followed by a flower-arranging workshop led by Catherine Birkbeck from Guardian Angel Home Care.

Many thanks to Catherine and to Family Network of Wyoming for donating beautiful discount-priced blooms from Trader Joe's.



## Adams Park Apartments Residents Revel in Disco Inferno!

Residents of Adams Park Apartments celebrated spring with a May “prom” event that incorporated a fab 70s disco theme. Dozens of residents donned their best prom-perfect threads and gathered in the development’s Community Room for a retro bash that included (of course) disco music and dancing, refreshments, prizes and plenty of great company.

Many thanks to Matt Murphy, Communications Director at First and Main, for volunteering his time and talents as the prom’s Disc Jockey Extraordinaire.

Kudos also go to Adams Park Resident Services Specialist Erin Shibley for planning, hosting and photographing the prom and to Pine Rest Resident Support Coordinator Joyce Williams for her help with this fun and totally tubular special event!

Other volunteers and organizations that have supported Adams Park in recent months include...

- The Kent County Garden Club lent a hand with residents’ gardening efforts.
- ADA Specialist Matt Hansen offered a presentation on Clear Captions as a communication option for the hearing impaired.
- Michael Curtis of the Grand Rapids Fire Department Residential Safety Program offered a fire safety presentation.
- The Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired provided vision acuity and glaucoma screenings.



- Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church and Business Management Solutions donated to the on-site food pantry.
- GVSU and MLK Trucking donated mattresses and mattress delivery services to residents in need.
- ACSET and Two Men and a Truck supported the USDA Commodities Food Program at Adams Park.

Adams Park serves disabled adults and seniors ages 62 and older; the development has a preference for applicants referred through Network 180.



# Grand Rapids Housing Commission Human Resources Update

## Staff Promotions

**Talimma Billips** has been promoted from Assistant Asset Manager to Asset Manager.

**Toni Coristine** has been promoted from Lead Leased Housing Coordinator for the Section 8 program to Asset Manager for GRHC agency-owned housing developments.

**Nikia Folden** has been promoted from Section 8 Coordinator to Lead Leased Housing Specialist for the Section 8 program.

**Margo Gatling** has transferred from Assistant Asset Manager for GRHC agency-owned housing developments to Section 8 Coordinator for the Section 8 program.

**Laura Oesch** has been promoted from Assistant Asset Manager for GRHC agency-owned housing to Lead Resident Services Specialist/Family Self-Sufficiency Program Coordinator for our Resident Services program.

**Lisa Rogalski** has been promoted from Section 8 Coordinator to Lead Leased Housing Specialist for the Section 8 program.

**Van Tran** has been promoted from Section 8 Coordinator to Lead Leased Housing Specialist for the Section 8 program.

## Welcome, New Staff

**Alicia Evans** has joined the GRHC as the Office Assistant for our administrative office. Alicia comes to the GRHC from the Health & Safety Institute where she was a receptionist. Alicia has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Wilberforce University.

**Destiny Willis** is the new Waiting List Specialist for the Section 8 program. Destiny worked as a temporary employee in the GRHC administrative office for the past year; prior to assisting us, she was employed as an Eligibility Specialist for the Kent County Department of Health and Human Services.

## GRHC Asset Management Staff Reorganization

Adams Park Apartments | Asset Manager: Lynn Simone

Campau Commons Apartments  
Asset Manager: Toni Coristine  
Assistant Asset Manager: Brooke Allen

Creston Plaza Apartments  
Asset Manager: Jake Blakeney  
Assistant Asset Manager: Brooke Allen

Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program  
Asset Manager: Lynn Simone

Leonard Terrace Apartments | Asset Manager: Jake Blakeney

Mount Mercy Apartments | Asset Manager: Talimma Billips

Ransom Tower Apartments | Asset Manager: Toni Coristine

Sheldon Apartments | Asset Manager: Talimma Billips

Scattered Sites Program | Asset Manager: Jake Blakeney

## Subscribe to Our New Partner E-Newsletter!



Community Partner Update June 2017



### Summer Meals Program at Campau Commons and Creston Plaza

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 program is administered locally by the Grand Rapids Public Schools 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... (article truncated)

The GRHC is publishing a new "Community Partner Update" email newsletter that provides GRHC partner organizations and volunteers with time-sensitive updates regarding our programs and services. The e-newsletter also recognizes partners for their efforts on behalf of our residents and agency.

Our most recent e-newsletter can be viewed online at <http://bit.ly/2vx6myx>. To subscribe, click the button at the top left of the e-newsletter or email [info@grhousing.org](mailto:info@grhousing.org).

## Calvin College Nursing Students Host Spring Brunch, Workshop at Hope Community

Calvin College Department of Nursing Assistant Professor Muriel Larson and her students hosted a spring brunch for residents of Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program. In addition to bright spring table decor and a tasty meal, the students offered a mental health workshop that provided practical tools for coping with life challenges, including relaxation exercises and “affirmation slip” jars that provide tangible reminders to take problems one step at a time and to acknowledge personal strengths and victories.

Many thanks to Calvin College, Professor Larson and these talented future health care professionals for their support of our residents and agency!



*Pictured clockwise from top right: The spring brunch offered fun for young residents as well as helpful information and resources for their mothers.*

*Pictured top left: Assistant Professor Muriel Larson and the nursing students who hosted the spring brunch.*

### **Become a Hope Community Donor or Volunteer!**

Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program supports low-income women and their minor children. Hope Community is funded in part by a federal Supportive Housing grant, but relies on donors for much of its routine operating needs.

For information about how you can support Hope Community as a donor or volunteer, please review the Hope Community “wish list” at [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org), or call our staff at (616) 235-2893. Thank you!

*Hope Community is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax deductible.*



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## Campau Park Party!



*The Cervera family were among the volunteers who helped clean up Campau Park.*

Campau Commons Apartments residents and GRHC staff pitched in to help spruce up Campau Park during a late-July “BBQ & Beautify” event sponsored by Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, a nonprofit citizen group that strives to protect, improve and expand our community’s public parks. The volunteers picked up litter and yard waste and also weeded around the splash pad.

Many thanks to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks for bringing the neighborhood together to beautify the park and for making the project fun by providing free food and music as well as children’s games and activities.

## Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Winners Announced

The Housing Commission is pleased to congratulate the winners of our 2017 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition:

- Kamania Chambers is a recent graduate of University Preparatory Academy. She attends Western Michigan University, with the goal of becoming a physician assistant.
- Esperance Mihigo attends Grand Rapids Community College, with the goal of becoming an obstetrician.
- Taylor Daniels is a recent Wyoming High School graduate. She is a pre-dentistry student at Eastern Michigan University.

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 from 1985 until her death in 1999.

Each year scholarships are awarded to GRHC residents who are graduating high school seniors or who currently attend



*Scholarship winner Kamania Chambers (right) with proud mom Maureen Franklin.*

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 \$33,500 to 34 scholarship winners over the years. Application materials for the 2018 competition will be available on our website, [www.grhousing.org](http://www.grhousing.org), in February.

Grand Rapids Housing Commissioners:

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

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