

Mineola landlord settles racism suit

BY RICHARD TEDESCO

A nonprofit organization working for racial equality announced last Thursday it had reached a \$165,000 settlement in a housing discrimination case filed against a Mineola landlord and property manager.

The lawsuit filed last August by ERASE Racism and four other plaintiffs charged that Town House Apartments, a 75-unit rental apartment building in Mineola, had discriminated against African Americans in renting apartments.

Elaine Gross, president of ERASE Racism, said the suit was filed after white and African-Americans sent by the Manhattan-based Fair Housing Justice Center to inquire about rental units advertised as being available received different responses on several occasions.

"The white applicants were told there were vacancies. The African American testers were told there were no vacancies for one reason or another," Gross said.

On one occasion, African-Americans

were told there were vacancies in the apartment building at 225 First Street in Mineola, but were quoted much higher apartment rental rates than the whites who inquired at the building, Gross said.

The Fair Housing Justice Center and the African-Americans sent to inquire about the apartments were co-plaintiffs in the suit.

Gross said her Syosset-based organization had targeted Mineola after conducting demographic research in Nassau County and found that African-Americans comprise 2 percent of the village's population.

"We undertook an investigation ourselves, which included some demographic analysis," Gross said.

Efforts to reach building superintendent Jorge Agudelo at the apartment for comment were unavailing.

The people sent in by Fair House Justice Center taped their conversations with Agudelo, Gross said.

Gross said the settlement, which signed on June 12 by United States

Magistrate Judge Gary R. Brown, requires the building owner, LLR Realty LLC, to have its building superintendent and other employees at the Town House Apartments trained in showing and renting apartments.

She said the training will be done by person designated by ERASE Racism or the Fair Housing Center.

ERASE Racism also reported the settlement will give it access to record keeping of documents such as rental applications and denials "to help ensure compliance" until 2017.

Apartment vacancies must be advertised to the public through www.craigslist.com in a non-discriminatory manner as part of the settlement. The settlement also requires that HUD Equal Housing Opportunity notices are posted at the property and visibly rendered on all rental applications.

"All people should have the ability to housing choice that they can afford. They should not be kept out because of race or religion," Gross said.

"This is very important also because children are relegated to racially segregated communities. Because of the way school segregation works, parents send their children to schools that have fewer opportunities and higher needs."

The Mineola case is the latest of several recent housing discrimination cases in Nassau County.

Two fair housing agencies recently filed a federal lawsuit against the Village of Great Neck Plaza and the Nassau County Industrial Development Agency for allegedly restricting access to affordable housing to African-Americans.

The U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the Town of Oyster Bay in April over alleged discrimination in the town's affordable housing programs.

And U.S. District Judge Arthur D. Spatt ruled in December that a Garden City zoning ordinance discriminated against minority residents.

COMMUNITY NEWS

CASA commended for anti-drug campaign

Manhasset CASA's recent sector meeting was kicked off with a proclamation from the Town of North Hempstead for its "Talk. They Hear You" campaign. The ongoing underage drinking prevention initiative seeks to empower families to talk with their children about the risks of underage drinking – as early as age 9. The proclamation also marked the day as a town wide day of special recognition in the prevention of underage drinking across our communities.

"The Town of North Hempstead commends CASA for providing families with the tools they need to start conversations with their children about alcohol," said Judi Bosworth, Town of North Hempstead supervisor. "Talk. They Hear You" serves a critical role in combating underage drinking and educating parents and caregivers about the importance of communication."

"CASA is a wonderful resource for parents, who are sometimes unsure of how to approach the subject of drinking with their children," added Anna Kaplan, North Hempstead councilwoman for District 4. "This gives parents the support and information they need in order to have those important discussions."

The meeting was one of four held this school calendar year as part of CASA's Drug Free Communities Grant Program and was dedicated to administering



The Town of North Hempstead applauded Manhasset CASA's "Talk. They Hear You" Campaign at CASA's recent sector meeting. Pictured left to right: Left to Right: Kristin Mulholland, Shelter Rock School SCA President; Cathy Samuels, Manhasset CASA Project Director; Andrew Lunetta, Manhasset CASA Board of Director; Anna M. Kaplan, North Hempstead Councilwoman District 4; Judi Bosworth, North Hempstead Supervisor; Lisa Belinsky, Manhasset CASA Executive Director; Eugene Petracca, Jr. P.E., Manhasset CASA Board President; Barbara Donno, Mayor of Plandome Manor; and Liz Tomaselli, Munsey Park School SCA President.

a community assessment facilitated by the U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Dave You of the NYC Counter-drug Task Force. The Community Kaizen or community assessment survey queried CASA sector members where they electronically recorded their answers with hand held devices. The results are to be measured against the Drug Free Communities Grant's standard process tool that most coalitions use and are gauged against factors like participation, consensus and utility which have been proven to be key indicators for coalition suc-

cess. Final survey results will be presented at CASA's Oct. 2 meeting and incorporated in its Strategic and Sustainability Plans.

Manhasset CASA's "Talk. They Hear You" Campaign notes that as children approach their teen years, they begin to experience many emotional and physical changes – changes that are not always easy – and some children may experiment with alcohol. For most children, it is not just one thing that influences them to drink, but rather a combination of factors and parents can act to encourage healthy

decision making during adolescence:

Stress: When children worry about things like grades, fitting in, and physical appearance, they may use alcohol as a way to escape their problems. What Can Parents Do? Encourage children to get involved in sports or other extracurricular activities as a healthier way to cope with his or her problems.

Peer Pressure: The age range between 11 and 18 is an impressionable period when youth are especially susceptible to outside influences such as peers, family

members, and the media. What Can Parents Do? Help boost children's confidence by helping him or her learn different ways to say "no" and reminding him or her that real friends do not pressure him or her to drink.

Transitions: Life events such as transitioning from middle school to high school, breaking up with a significant other, moving, or divorce can cause children to turn to alcohol. What Can Parents Do? Reassure children that things will get easier, and make sure he or she knows that drinking is not a solution.

Environment: If children grow up in an environment where parents or peers drink a lot and/or view drinking favorably, they may be more likely to drink themselves. What Can Parents Do? If parents choose to drink, set a good example by drinking in moderation, and make sure children know that underage drinking is not acceptable.

Genetics: Children who come from families with alcohol in their history are at an increased risk for becoming an alcoholic. What Can Parents Do? Have an honest discussion with children to make sure he or she understands the seriousness of the disease.

For more information on talking with children about alcohol, go to underagedrinking.samhsa.gov or manhassetcasa.org