

Community Relations

Link

Promoting Harmony - Facilitating Resolution - Celebrating Diversity



CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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Then and Now

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Passage of the Civil Rights Act

By: *Lisa Rudisill*

With a house filled to capacity in the ImaginOn theater at Levine Museum of the New South—and overflow seating in an adjacent room, an excited audience heard the inspiring remarks of noted leaders on July 2nd reflect on the many positive changes that began with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

The special commemoration of the passage of the act was co-sponsored by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library and the Charlotte Community Relations Committee and featured words by the mayor of the city, and panel of area speakers, and keynote speaker from UNC-CH

School of Law, Professor Theodore Shaw.

Mayor Dan Clodfelter read a proclamation from the city declaring commemoration of the special act, and panelists James Ferguson, II, attorney, Dr. Tom Hanchett, historian, and Diane English, non-profit director discussed the great importance of the act in creation of equality in public education and hiring and the illegality of discrimination in housing, justice, and many other areas.

Professor Shaw of UNC-CH heads the Center for Civil Rights of the UNC School of Law, which works

to enforce all aspects of justice and non-discrimination. He spoke at length about the great changes that took place across America with the law's passage. All panelists and speakers agreed that many steps remain in ensuring equal rights and justice for all citizens in America.

CRC director Willie Ratchford and members of a special committee helped arrange for the program and make this event one of the most special ever for Charlotte!



Photo Captions: (Top row, from left) Carrie Taylor, Member, Public Library Representatives; Mayor Dan Clodfelter and Panelist James Ferguson, II; (bottom row, from left) Professor Theodore Shaw speaking with audience members, Willie Ratchford, CRC Director, with audience member.

CRC Holds Annual Retreat

By: Patricia Albritton, CRC Chair

The Annual CRC Retreat was held on Saturday, August 23. The CRC Retreat is an opportunity for the CRC Committee and Staff to come together and discuss our focus for the upcoming year. The retreat allows the committee time to learn more about our purpose and to reveal what each person brings as personal talents to the committee. This year's retreat was also an opportunity to evaluate what can hinder us accomplishing our CRC mission of advocating for an inclusive community, where trust, acceptance, fairness, and equity are community norms. During the retreat, we focused specifically on a S.W.O.T. analysis of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Over the past four months, the CRC has added eight new CRC members. In addition to the current members and staff, the committee knows it is important to evaluate the needs of the CRC Committee compared with understanding the needs of the Charlotte Mecklenburg communities. CRC members have a unique responsibility to hear the voices of our communities and develop responses. Discussions between new and existing CRC committee members and staff assist us all in under-

standing how the CRC committee can perform as a whole.

The CRC is effective with developing community partnerships; new opportunities present themselves every day. The CRC has a variety of individual talent but how do we pool this talent to speak for all of our communities? The CRC is strong in diversity and education but do we truly understand the needs of those in our communities who are less educated and lack diversity in their daily lives? Any committee can be threatened with having too broad a mission and not being proactive with developing effective follow-through. Having a variety of talent and areas of focus can also lead to conflicts of interest. Being a diversified committee does not mean we always understand how to engage our communities and how to appreciate differences. Finally, visibility and commitment are challenges not easily accomplished through assignments and regular meetings.

What I have just revealed are some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats discussed during the CRC retreat. However, before the CRC retreat ended, we began to put into place our plans for moving from

analysis to action.

Collaboration is essential to working within the committee and to working throughout our communities. Community outreach and communication will further support our collaborative efforts. Charlotte Mecklenburg has a wealth of organizations that are champions for so many. Together with the CRC, we can broaden the outreach, focus, education, and service.

Being responsive to our communities also requires the CRC to engage in conversation. Community dialogues will be developed and scheduled to allow reaction and feedback on issues challenging ours and other communities. Furthermore, the CRC Committee plans to review our response plans and further engage in dialogues that will assist our citizens with understanding how to respond in a crisis.

Overall, this year's CRC retreat accomplished what we set out to do: increase our familiarity with each other, understand the opportunities in our communities, and begin to move in ways to meet the mission of the CRC. I look forward to the opportunities we have before us and the differences we can make in the upcoming year.



CRC Staff Member Terry Stokes with Gwen High and CRC Chair Patricia Albritton



Asst. City Manager Eric Campbell with CRC Staff Member Stephanie Randolph

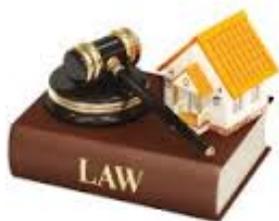
Landlord Tenant or Fair Housing

What are the differences?

By: Melissa Baker

The CRC is tasked with enforcing the Fair Housing Ordinance of the City of Charlotte; we also have a Landlord-Tenant Mediation program. We receive calls on a daily basis involving conflicts in housing, and we must distinguish whether it is a fair housing concern, or a landlord-tenant problem. Here are some of the differences:

Every landlord and tenant has certain rights and responsibilities. Landlords must keep the property in a fit and habitable condition, comply with all housing codes, maintain all electrical, plumbing, heating and other facilities in good and safe working order provided or required to be provided by the owner, and provide an operable smoke detector.



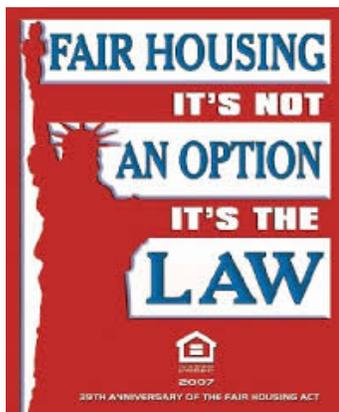
Every tenant must keep the property clean and in good condition, pay rent on time, follow the terms of the lease, and notify the landlord or property management company of any needed repairs. Tenants should keep a written copy of all repair requests, rental payments made, along with any other requests. Tenants are responsible for normal wear and tear and should never deliberately damage or destroy property or allow others to do so.



Landlord-Tenant issues usually involve more than a few tenants (everyone has trouble getting their maintenance problems addressed, or the property manager asks everyone for a social security number on the application), whereas fair housing problems are discriminatory against a particular group of people.

The Federal Fair Housing Act was written into order in 1968; the City of Charlotte's Fair Housing Ordinance has been deemed by the Federal Government to be substantially equivalent, which means our City's Ordinance very closely follows the Federal Law.

The Ordinance states that it is unlawful to treat differently in the rental, sales, brokerage or appraisal of housing due to one of the following protected classes: Race, Religion, National Origin, Sex, Disability, Familial Status or Color. Every person belongs to a protected class and is therefore protected under the Act. Most often, housing discrimination is subtle and many do not even know they are experiencing discrimination.



Here are a few examples:

A disabled person requests a parking space near his/her apartment, and the property manager refuses the request.

A family with young children is placed at the back of an apartment complex, near the playground, or on a lower level, even though they wanted a different unit and one was available.

A couple from another country walks into a neighborhood model home, and the relator tells them that they'll probably feel more comfortable in the neighborhood across town, because there are more people like them.

These are only a few examples of housing discrimination. There are many more, and every case is unique.



A landlord may also not evict a tenant for filing a fair housing complaint, nor for assisting another person in doing so.

The State of North Carolina also prevents landlords from evicting or otherwise discriminating against tenants because the tenant has experienced domestic violence, or if the tenant calls the police for assistance with domestic violence.

A tenant is also allowed to break his/her lease in order to move to be safe from the violence.

Often our department receive calls from tenants who want to or already have discontinued paying rent, because the landlord has not maintained the property, or because the tenant feels the landlord is engaging in discriminatory practices.

It is important for a tenant to continue to pay rent while seeking assistance; otherwise a landlord can file an eviction for non-payment of rent.

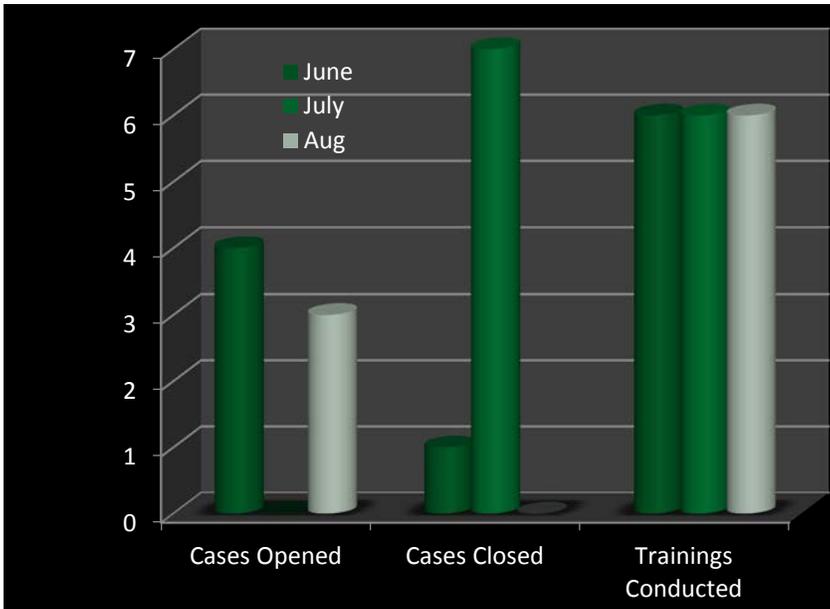
If you believe that you have a landlord-tenant issue, and would like to use our dispute settlement services to mediate your problem with your landlord or tenant free of charge, you may call 704-336-3056. If you feel that you are being treated unfairly due to your protected class status listed above, then you may call 704-336-5160 to reach a fair housing specialist. We can help decipher whether the problem falls under the jurisdiction of fair housing law, or if it is a landlord tenant issue, and assist you in proceeding accordingly.

You can also visit our website to file a complaint online and to learn about our other services at: <http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/crc>



Feel discriminated? Call us!
For more information about fairness in housing and public places or to file a complaint, please call 704-336-5160.

Fair Housing and Police Review Highlights



Police Review Highlights:

June:

Staff attended 7 Chain of Command Hearings

August:

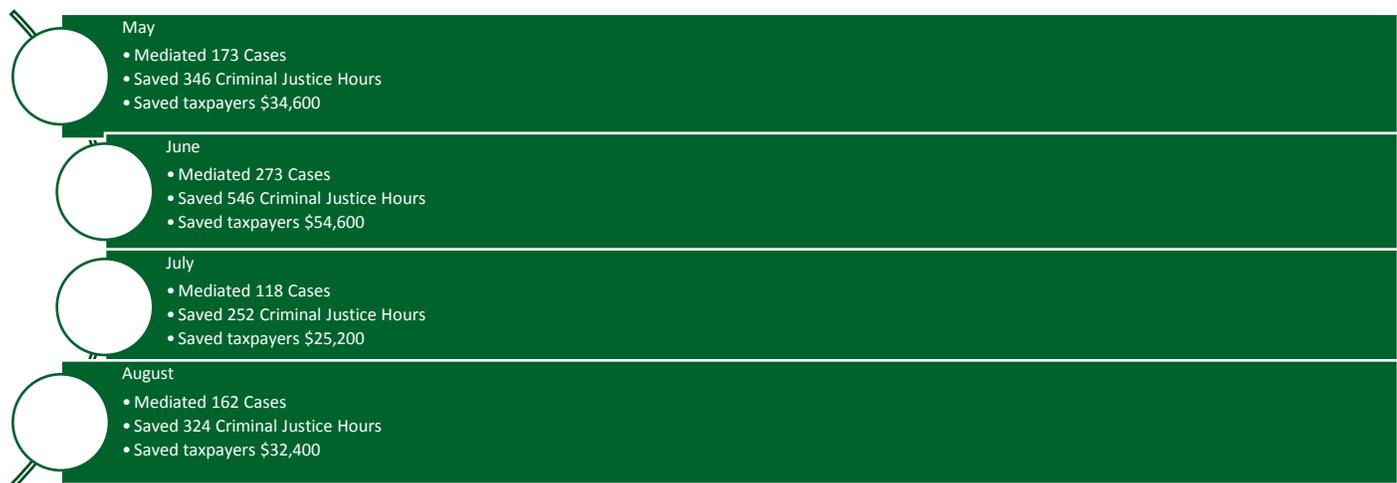
Staff attended 11 Chain of Command Hearings

JULY:

Staff attended 11 Chain of Command Hearings

Staff assisted citizens with filing 7 complaints against police officers

Dispute Settlement Highlights:



CRC Staff

Executive Director

Willie Ratchford

Community Relations Managers

Ledger Morrisette Jr.
Mary Williams
Terry Bradley

Community Relations Specialists

Melissa Baker
Lezlie Briggs
Luis Matta
Stephanie Randolph
Terry Stokes

Administrative Assistants

Renee Thompson
Sue Green

CRC Board Members:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
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| Dwayne Walker, CRC Vice Chair | Kathleen Odom |
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| Madelyn Baer | Marty Puckett |
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| Trymaine Gaither | Ruth Stevenson |
| Roderick Garvin | Jennifer Styczen |
| Tyyawdi Hands | Michael Tanck |
| Brenda Hayden | Carrie Taylor |
| Gwendolyn High | Rhonda Taylor |
| Jibril Hough | Glenn Thomas |
| Janet Lama | Thomas J. Vinson, Jr. |
| Melvin Lowery | Bahiyyah Walker |
| LaWana Mayfield | Dwayne Walker |
| Shannon McKnight | Doug Wilson |
| Sharon Merritt | |
| Kwesi Nichols | |

*Our Vision:
A Charlotte-Mecklenburg
where people's differences
are acknowledged, under-
stood, and appreciated*

Thank You

We're on the Web!

See us at:

crc.charmeck.org

Address:

600 East Trade St. Suite 003
Charlotte, NC 28202
(704) 336-2424

We love to hear from CRC Link readers! If you have a suggestion, feedback, or great story idea, please do not hesitate to contact us at mbaker@charlottenc.gov

The CRC Link is a quarterly publication of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee.

Editor: Melissa Baker

Editorial Board: Michael Tanck, Marc Friedland, Lisa Rudisill, Trymaine Gaither, Shannon McKnight, Jennifer Styczen, Diana Sanchez, Carrie Ann Taylor, Scott Bishop, Janet Lama, David Smith, Sandra Donaghy, and Omar Saxton