

FAIR HOUSING CENTER of Washtenaw County



P.O. Box 7825 • Ann Arbor, MI 48107 • (734) 994-3426

Sexual Harassment/Race Discrimination Suit Filed

Coates et. al. v Myers

They all answered the same ad: "FEMALE NEEDED. Elegant home, near WCC. Jacuzzi, laundry, \$280+. 572-0724." and now, Rachel Coates, Amanda Coffin, Erin Cuniffe, Cynthia Moening, Dawn Ottinger and Sarah Ruggles have filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against their former landlords, Raymond Scott Myers and his parents, Ernest and Becky Myers. The six-bedroom house is located on North Hewitt Road in Ypsilanti.

Although the women, some of whom had never met, lived at the house at different times in 1998 and 1999, all reported a similar pattern of behavior from Scott Myers. An initial group of women contacted the FHC in the Fall of 1998 and decided to pursue litigation. Other women were added to the case as they contacted the FHC for assistance.

According to the lawsuit filed at the end of May, 1999, Scott Myers engaged in a range of behavior including: making unwelcome sexual advances to tenants; touching tenants in an unwelcome, sexually suggestive manner; placing sex devices in tenants' rooms and common areas of the house; viewing and storing pornographic material in common areas of the house; entering and attempting to enter the bathroom when in use by tenants; and performing sexual acts in tenants' bedroom and bathrooms during their absence.

"We want this unlawful behavior to stop," said

complainant Amanda Coffin, "We are trying to help other women from falling into his trap." Two complainants, Erin Cuniffe and Sarah Ruggles also claim race discrimination. According to the suit, Myers

— *Harassment Suit* continued on next page



Woman Sues Romain Realty for Race Discrimination in Housing

Fonte v Romain Realty

One of Ypsilanti's largest landlords, Romain Realty, is being sued in Federal court for race discrimination by a woman who attempted to sublease an apartment owned by the downtown company.

Amelia Fonte attempted to take over a lease for a Romain efficiency apartment in late 1997. According to the lawsuit, after viewing the unit and meeting the

existing tenants who told her they were "desperate" to get out of their lease, Fonte, who is African-American, went to the Romain Realty office where she was told that the unit had already been rented. Testing conducted by the Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County over a 16-month period supported Fonte's claim of race discrimination.

Romain Realty, located at 312 Ballard, owns and operates numerous rental

units in the downtown and Eastern Michigan University area as well as units on the outskirts of Ypsilanti.

FHC Cooperating Attorney Ericka M. Jackson of Sommers, Schwartz, Silver and Schwartz, P.C., filed suit on behalf of Ms. Fonte. The suit, filed in September, 1999, alleges violations of the Federal Fair Housing Act. The case is assigned to Judge George E. Woods.

Disability Discrimination Suit Filed Over Violations of Federal Accessibility Guidelines

WACA v Oakridge

The Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy (WACA) has filed a disability discrimination lawsuit against Oakridge Apartments in Ypsilanti Township. The suit, which also individually names developers Julie A. Fielek and Charles Chatfield, engineer John W. Adams, and architect Joseph E. Sojkowski, alleges violations of the Federal Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1989. WACA is a non-profit advocacy group for people with disabilities and their families.

A 1997-1998 investigation conducted by the Fair Housing Center while Oakridge was still under construction revealed that the Holmes Road complex had a two-inch threshold leading into ground floor apartments and the leasing office, insufficient space and design in the bathrooms such that the door could not be closed while in use by a person using a wheelchair, insufficient space and design of doorways within the apartments, and no designated handicapped parking spaces. According to the Fair Housing Amendments Act, all multi-family housing built after March 13, 1991, must

adhere to seven basic design requirements regarding wheelchair accessibility for ground floor units and units on other floors reachable by elevator.

The suit was filed in October 1998 after meetings between the Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy, the Fair Housing Center and representatives from Oakridge failed to resolve the complaint. Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy is represented by Paul A. Callam and Stephen M. Dane of Cooper, Walinski & Cramer. The case has been assigned to Judge Patrick J. Duggan.

12-month Summary of Complaint Activity

(9/1/98 – 8/31/99)
Number of Complaints: 152

Basis for Complaint: *

Race	75
Physical Disability	28
Familial Status	27
Age	21
Sex	19
Mental/Emotional Disability ...	11
National Origin	8
Marital Status	5
Source of Income	4
Sexual Orientation	2
Student/Non-Student Status	2
Religion	0

*complaint may have more than one basis

Harassment Suit

— continued from front page

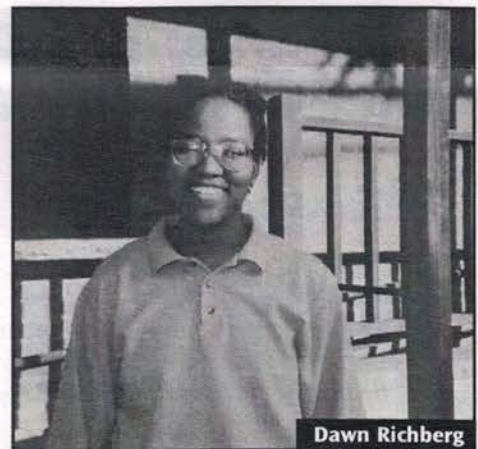
initiated the eviction process against Cuniffe and Ruggles after they each brought African-American friends to the house.

Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County Cooperating Attorney Henry Stancato of Stancato & Tragge, filed the lawsuit in Federal District Court on behalf of the group. The case is assigned to Judge Gerald E. Rosen.

Congratulations and Thanks!

Congratulations to FHC Executive Director Pam Kisch and husband Paul Sher on the birth of their daughter, Hazel Mari. Hazel made her appearance in early August. Congratulations are also due to Special Projects Coordinator Ruth Kraut and FHC Board Secretary/Treasurer Michael Appel on the birth of son Joel Issac in October. Our warmest regards go to both families and we hope they will start talking to Hazel and Joel about becoming fair housing testers!

Our thanks go to Dawn Richberg, who helped us hold the office together as two-thirds of the FHC staff went on maternity leave. Dawn, who recently left the American Friends Service Committee where she worked with the



Dawn Richberg

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues Program, assisted the FHC with everything from fundraising to investigations. We appreciate Dawn's skill, patience and willingness to go with the flow.

Keep the FHC Going Strong in the Year 2000

Anonymous Donors will Add to first 40 New Member Contributions!

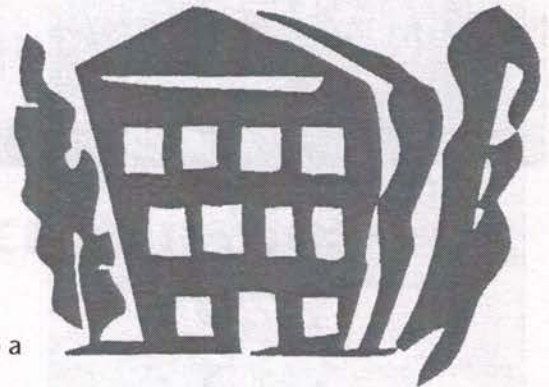
With your help, the Fair Housing Center can turn stories of discrimination into stories of justice. The FHC is the only group in Washtenaw County that provides testing services – often the only way to uncover evidence of illegal housing discrimination. We need your support to continue providing investigative services, advocacy, advice, conciliation, attorney referral and community education. All donations are tax deductible.

Become a New Member.
If you are one of the first 40 new

members by 12/31/99, anonymous donors have pledged to add \$10 to your contribution. Get the FHC off to a strong start in the Year 2000!

Renew Your Membership.
Whether you gave last year or five years ago, you remain important part of the fight against housing discrimination. We need you!

Make a Special End-of-Year Gift.
We deeply appreciate those of you who have already made a donation



to the FHC this year. Will you consider making a special end-of-year contribution?

Any contribution, big or small, keeps the FHC working for equal housing opportunity. Just clip and mail the form below in the envelope provided. And thanks for your support!

Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County • Membership Drive 1999-2000

Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special End-of-Year Special Gift | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35.00 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ |

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Your donation is tax decuctible.

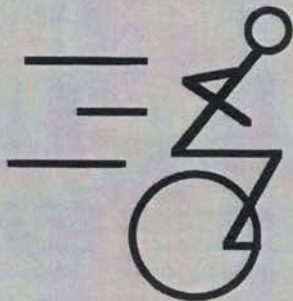
**Are you female
and over 30**



**The Fair Housing Center needs testers
— especially women over 30.**

Call Mary Bejian at **(734) 994-3426**

**REQUESTING
REASONABLE ACCOMODATION:
A GUIDE TO FAIR HOUSING
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**



COMPILED BY
THE FAIR HOUSING CENTER
OF WASHTENAW COUNTY

Shop On-Line This Holiday Season to Benefit the Fair Housing Center

CharityMall.com is an internet shopping link between retailers and non-profit organizations. Buy year-round from a Charity Mall retailer and they will send 3-30% of the cost of your purchases to the Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County. Charity Mall has links to over 100 diverse retailers including those who sell environmentally friendly products and educational toys for kids. Charity Mall sends 100% of retailers' commissions to



non-profits at no cost to the organization or its members. Type in www.CharityMall.com, select the Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County, and start raising money to fight housing discrimination!

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Disability Handbook Available

"The landlord says that I have to pay for the ramp myself... is this true?" FHC's fair housing handbook for people with disabilities and their advocates answers this question and more. The do-it-yourself guide includes the stories of FHC complainants and sample letters requesting a range of accommodations under state and federal law. The handbook also summarizes state and federal laws protecting people with disabilities in housing. The handbook is free to people with disabilities and available at \$5 per copy for others.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED