



**Greater Milwaukee Association of REALTORS® and City Leaders Recognize
50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act**
*Special Event Honors Those Who
Led, Participated In and Supported Milwaukee's Open Housing Marches*

Milwaukee (April 11, 2018) – Milwaukee-area REALTORS and city leaders gathered to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act and Milwaukee's open housing marches that began on August 28, 1967, and lasted until March 14, 1968.

During a news conference just north of the 16th Street Viaduct, former members of the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council and Commandos who participated in the 200 days of marches were honored and thanked for their bravery and courage in demanding an open housing ordinance in the city and an end to housing discrimination. Alderwoman Vel Phillips and Father James E. Groppi were also recognized for their leadership and dedication.

“We wanted to thank the members of the NAACP Youth Council, the Commandos and all of the participants of the open housing marches 50 years ago. Their efforts improved the lives of thousands of people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the United States,” said Vickie Kelsall, chairwoman of the board of directors of the Greater Milwaukee Association of REALTORS (GMAR). “The principles they marched for were important 50 years ago and are just as important today. And, they will be more important tomorrow, as future generations pursue the American dream of homeownership.”

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Fair Housing Act, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status and national origin.

As part of the news conference, the GMAR presented a check for \$12,500 to Housing Resources, Inc. to support their work in preparing Milwaukeeans for successful homeownership. Shorewest Realtors, RE/MAX Realty 100, the First Weber Foundation and Century 21 Affiliated each contributed funds to make the donation possible.

The GMAR also announced a first-time homebuyer awareness and education initiative. During May and June, the association will execute a postcard mailing to thousands of renters throughout the city to encourage them to consider homeownership and direct them to homebuying classes offered by Housing Resources, Inc. The GMAR also plans to produce a rack card for placement in city churches.

Statistics show Milwaukee has experienced a loss of owner-occupied homes in the last 10 years.

“Prior to the recession in 2007, 78% of single family homes, duplexes and condo units in the City of Milwaukee were owner-occupied. Currently, that figure is 68%, which represents a loss of roughly 13,000 owner-occupied homes,” said Kelsall, citing numbers from the City of Milwaukee, Department of City Development. “We want to reverse that trend. That’s why we’re focusing our efforts on encouraging and preparing more first-time homebuyers to enter the market.”

A number of former Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council members, Commandos and marchers were able to attend the April 11 recognition event, including: Mary Ann Arms; Pinkie Arms; Shree Brooks; Susan and Wilbur Arms; Dave Childs; Betty Glossen; Frankie Hall; Betty Harris Martin; Joyce and Ken McGhee; Lyneria Childs McGhee; Bill Wigley; and Chuck Wigley. Fred Reed, a former NAACP Youth Council Commando member, and Margaret "Peggy" Rozga, the wife of Father Groppi and a Youth Council member, spoke at the news conference and shared their experiences during the 200 days of marching.

The entire group received special recognition from City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett who led a standing ovation. The Mayor also provided an update on his 10 years, 10,000 homes plan, which he announced in February during his annual "state of the city" address.

Alderman Ashanti Hamilton, president of the Milwaukee Common Council, spoke about the leadership, determination and persistence of Vel Phillips. Phillips was a champion of fair housing in Milwaukee, was active in the NAACP and helped lead the open housing marches.

Phillips was a trailblazer in many ways. She was the first woman and first African-American elected to Milwaukee's Common Council, serving from 1956-1971. In 1962, she introduced an open housing ordinance but her vote was the only one in support of it. She introduced the ordinance three more times during the next five years but the result was always the same – a single vote from Phillips.

The open housing ordinance Phillips had advocated for was finally adopted. On April 30, a couple of weeks after President Johnson signed the federal Fair Housing Act, the Milwaukee Common Council passed its own fair housing ordinance that was more comprehensive than the federal law.

Dr. Eve Hall, president and CEO of the Milwaukee Urban League, and William Tisdale, president and CEO of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council, also participated in the news conference and talked about their organizations' missions and the important benefits that homeownership provides to individuals, families, neighborhoods and the City of Milwaukee.

"The Fair Housing Act was landmark legislation. We didn't want this significant, historic event to pass by quietly," said Kelsall. "As REALTORS, we felt it was important to take time to celebrate what was achieved 50 years ago and then continue to work for more progress now and in the future."

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