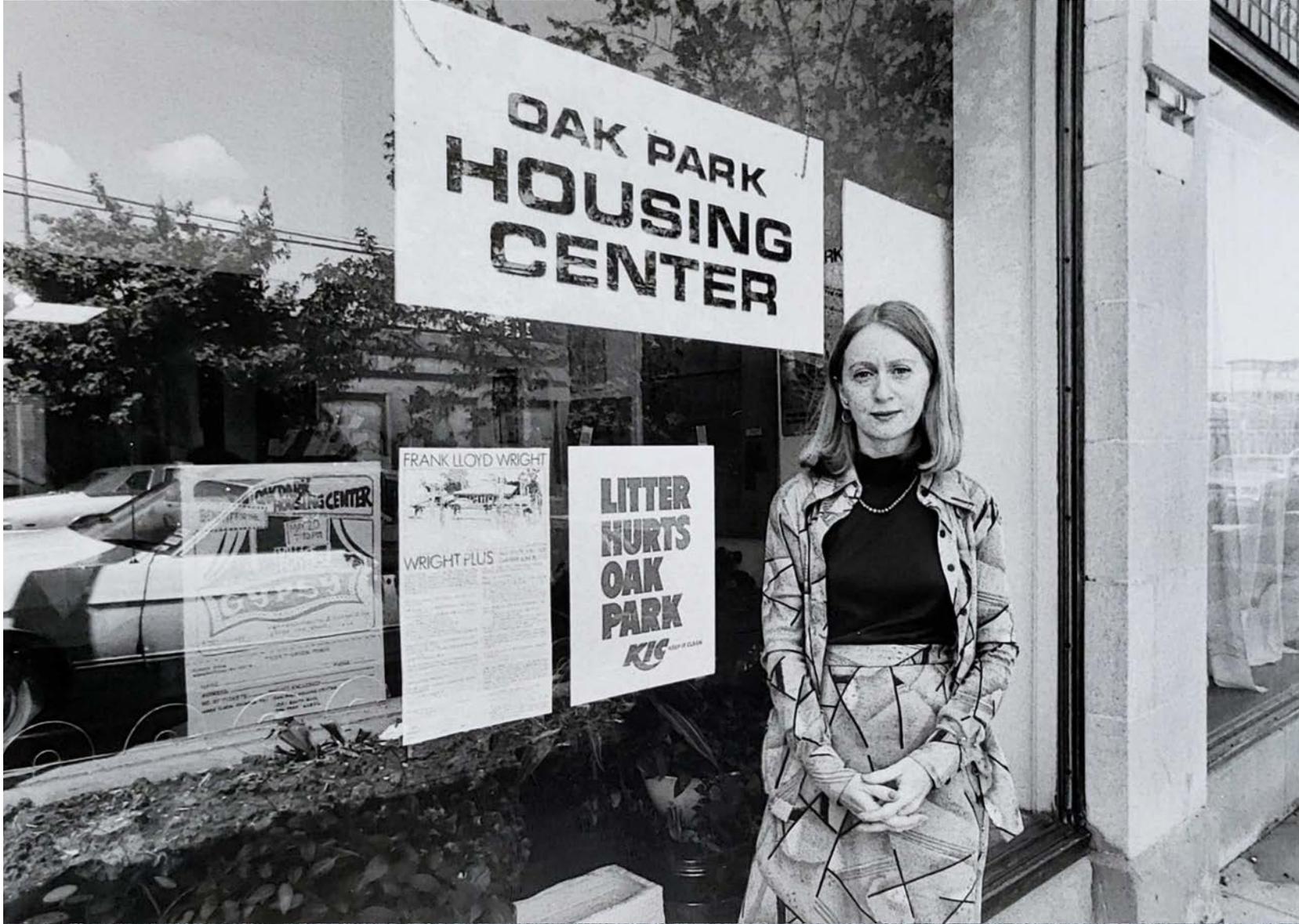


THE OAK PARKER



VOLUME 5: ISSUE 1: FALL 2019

MOVING THE LEGACY FORWARD: BUILDING ON ONE WOMAN'S HISTORIC IMPACT

A PUBLICATION OF THE OAK PARK REGIONAL HOUSING CENTER

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SPECIAL THANKS TO THE
VILLAGE OF OAK PARK
WHOSE GENEROUS FUNDING
CONTRIBUTES TO THE
MISSION OF THE OAK
PARK REGIONAL HOUSING
CENTER.



Welcome to the 2019 issue of *The Oak Parker Magazine*. First published in 2012, *The Oak Parker* continues the tradition of promoting the great things about Oak Park and its people. After a three-year hiatus, we decided to bring back this special edition of *The Oak Parker* as a way to keep the work of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center (OPRHC) front and center in your thoughts, and to let the community know that rumors of our demise have been greatly exaggerated. We are still here in the Village, actively working to ensure integrated and stable neighborhoods in Oak Park and the West Cook region.

The reactivation of *The Oak Parker* coincides with a celebration of the legacy of Roberta Raymond and her contributions as the founding director of the OPRHC. At our Annual Benefit: "Moving the Legacy Forward" we will announce the establishment of an endowment in honor of Roberta Raymond and share our future vision for the Housing Center.

This issue of *The Oak Parker* will explore the legacy of OPRHC founder Roberta "Bobbie" Raymond, her effect on Oak Park and her "radical" strategy to create and maintain a diverse and integrated community. We will also reintroduce you to the Housing Center, explore the history, and provide an overview of our current operations. Focusing on Oak Park businesses, read the article on the stylish and dynamic owner of LIVE Café, Reesheda Graham Washington, a dedicated educator, advocate for equitable treatment and outcomes, and an unapologetic proponent of individual and community upliftment. OPRF High School alum and Housing Center intern India Soodan will share her observations on how people are shaped by the foundations of their community. Victor Yipp explains how Oak Park will become the first co-housing community in Illinois. Erica Cuneen from Beyond Properties gives advice on investing in multi-family buildings in Oak Park. OPRHC Associate Director Athena Williams will outline how the Housing Center's West Cook Homeownership Center program provides comprehensive housing counseling to prospective homebuyers in western Cook County.

The Oak Parker is produced by the OPRHC. *The Oak Parker Magazine* is an indispensable guide for Oak Park residents and newcomers to the community. Be sure to like us on Facebook to stay up-to-date on Oak Park events, fair housing news, available rentals, and workshops on financial empowerment and homeownership. We would like to thank donors, volunteers, advertisers, supporters and the Village of Oak Park in making it possible to pursue our mission to achieve vibrant communities and promote intentional and stable residential integration throughout Oak Park and the region.

Derrick C. Lewis
Executive Editor



Thursday Night Out, August 2019
Photo Credit: Maggie Leiningner

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Creating a Legacy of Giving



No other organization puts your money to work in our community like the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation. For 60 years we've connected individuals' and families' philanthropic aspirations with local organizations and initiatives, enhancing donor investments and changing lives for the better.

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*Thanks to the Oak Park
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Center for all you do for
our community!*

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Assistant Majority Leader

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6937 W. North Ave., Oak Park

(708) 613-5939 * staterepcamilleylilly@gmail.com



OUR MISSION is to achieve vibrant communities and promote intentional and stable residential integration throughout Oak Park and the region.

OUR VISION is a diverse Greater Westside of vibrant, sustainably integrated communities.

WHAT WE DO:

Both federal and local laws provide apartment seekers the freedom to pursue housing of his/her choice. As a rental referral service, the Housing Center assists prospective renters in their search to find housing in the Oak Park area. We encourage our clients to consider the full range of housing opportunities throughout Oak Park, especially those that contribute to racial integration. We give listings to prospective renters based on their registration and in accordance with our mission.

Our services also include a housing counseling program, the West Cook Homeownership Center (WCHC). Its purpose is to help make homeownership attainable in communities that border Oak Park. Our WCHC program provides pre-purchase and first-time homebuyer education and counseling. We also provide extensive services to assist with money management.

There is no fee to use our services. The Housing Center is a not-for-profit HUD-approved 501(c)(3) organization that does not act as a licensed agent for any property owner or manager.

WHO WE HELP:

We help rental seekers, homebuyers, and property owners. Are you a renter looking for your new home? We can help you find a new apartment in Oak Park that matches your needs, helping you in ways that the larger online apartment search sites can't, such as providing clients with first-hand information from a non-biased perspective.

Are you looking to buy a home? We equip you with the tools needed to make informed and secure home purchase decisions. We also provide assistance with credit building, and debt management.

Are you a property owner looking for qualified renters? We help renters understand their budgets and what to expect when applying for a rental application. We offer personalized on-sight meetings at the property to assist building owners with setting rent ranges and to provide insight on market trends.

HOW YOU CAN HELP US:

Use our services. Refer your friends, family and neighbors to the Housing Center. Since our founding in 1972, the Housing Center has provided a national model for community-based action to promote open and inclusive communities. The Housing Center serves as a resource for other communities and community-based organizations across the country that are striving to achieve diversity and integration.

Read more on page 9 for details on how the Housing Center helps apartment seekers and property owners. If you are looking to buy a home in west Cook County, or require money management assistance, go to page 12 for more information on the services provided by our WCHC program.

And because we are a not-for-profit and charge no fees, your donation in any amount is greatly appreciated.

Visit <https://oprhc.org/donate/> to donate today!

A HISTORY OF THE HOUSING CENTER

WILLIAM PETERMAN



Founder Roberta "Bobbie" Raymond counseling a prospective new resident in the early years.

As part of Oak Park's efforts to address issues of integration and diversity since the 1960s, the Oak Park Regional Housing Center has been a major player in working to welcome minorities to the Village while avoiding resegregation that has so often occurred in many American urban neighborhoods and communities. Even as times and issues have changed, the Housing Center continues to serve Oak Park and remains an important component of Oak Park's present and future.

Following World War II, neighborhood after neighborhood on Chicago's west side experienced resegregation, changing racially from white to black. This was not a natural phenomenon, but the result of: redlining, the refusal of financial institutions to lend in neighborhoods they considered "risky;" blockbusting, a real estate practice that promoted panic in neighborhoods when an African-American family moved in; and the lack of action from city government." Neighborhoods often changed from white to black in a matter of weeks. By 1960 resegregation was occurring in the Austin neighborhood adjacent to Oak Park.

Some academic "experts" predicted that within a few years Oak Park would also begin to resegregate. That this did not happen was not due to chance, but rather to a community wide effort involving an active citizenry, a few very dedicated individuals, one lender willing to invest in Oak Park, and a Village government that addressed the issue straight on. It was in this context that the Oak Park Housing Center came into being.

The 1960s were a time of turmoil and in Oak Park turmoil focused on the potential for racial change and resegregation. According to the 1960 census 57 African-Americans lived in Oak Park, primarily a declining servant population to Oak Park's wealthier families. But in the mid-1960s new Black families began to purchase homes in Oak Park. Lenders began redlining the Village and it looked like racial change might follow the pattern well established on Chicago's west side.

The Village government began taking steps in response, creating a Community Relations Commission in 1963 and a Residence Corporation in 1965 to deal with

blighted homes. So called "Hundreds Clubs" were established in 1968 to foster neighborhood cohesion and encourage home maintenance and improvement. (Today's block parties, a legacy of these "Clubs", informally serve the same purpose.) One lender, St. Paul Federal Savings and Loan, whose president lived in Oak Park, continued to lend to Oak Park home purchasers.

After weeks of heated debate the Village Board passed a Fair Housing Ordinance in May of 1968, a month after the passage of the Federal Fair Housing Act. The Oak Park Ordinance prohibited discrimination in home and apartment advertising, home sales, rentals, and financing, as well as outlawing panic peddling. The Community Relations Commission was charged with enforcing the law, although it would not be staffed or have an office until 1970.

By 1970 Oak Park had positioned itself as an open community, declaring black families to be welcome. It had also taken some steps to discourage rapid racial change. But as of yet it had no policies or procedures to ensure that no one section or the entire Village would resegregate. Fortunately one citizen, Roberta "Bobbie" Raymond, stepped forward with the idea of the Oak Park Housing Center.

Bobbie Raymond's plan was simple. Since multi-unit apartment buildings made up approximately half of Oak Park's housing and since the turnover in renters could be quite rapid, renters and landlords would be the Housing Center's focus. Center staff would match potential tenants with apartment units in ways that promoted integration while helping landlords find tenants for their vacant units. White apartment seekers would be encouraged and directed to units where it was felt that "white demand" was soft, while Black apartment seekers would be encouraged and directed to locations where few if any African-Americans were already living. Landlords who agreed to let the Center act as their "agent" would get help in renting their units and would not have to worry about their buildings resegregating.

The Housing Center opened in 1972 in the basement of First Congregational church (now First United Church). While independent from the Village government, it has worked closely with the Village and has been funded by it. Raymond and subsequent directors have always tried to coordinate the Center's work with Village programs.

This was particularly the case when Sherlyn Reid was the head of the Community Relations Department (1977 - 1999). By informing clients that the Center's goal is to promote integration and diversity and leaving the ultimate choice of where to locate up to the client the Center operates in compliance with fair housing laws. This counseling and referral program has been very successful in keeping Oak Park's housing stock integrated.

The Oak Park Regional Housing Center has been a major element, but not the only one, in Oak Park's efforts to become and remain integrated. Several initiatives were introduced in the 1970s. These included; a ban on for-sale signs passed by the Village Board in 1972 (later ruled unconstitutional but still voluntarily practiced today), an official diversity policy statement passed by the Village Board in 1973 and subsequently passed (and amended) by each new Village Board, a Village funded equity assurance program allowing homeowners to "insure" their homes against racial change, work by the Residence Corporation to purchase, rehabilitate, and sell multi-family buildings, and a reorganization of the Village's elementary and middle schools drawing boundaries to promote diversity in each of the Village's six elementary and two middle schools.

While the rental counseling and referral program remained at its core, the scope of the Housing Center expanded over the years. In 1977 it organized the Oak Park Exchange Congress, promoting Oak Park and sharing programs and policies with integrated suburbs throughout the U.S. In 1985 the Center began working with the Village on a Diversity Assurance Program, providing loans and technical assistance to landlords who agreed to market their units through the Housing Center. In 1992 the Center initiated the New Directions Program (Apartments West) expanding choices for its clients throughout the western suburbs. With this came the name change, to the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. Rob Breymaier, the Center's Director from 2006 to 2018, reoriented the New Directions program by establishing a short lived program in Berwyn, creating the West Cook Homeownership Center, and working with several Austin organizations on community and housing issues.

Much has changed since Oak Park and the Housing Center began working toward integration in the Village. Integration is no longer just a black and white issue.

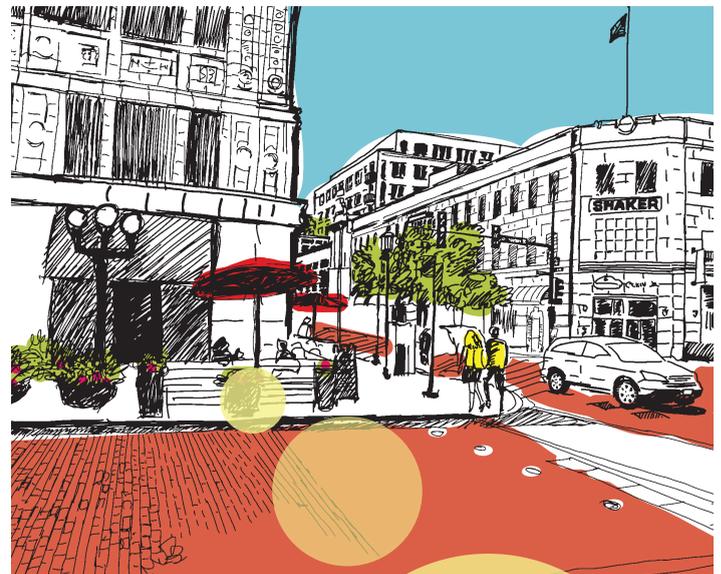
(continued from pg. 7)

The citizens and government of Oak Park continue to struggle with what it means to be a diverse community. Threats of resegregation may not be as obvious, but they have not gone away. Bobbie Raymond was always quick to point out that as long as racial discrimination exists, work to maintain integration is necessary. Today Oak Park faces an ongoing task to promote diversity and to maintain its integrated neighborhoods. With community support the Housing Center will be there doing its part to ensure a fair, equitable, and integrated Village.

William Peterman is a retired professor of Urban Geography at Chicago State University and lives in Oak Park. He is also a former board member of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center.



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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE HOUSING CENTER



The mission of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center is to achieve vibrant communities and promote intentional and stable residential integration throughout Oak Park and the region. To accomplish this mission, the Housing Center engages in proactive approaches that aim to foster integration and improve the options and opportunities available to people of all races and incomes.

Why Use the Housing Center?

When was the last time you moved to a new town? What tools did you use to find a place to live? Did you use one of the large national apartment search websites? How did you find out if the neighborhood was right for you, or if your rent was within market value? Just because an apartment is in a general location



Clients working with Housing Guide Art Murnan.

where an average rent is charged, doesn't mean that it is worth that amount. We work with property owners to help them understand what amenities can entice renters and we work with renters to help them understand the value of the property they are renting.

Our Referral Service

As a free rental referral service, the Housing Center assists prospective renters in their search to find housing in the Oak Park area. Our Housing Advisors educate clients on their fair housing rights, and encourage consideration of the full range of housing opportunities, especially those that contribute to improving or sustaining integration in Oak Park. Our policy is to offer listings in accordance with our mission. We give listings to prospective renters based only on their specific requirements. This affirmative model of direct service ensures that our clients are aware of their rights and opportunities at the onset of their apartment search.

With our apartment services, clients can choose from vintage apartments with beautiful woodwork and architectural flourishes to modern apartments. Whether a client's preference is for a classic courtyard building or a house, we have rentals available from studios to 3-bedrooms and more.

(continued from pg. 9)

We try to exercise every means available for personal contact with clients. We offer qualified clients the opportunity to interact with us via Skype and Apple FaceTime with real-time video tours of apartments with our Rental Guides. There is also a chat function available on our LiveinOakPark.com website.

Our services are unique because we get listings from owners throughout Oak Park, so we can provide clients with potential rentals that meet their specific needs. When getting listings through the Housing Center, clients save a huge amount of time and effort. We don't provide our listings online because speaking with you one-on-one allows us to customize our services just for you.

The actual price of rent depends on the time of year, which Oak Park apartments are listed at that time, and what utilities and amenities are included. We try to help everyone the best we can but the Housing Center is not an affordable housing provider. We provide listings that are at typical market rents for Oak Park apartments.



Head Rental Housing Advisor Jerry Ehernberger

No appointment is necessary! The process is easy: Simply walk-in during business hours to meet with an adviser who will customize an apartment search to meet your needs. You can also call us to register for one of our listings at 708.848.7150.

Services for Property Owners

We also assist Oak Park and surrounding area property owners who are seeking renters. When property owners provide listing information to our staff, it is entered into our listing database, and given to qualified, potential tenants.



Housing Guide John McKinney and Marketing Director Mike Stewart.

What we offer when you list your property:

- More than 47 years of marketing experience in the rental industry
- Knowledge of area marketing trends, including pricing and tenant preferences
- Advertising and community outreach via print and online to a wide regional and national audience
- More than 2,000 apartment seekers who use our service each year
- Thorough familiarity with all of Oak Park and its features: from Austin to Harlem, Roosevelt Road to North Avenue

What you receive when you list your property:

- Valuable information on tenant screening, selection, management, and retention
- Personalized advice on how to showcase and market your vacancy
- An on-site preview of your property with suggestions and comparison to other similar apartments
- Guidance through the tenant application process
- Expertise on fair housing compliance

In Addition:

- We can help you understand and apply for Village funding programs
- We can provide referrals for remodeling and repairing your rental property
- We can advise you on companies that can offer the best tenant screening and background checks and which pre-lease documents to use

- We can help you take advantage of the best market timing to list and renew your leases
- We can advise you of local products and services to help you retain and renew your tenants

Hear it first-hand:

Our advisors and guides will help you find exactly what you are looking for and we will be able to assist you with detailed information that the large apartment search websites just can't provide. Just look at some of our client testimonials from both rental seekers and property owners.

Property owner Sandra Goldberg said, "Although the internet has given landlords another avenue in which to advertise for tenants, it cannot replace the wonderful service that the Oak Park Regional Housing Center provides."

Rental seekers Matt Smith and Heather Sollom said, "Our experience with the Housing Center was great. We were shown a broad variety of units based on our price range and preferences by our guide (an Oak Park native who really knew the area). We had a hard time deciding between two places only because both suited us so well. Highly recommend to anyone new to the area."

Meet some of our staff and volunteers who provide the valuable services the Oak Park Regional Housing Center offers.



Jay Champelli also volunteers at the front desk.



Rental Advisor Jennifer Hopkins counsels rental seekers.



Associate Director Athena Williams with volunteer Judy Compton.



Marketing Assistant Juan Arriaza and Housing Guide Art Murnan.

Call us at 708-848-7150
 email: inforequest@liveinoakpark.com
www.LiveinOakPark.com



HOMEOWNERSHIP IS KEY

ATHENA WILLIAMS

In 2006, the Oak Park Regional Housing Center (OPRHC), a HUD-approved agency, created a housing counseling program, the West Cook Homeownership Center (WCHC). The development of the West Cook Homeownership Center was a way to further our vision of creating a diverse Westside of vibrant, sustainably integrated communities. As we continued to influence the rental market, we knew it was essential to make homeownership attainable, particularly for those communities that border the Village of Oak Park, hence the development of the West Cook Homeownership Center.

It is a well-established financial principle that home ownership is a major key to building wealth over time. This makes homeownership unique— a goal that must be made accessible to more people if we hope to increase the financial security of financially stressed communities. Owning a home, with the proper tools in place, is the main way people increase their wealth over time. Other benefits of homeownership include building equity, having more space and being able to do what you want with it, and having something of means to pass on to your family. We provide the tools you need to acquire homeownership at the West Cook Homeownership Center.

The West Cook Homeownership Center focuses on pre-purchase and first-time home buyer education and counseling for residents seeking homeownership. This program equips residents with the tools needed to make informed and secure home purchase decisions. Those tools include, but are not limited to down payment assistance administration; budgeting for homeownership; how to work with the home buying professionals such as the realtor, inspector, attorney and much more. With our bilingual staff, we offer assistance to everyone and anyone interested in homeownership. We provide an array of housing services that include assistance with issues that arise during the period of ownership of a home such as predatory lending counseling, the need for refinancing, reverse mortgage counseling, loan modification, default, and foreclosure counseling.

We also offer extensive services to assist with money management. Our Financial Services program offers basic banking needs information, credit building and debt management assistance, and a financial empowerment group education class. A financially savvy homeowner is a happy homeowner.

People often wonder, “Is buying better than renting?”

Here is my answer - you have to live somewhere, correct? Things to consider: do you want to continue to pay a landlord for 30 years, and not have anything to show for it? Or, would you rather pay yourself, and after so many years, own a home that has equity? In addition, your home, when properly managed will have accumulated an appreciation. However, buying only makes sense if you are financially ready, and of course, no judgement here if you are not; only help to get you there! There are a few things you should consider if you should decide to buy versus renting. These include stable employment, money available for down payment and moving costs, and of course if you are planning to live in one place for at least five years. As the demand grows for rental units, rent costs are skyrocketing which makes the benefits of owning a home more attractive.

In 2018, WCHC expanded its service area to provide broader comprehensive services to the Austin community. We acquired the Bethel New Life housing program, and established a brick and mortar presence in the community. As a result, the Oak Park Regional Housing Center became a Co-Chair of the Housing Committee of the Austin Quality of Life Plan, responsible for overseeing four strategic initiatives. In

2017, we developed our Austin Rising initiative, which is aligned with the Austin Quality of Life Plan strategy to decrease the vacancy rate of buildings in the Austin community. The Austin Rising initiative, in its infancy stage, is funded in part by Wells Fargo. We have much work to accomplish with the Quality of Life Plan, but with help from partners such as Wells Fargo, we are sure to get the work done!

To participate in our classes or to learn more about the West Cook Homeownership Center visit our website westcookhomeownership.org, or drop us a line, info@westcookhomeownership.org. Remember, the West Cook Homeownership Center has the keys to help you become a homeowner, help you build your credit, and help you stay in your home. All services are free.

Athena Williams is the Associate Director of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center and manages the programming of the West Cook Homeownership Center.



Housing Counselor Deborah Williams
with a client at the West Cook Homeownership Center.

AUSTIN is RISING!

*Thanks to a
Community Development Grant
from Wells Fargo!*

WELLS FARGO

**West Cook Homeownership Center
a program of the
Oak Park Regional Housing Center**



THE
LEGACY
OF
ROBERTA
"BOBBIE"
RAYMOND

DERRICK C. LEWIS

Much has been written about the former child actor, scholar, community activist, mother and artist, Roberta "Bobbie" Raymond. She has been described in the media and by those who knew her as a feisty and/or fierce advocate for Oak Park. Small in stature but a dynamic advocate for social change, Raymond was a pioneer in the fight for fair housing and an advocate for maintaining integrated communities.

Before Raymond earned her acclaim as an innovative advocate for integration, she honed her promotional skills starting off as a child actor from 1945-52 in Chicago and then found work in New York acting in numerous radio, television, film, and stage productions. Television work included guest appearances on the Jerry Lewis NBC Spectacular, *An American Girl* and on the soap operas *Search for Tomorrow* and *Love of Life*. She toured the Catskills with the Stanley Woolf Players in 1958 and earned the distinguished Actors Equity membership card. Raymond had a lead role in the 1960 pre-Broadway try-out of *Tender Loving Care* with John Payne. She also had a lead role in the pre-Broadway cast of *Tender Loving Care* in 1960. Raymond turned her attention from acting to copy advertising in the early '60s and then began her undergraduate studies in sociology at Drake University, The New School for Social Research, and Hunter College.

Concerned about racial discrimination in housing and the steady resegregation of the Austin neighborhood on Oak Park's eastern border, Raymond joined the Oak Park-River Forest Citizens Commission for Human Rights in 1966. Joined by progressive faith leaders, political radicals, those who viewed residential segregation as morally wrong, and those self-interested in keeping property values up, the commission's mission was to lobby for a local fair housing ordinance and to pressure realtors to show houses to anyone qualified regardless of race. Arrayed against them was a majority of Oak Park residents and threats of violence, but employing the tactics of regular protest marches, demonstrations in front of realtors' offices and "testing," they were successful in obtaining a 5-2 vote by the village board in favor of a Fair Housing Ordinance in May 1968.

Frank Lipo, Executive Director at the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, recognizing Bobbie as a key person in the fair housing movement, indicated the leaders of the Oak Park fair housing movement did not

rely on the force of their leader's personality to effect change, but relied on their ability to marshal various groups of people working toward the same goal and implementing a plan. Raymond was able to work with a variety of groups and people to implement a vision of change. This was evident in making fair housing allies of Oak Park real estate brokers and agents, a group responsible for blockbusting tactics exacerbating white flight. Lipo attributed this to Raymond's affinity for Oak Park. "Bobbie really loved Oak Park, as someone who grew up and went to high school here, there is an element that even though you are a change agent - she said we have to be welcoming to African Americans and others, but not throw away that we are a cultural community, we have good things."

Galvanized in her fight for fair housing, she decided to pursue graduate studies in sociology at Roosevelt University in Chicago. Her thesis, "The Challenge to Oak Park: A Suburban Community Faces Racial Change" earned her a master's degree with honors in 1972. With the Committee for Human Rights having accomplished its original goals of opening up the real estate market in Oak Park, they decided to disband, but not before Raymond offered a proposal for the next phase - the stabilization of the rental market. In the early '70s, the Austin neighborhood was undergoing rapid resegregation, the black population of Oak Park began to increase, and a number of whites had left Oak Park. Raymond's thesis research was used as the basis for the Oak Park Plan or Strategy to establish a long-term racially integrated community, which led to her founding the Oak Park Housing Center (later the Oak Park Regional Housing Center) on May 1, 1972. Arguing that "a community attempting to maintain integration had a better chance than a community that resisted," the volunteers at the Housing Center worked to attract continuing demand from whites while encouraging all clients to make "affirmative moves" that would increase integration and diversity in Oak Park.

Wednesday Journal Editor Dan Haley commented, "Bobbie Raymond was a radical thinker and doer. Oak Park does not exist as it does today without Bobbie Raymond. Period. At a time in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s when Oak Park was inventing a range of radical responses to ward off what was anticipated to be the likely resegregation of Oak Park - following immediately on the rapid resegregation of the West Side - Bobbie Raymond invented something in the

Housing Center that I don't think anyone else even understood the need for. That was her genius and her vision in that moment. Oak Park would not have found a path to racial integration without the Housing Center.

In our misty-eyed lookbacks at those early days of integration efforts we have fairly consciously overlooked that success was anything but inevitable. We forget just how tense, fearful, and racist Oak Park was in that moment. We don't pay attention to the number of white people who packed up and moved to Westchester, Glen Ellyn and points west. I believe the current Open Housing exhibit at the history museum in Oak Park puts that percentage at 25 percent exodus. Those would be the adverse conditions."

In 1976 the Housing Center moved from its office space at the First Congregational Church on Lake Street to its present location at 1041 South Boulevard. As current interim Executive Director Jay Readey said, "Bobbie Raymond made it so that the mission of the Housing Center converged with the identity of Oak Park; renowned for her work in the arts community and as a passionate member of the Oak Park-River Forest High School Alumni community, Bobbie showed how being passionate about both a place and its people can create a civic spirit that will live with her memory in Oak Park forever."

Community activist Sandra Sokol reflects upon her relationship to Bobbie and the Housing Center, "We moved here in 1972 when the Housing Center first opened. I volunteered at the Housing Center, PTA and the Community Relations Department. Bobbie was amazing, in those days she rode a bicycle and she was everywhere and worked very hard to help people find housing. Our paths crossed a lot in regards to the condition of housing in our neighborhood, landlords, tenants and real estate agents. Bobbie was everywhere focused on Oak Park remaining an open community with fair housing and diversity. We personally believed in fair housing. At the early stages of the Housing Center there was help going on not

only for rentals but also for renting houses, and there were lots of different groups doing different things, but Bobbie was always there caring about Oak Park, and there is no one who cared about this community more than she did, and the energy and her intelligence, and mostly it was all volunteers. The Community Relations Department worked closely with the Housing Center on a daily basis. She always had good ideas. She did all the marketing and Oak Park was put on the map with the Housing Center. She helped to form the Oak Park Exchange Congress to show all the good things that Oak Park did with housing, education, business, and public safety. We had a big Exchange Congress in Oak Park and invited similar communities throughout the country to work together to emulate what Oak Park had done for fair housing. We would hold panel discussions, sharing what worked and didn't work

for fair housing. You have to work at it and you can't stop. I've never met anybody who was so smart and caring, and did so many things for people with no accolades. She was not doing it for Bobbie. She was tough, no question about it, and passionate."

Raymond served 27 years as Executive Director, and she hoped to change the way people thought about integration, "If you were not looking to live in a diverse community maybe Oak Park wasn't for you," was a

saying she was known for. "She grabbed the Housing Center like a tool to move a community forward," stated Lipo. With the help of the Housing Center, Oak Park was successful in establishing an integrated and diverse community where the Black population from the 2010 census was 19.9% and the white population 68.6%. The African-American population of Oak Park was less than 1% in 1970. Within the village, as late as 2000 there were no resegregated census tracts, with tracts ranging from 7% to 36% African-American. In neighboring suburbs, segregation trends are still operating. In addition to welcoming minorities into the community, Raymond also actively marketed Oak Park to the LGBTQ community.

With the help of the Housing Center, Oak Park was successful in establishing an integrated and diverse community where the African-American population from the 2010 census was 19.9% and the white population 68.6%. The Black population of Oak Park was less than 1% in 1970.

(continued from pg. 17)

Program Director Michael Stewart was quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, “We talked about how it felt like she wasn’t just the boss, but was a part of the staff,” Stewart said. “If there was a gap where we needed someone at the front desk to work with a client or owner, she would do everything here. There was not a job below her. She was a firecracker and a firehouse. She was a small person, but she had a huge heart and huge plans for Oak Park. I have to note, she wasn’t the only one working on this. She worked in collaboration with many other community leaders. She knew it was important that it wasn’t just the Housing Center striving for integration.”

The success of the Housing Center was recognized nationally and internationally. A brief timeline highlights some of the successes over the years:

1973, the Housing Center is named one of the top housing programs in the United States by the Department of Housing and Urban Development

1976, the accomplishments of the Housing Center, along with the Oak Park Village Mall and the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, earned Oak Park the All-America City Award. Raymond wrote the winning presentation script. Wikipedia described the award as a turning point for Oak Park, bringing it extensive publicity and recognition from the National Municipal League and Chicago daily papers. An ABC documentary *Oak Park: All American* followed.

1978, the Housing Center and Raymond were featured on *60 Minutes*.

1991, Raymond was featured on the BBC radio documentary *Race in America*.

1993, Raymond participated in a panel discussion of why people were leaving the city on *Chicago Tonight*.

2008, Raymond is featured in the book *Save Our Land Save Our Towns*, as well as in numerous newspaper and magazine articles over the years.



Oak Park Exchange Congress, Sandra Sokol and Bobbie Raymond.



From left to right: Shirlynn Reed, Roberta Raymond, and early supporters of the Housing Center.

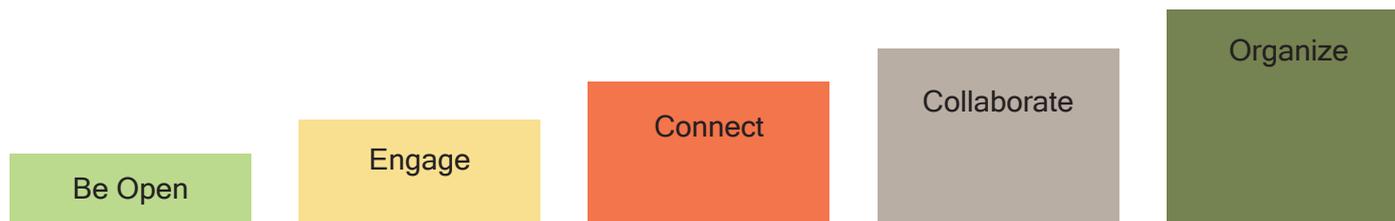
In 1996 Raymond stepped down as Executive Director of the Housing Center. Recognizing that Oak Park could not succeed if it remained an isolated oasis of integration, Raymond founded The Oak Park Exchange Congress in 1977 and served as its national vice president. The Exchange Congress was an organization of fair housing groups from Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and other states. Members met annually for nearly fifteen years to discuss integration; racial diversity in housing, schools, and religion; and economic development. Through the Oak Park Exchange Congress, the “Oak Park Strategy” became a model for integration nationally. Raymond also reached out to the Austin community by collaborating with the Austin Shock Historical Association to create the Austin Village House Tour, promoting historic homes in the neighborhood. She also established the 10K Boulevard Run, which ran

through Oak Park and Austin, an annual event that lasted 10 years. Commenting on the longevity of Raymond’s legacy, Hayden stated, “Only important and worthwhile if it becomes the racial equity legacy. Integration was just the first step. Unless we get to a place of genuine power sharing, an acknowledgment that even Oak Park has an enormous equity burden to battle then integration has not accomplished what needs to be done. And, I’m not sure that Bobbie and some others of that remarkable generation fully understood the need for a continued radical focus on fostering the full flowering of what she bravely created all those decades ago.”

Derrick Lewis is the Marketing Communications Specialist at the Oak Park Regional Housing Center and wrote this article upon the passing of Roberta Raymond on May 7, 2019.

Action Steps You Can Take To Support Fair Housing and Diversity

COURTESY OF THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR METROPOLITAN OPEN COMMUNITIES



The Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities formed in 1966 in direct response to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s activism in Chicago to overcome overt discrimination and violence related to housing matters. While the Leadership Council dissolved in 2006 after 40 years of advocacy and service to Chicago, some of the actions that they list below are still relevant today.

There are many things you and your group can do to promote fair housing and diversity in your community, including:

Host a forum or presentation on fair housing and related issues for residents in your community.

Engage with realtors. Make sure real estate professionals—including apartment owners—who provide housing in your community make housing available, and that banks make loans available, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Organize a film screening at the local library with discussion on a film that deals with racial or ethnic inter-group relations.

Organize exchanges and dialogues with people of different races and ethnic groups through community organizations, schools, or faith-based groups.

Make sure your community has a fair housing ordinance and an active human relations commission that promotes positive intergroup relations.

Organize local faith-based, civic, and business leaders

to work for open and inclusive communities and commend their positive actions taken towards this objective.

Encourage local zoning and land-use policies that allow for and encourage the development of diverse types of housing, including single family homes and apartments, and housing options for moderate and low-income families.

Establish relationships with one or more low-income families, including families relocating from public housing, to help them access opportunities and progress toward self-sufficiency.

Actively welcome people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (or people who are diverse in other ways) to your community, and speak out against hate crimes.

Get the word out. Work with the local news media to promote a better understanding of the value of diversity as a community asset and to educate the public about fair housing and related issues.



A FOUNDATION TO BUILD UPON

INDIA SOODAN

How does one quantify excellence? Is it the amount of minutes we spend typing away on an article? Is it the money deposited into our checking account after two weeks of working? Better yet, is it the transferring of said money from checking to savings? As a college student in 2019 it can be difficult to accumulate our own perceptions of what is not only important but excellent. Part of what makes it so tricky is the fact that each individual has their own definition of the word.

My former high school, Oak Park River Forest High School, has an annual award called The Tradition of Excellence given to alumni to recognize both their professional and personal contributions to society. When in high school, the assembly to showcase the alumni meant a whole 48 minutes in which I didn't have to sit through algebra. I didn't give much thought to what I could be learning from my predecessors. I had bigger things on my mind like what dress I was going to wear to prom and what colleges I might apply to. Now that I'm a few years down my path it's difficult not to have the possibilities for my future consume my headspace. What relieves my worries is knowing that I was given what so many others my age were not: a sturdy foundation. If the foundation of a building is frail and under sourced, time and hardship will eat away its longevity and oftentimes it will crumble.

People are similar. Our foundation isn't who we are, but it most definitely shapes us. A half hour drive in any given direction outside Oak Park will provide a completely different foundation to build upon. I can imagine but never truly understand what it's like to

have every single face around me look like my own. I'll never understand what it's like to not have a single adult to look up to. I'll never understand what it's like to be unable to walk home after school because you might never arrive through your front door. Not to say that bad things don't happen in Oak Park, bad things happen everywhere and that's the reality of our world. However, what matters is the response to those bad things. Oak Park isn't just a neighborhood, it's a community.

From block parties to protests to candlelight vigils, the people of Oak Park know how to show up for each other. Communication is a part of the foundation. I'm proud to say I was raised in an area in which closedmindedness and hate was not wanted or tolerated. I'm proud to come from an area in which role models have no

Communication is a part of the foundation. I'm proud to say I was raised in an area in which closedmindedness and hate was not wanted or tolerated.

age requirement. My peers, teachers, and neighbors inspire me. For example, a classmate of mine, Sydney Jackson, has been an advocate for people for as long as I can remember. In high school, she along with a few other students started an organization that flourishes to this day.

Roses 4 Austin is a program established with the kids at St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy School located on Washington and Austin Boulevard in Oak Park. The school, located on the border of Austin and Oak Park, serves both Oak Park and Austin students. Once every month about forty Oak Park River Forest High School students teach the kids dance and the arts. In an Oak Park Wednesday Journal article Sydney states that she wants to bridge the gap between Oak Park and

(continued from pg. 21)



Oak Park River Forest High School students marching for gun control changes in 2017.

Austin. "It's just my small way of addressing how rich in resources Oak Park is and how other children are just as deserving as those of us who grew up in Oak Park."

India Soodan is an intern at the Oak Park Regional Housing Center and is a recent graduate of Oak Park River Forest High School.

Another inspirational figure is Anthony Clark, a teacher at Oak Park River Forest High School determined to eliminate systematic issues, both locally and nationally, and is in the process of running for Congress. I never was blessed with the opportunity of meeting him, however I have seen how he has positively impacted the lives of my peers whether it is through hosting the dance club after school or organizing meetings at a coffee shop to both educate and mediate conversation.

Excellence is recognizing a problem and actually doing something about it. It doesn't matter if the problem is as small as returning a lost dog or as uncomfortable as calling out micro-aggressions. As Oak Park River Forest High School alumnus Ernest Hemingway said, "It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is that journey that matters in the end." No one knows what his or her journey is going to consist of, no matter how much you plan. Oak Park has provided me with the values I want to carry with me on my journey and despite my fear of the unknown, because of those values, I know I'm going to be excellent.

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WORDS TO LIVE BY:

AN INTERVIEW WITH REESHEDA GRAHAM WASHINGTON

DERRICK C. LEWIS

When you walk into LIVE Café, one of the first things you notice is a mosaic of people and an inviting environment accentuated by colorful local artwork, the not-so-low din of good music, a great selection of food, and delicious mochas. LIVE Café was established in February 2017 at 163 S. Oak Park Ave by owner Reesheda Graham Washington, 44. “My motivation behind Live Café is that I, along with everyone else who participates in life here, will get close to each other to find out what each other’s passions are so that we might collectively pull those passions together. That’s what LIVE is all about. The coffee and the food are good, but they are the draw to ensure that the other, larger work happens.” Another thing about LIVE

Café as stated on its website, is that it was established with an intentional eye towards blurring the lines and divisions between communities like Oak Park and Austin.

As a child growing up in the Chicago neighborhood of Austin in the mid 70’s, Graham Washington reflected on not seeing Austin as segregated but rather as a Black community. “I remember feeling a lot of pride and collective responsibility for the community. At that time Danny K. Davis had become Alderman. We would have a back-to-school parade in our community. We had clean-up week. I lived in Austin at a time when ‘outside’ was a place. There was still a lot of collective

responsibility in how we connected together with one another. I felt very comfortable and safe in my community. On occasion, my brother and I would ride our bikes across Austin into Oak Park, and I thought ‘What is this place and why is my place so different?’ I didn’t necessarily register that as worse or better than this place, but I felt a distinctive difference. Something in me knew I wasn’t still in the same community. I became very curious about those distinctions at an early age.”

Graham Washington relocated to Bellwood in middle school, where she stayed until college. Influenced by teachers, especially those who lived in her Austin neighborhood, she pursued a career in education earning her first masters in English Literature from Chicago State. She earned a second masters in Education Administration and Supervision of Curriculum and Instruction from National Louis University through a partnership with New Leaders, which afforded her the opportunity to study at the Wharton School of Business. Through this program she studied under Ivy League professors who subjected her to training that she likened to a “principal boot camp.” When the school year started, resident principals in the program were assigned a school in their respective cities to run Monday through Thursday and on Fridays they met at National Louis to do case studies on the work done during the week. She established and served as the founding principal at the Plato Learning Academy in the Austin community. Prior to her administrative tenure, she also taught at Oak Park River Forest High School, allowing her an upfront view of the inequitable differences between the two school systems.

Married and with a combined family consisting of her three daughters, 29, 19, and 9 years of age and two of her husband’s children, ages 19 and 17, Graham Washington now resides with her husband, Darrel and their 9 year old in Bronzeville. As a mother and Black business owner, she mentioned some of the difficulties she has had to overcome in interacting with people who are slow to recognize her as the owner of

LIVE because of her age, gender, and/or race. She also mentioned obstacles in sometimes carrying out business in Oak Park, saying, “There are blind spots when people have access to a lot of resources. I don’t think they are always intentionally neglectful, but sometimes you can’t see what someone with a different lens can see. . . I don’t want to make it sound like Oak Park is not welcoming in that way. We [LIVE] received an outpouring of support and love from the community that we are really thankful for and appreciate, but a lot of that is because Oak Park has been looking for a place that addresses some of the tensions and the differences and challenges of the village, and not just exist as a coffee shop. I think the way that we leaned into the tensions that exist here, ironically was the thing that served us well, as opposed to just coming and being a place for people to work.”

When the “America to Me” docu-series premiered, exposing inequities at OPRF High School, Graham Washington played a calming voice as the moderator of one of the group discussions at the school. She also hosted a showing of 8 of the episodes and held a panel discussion at LIVE Café, featuring community

“There are blind spots when people have access to a lot of resources, I don’t think they are always intentionally neglectful, but sometimes you can’t see what someone with a different lens can see. . . ”

advocates and personalities from the series. Graham Washington’s role in addressing inequity is tied to her being the owner of RGW Consulting, a national consulting firm that works on

equity issues all over the country. RGW contracts with various entities including the Oak Park Public Library, District 200, District 97, Holmes School and other individual schools in Oak Park, providing coaching and training to facilitate equity practices. On the overall issue of equity, Graham Washington stated, “There is a gap between who we see ourselves to be ideally and who we are actually. The space between the ideal and the actual is filled with a desire to help, without it making us uncomfortable; and there is no such thing. I think we keep circling the wagons because often we are willing to help as long as it doesn’t cost us anything. For example, if my kids have to be in a classroom with kids that don’t perform at the same level, I want equitable classrooms, but I’m not willing to make that sacrifice, or ideally I want all kids to receive a quality education,

but if my taxes are going up for that to happen, then I don't know how committed I am to it. So as soon as the stinging part comes, I think we get skittish about giving up power, giving up voice, or having to relinquish even non-monetary things like making room at the table in a more authentic way. I think those are the places where we struggle to achieve equity."

A supporter of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center, Graham Washington said she would love to see the organization play an integral part in the invitation for equitable housing in new developments coming to Oak Park. She also expressed curiosity, "as to what the organization and the Village could do together to create more equitable access for home ownership, recognizing that diversity, inclusion and equity is important to the values of Oak Park and its residents," then stating that high taxes preclude many kinds of people from participating in residential life in Oak Park. She mentioned her own experience renting an apartment in Oak Park on Austin with her oldest daughter who attended OPRF while she was teaching there, saying eventually she might have been able to buy a home, but that taxes higher than the monthly mortgage would have forced her to move.

Graham Washington describes her average day performing executive coaching, administering LIVE, and about 20 percent travel for RGW to see national clients. "A lot of my time is spent being in community and relationship with people." A licensed minister, she says she has an unapologetic faith orientation. "Some people think of me as a community chaplain. Intentionally, I didn't plant a church . . . but I chose to plant this place instead, because I know there are people who will never walk through the doors of a church, but would definitely walk through the doors of a coffee shop. I am happy to be nuanced in my posture and language. . . I don't hide who I am, it's just not the first thing I need to tell people. I think people can see it in how I foster a relationship, how I am present to people in their lives, how transformation happens in this space. I think that's the work of the Church. We increase the chances of relationship and connectedness when we are willing to be present, human life on human life, in front of everyone. Sometimes people who come to LIVE will say, 'I feel like I've just had church,' and I just smile to myself."



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Co-HOUSING IN A NUTSHELL

VICTOR YIPP

If all goes well, Oak Park will soon enhance its reputation as a national leader in proactively promoting fair housing and integration. For the first time in Illinois, a co-housing community is on its way to become a physical reality here, hopefully in the next two to three years.

So, you may ask, what is co-housing? It is not one of our normal living choices: single family homes, apartments, condos, senior housing for retirees, etc. It is also not comparable to “communes,” which had some popularity (and notoriety) in the 1960s. Co-housing consists of private homes, as in condos,

but with an intentional goal of encouraging social interaction through an expansive common space and shared activities such as community dining. There are more than 160 co-housing communities across the United States, and many more in European countries. Moreover, for those of us in Oak Park Intergenerational Co-Housing, we want this to be a multigenerational community with ethnic and racial diversity, as well as diversity in financial standing.

How cool can that be? This is Oak Park at its finest! The search for housing in a diverse community such as Oak Park



Co-housing Meeting, 2018.

can be challenging, to say the least. Young households looking to purchase here typically don't have the financial means to buy a house.

What about the sizeable older population in our village? Empty nest boomers (and above) are torn between resentment at increasing taxes and grief at the prospect of moving somewhere more affordable.

To be sure, several fine options exist for older persons. These include housing specifically tailored for the elders in our community, such as the Oak Park Arms and Brookdale Senior Living.

Now, there is a truly unique opportunity to answer the question: What can we do to make a place where young families, older persons, and all those in between – can live and flourish together?

For the past two years, Oak Park Intergenerational Co-Housing has been busily recruiting members to help answer this question, which is no easy task, as we are committed to consensus decision-making to inform our policies and plans. Consensus decision-making as a means of governance departs from majority rule (and of course, autocratic rule!) in that all participants engage in the process of developing and agreeing to support a decision in the best interests of both the individuals and the group as a whole.

Guess what? Consensus decision-making is challenging! But none of us has regretted this journey. Now that we have a critical mass, we are taking the next step: Identifying a site in Oak Park and starting the hard work of designing and constructing a home to meet the needs of all its members. Our home will be based on a condominium model. All member households will own their own unit. We plan to have a common house - a sizeable community space for a kitchen, dining area, library, gym, children's play area, and other amenities. We will also share responsibilities such as lawn mowing and snow shoveling (depending on the season, of course!).

Please visit our website for more information: <https://www.oakparkcohousing.org> and join us at one of our monthly public meetings. We'd be delighted to have you consider joining our community! Co-Housing in a Nutshell: All the benefits of living with extended family plus your own space to get away from it all.

Victor Yipp is a writer and long-time Oak Parker, along with his wife, Iris, who co-owned the Magic Tree Bookstore for thirty-one years.

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INVESTING IN OAK PARK:

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERICA CUNEEN AT BEYOND PROPERTIES



Have you been thinking about purchasing a home in Oak Park, but might not want the increased cost associated with a mortgage and homeownership? Or, are you looking to enter the real estate investment world and wondering if Oak Park is a good place to invest? Maybe you are already an owner of a multi-family home and are looking for some additional resources. Erica Cuneen at Beyond Properties spoke with us about the challenges and benefits of investing in Oak Park.

The Oak Parker: There are a lot of multi-family housing units in Oak Park, from two-flats to larger complexes that provide housing to residents throughout the Village. As a realtor, how many people do you assist in finding investment opportunities in multi-family units?

Erica Cuneen: I have many clients looking for these types of properties. I would say approximately 15% of my clients are looking for these... but it varies on market timing, availability, etc. The market has changed somewhat and I am seeing more blended families and empty nesters looking at this option. I am an investor myself, so I have plenty of experience to pass on to others who are considering this option! I do think it is a good idea for investors to work with an agent that has a lot of experience in this area, because it can be very different than purchasing a home.

TOP: Why might someone consider investing in a multi-family unit?

EC: People consider multi-family buildings for a number of reasons, a few of which are:

1. The desire to live in a great neighborhood while having another party contribute to the mortgage/taxes.
2. Purchasing a starter home that can later turn into income property when buyers want to upgrade or when they grow out of living in one unit.
3. Families that want to move to a multi-generational housing situation i.e. to be able to keep an eye on elderly parents but maintaining their private living space.
4. Parents who wish to help their adult children by living "together" - to share expenses and costs of childcare.
5. Long-term residual income for retirement.
6. Rounding out their investment portfolio to spread risk by not keeping it all in the stock market.

TOP: What kind of performance might one expect when investing in Oak Park properties and how does it differ from surrounding areas?

EC: Investment performance all depends on each individual investor's goals and their timeline (how long does the investor plan to hold the property), and the resources that they start with, both financially and information they are provided. It is so important to

work with a team that understands the intricacies of real estate investing. There are many ways to define an acceptable rate of return on investment. Even if ROI is purely a function of cash flow, it can vary greatly AND there are a lot of benefits to investors that are important, such as tax benefits, depreciation, and managing capital gains.

The market is constantly changing, so real estate investing often requires some patience and ability to weather these changes in the market. If the plan is to buy and hold for a long time, market volatility is less of a factor. If the plan is to sell in 5 years, the plan will look very different.

Investing in Oak Park is a good choice as it has a multitude of multi-units, many of which are large – big enough for families who want to be in the school district. Also, rents are generally higher than other areas and that benefits the investor.

TOP: For those who are considering purchasing a multi-family housing unit and plan on living in the same building, what are some things to consider, both pros and cons?

EC: Investors who live in their investment property enjoy "homeowners exemption" on their real estate taxes. Also, you have a true understanding of how your tenants are taking care of property, the ability to address issues quickly, and providing security or oversight if you or your tenant is out of town for long periods of time. Also, if you live alone, you have someone close by if needed.

One of the largest cons is the potential for conflict, noise, and problematic tenants; however, that can be avoided by good screening.

TOP: In your experience, why would someone want to consider investing in multi-family units in Oak Park versus other locations?

EC: The most recognized assets of Oak Park include the schools, access to multiple forms of transportation, higher rental income, and the desirability of Oak Park (and real estate is still about location!).

TOP: Are there any legal restrictions that don't exist in other areas?

EC: Cook County has strict rules that generally benefit tenants. I encourage all of my clients to take classes at the Community Investment Corporation so that they know the laws. They are a wonderful resource for anyone who owns or is thinking of purchasing investment property. I also host investment seminars at my office for people who may be wondering if investing in real estate is a good option for them. Oak Park also has special addendums to leases that can be very helpful to landlords in helping understand how Oak Park is different.

TOP: Does the Village of Oak Park provide any support to those looking to invest in Oak Park real estate?

EC: Currently, landlords must register with the Village and take a class. Some of the incentives that the Village provides include grants such as the Matching Grant program that provide a 2:1 match by the owner up to a certain amount; Rental Reimbursement for owners of properties that have a history of marketing difficulties; and a Marketing Services Agreement. The last two programs connect building owners to the Oak Park Regional Housing Center who acts as the Village's designated marketing agent to help affirmatively market available units.

Unlike some other areas, the Village is also supportive of Airbnb's. This provides investors with yet another type of investment option. Overall, Oak Park is a great place to both live and work, and I thoroughly enjoy working with investors who want to be a part of our community.

Erica Cuneen is the Managing Broker at Beyond Properties in Oak Park. She has 19 years of real estate experience, with 15 years as a real estate investor. Erica's next Investment Seminar will be held Tuesday, October 1st from 6-8 pm. Call 708-386-1366 or email erica@beyondpropertiesrealty.com for more information.



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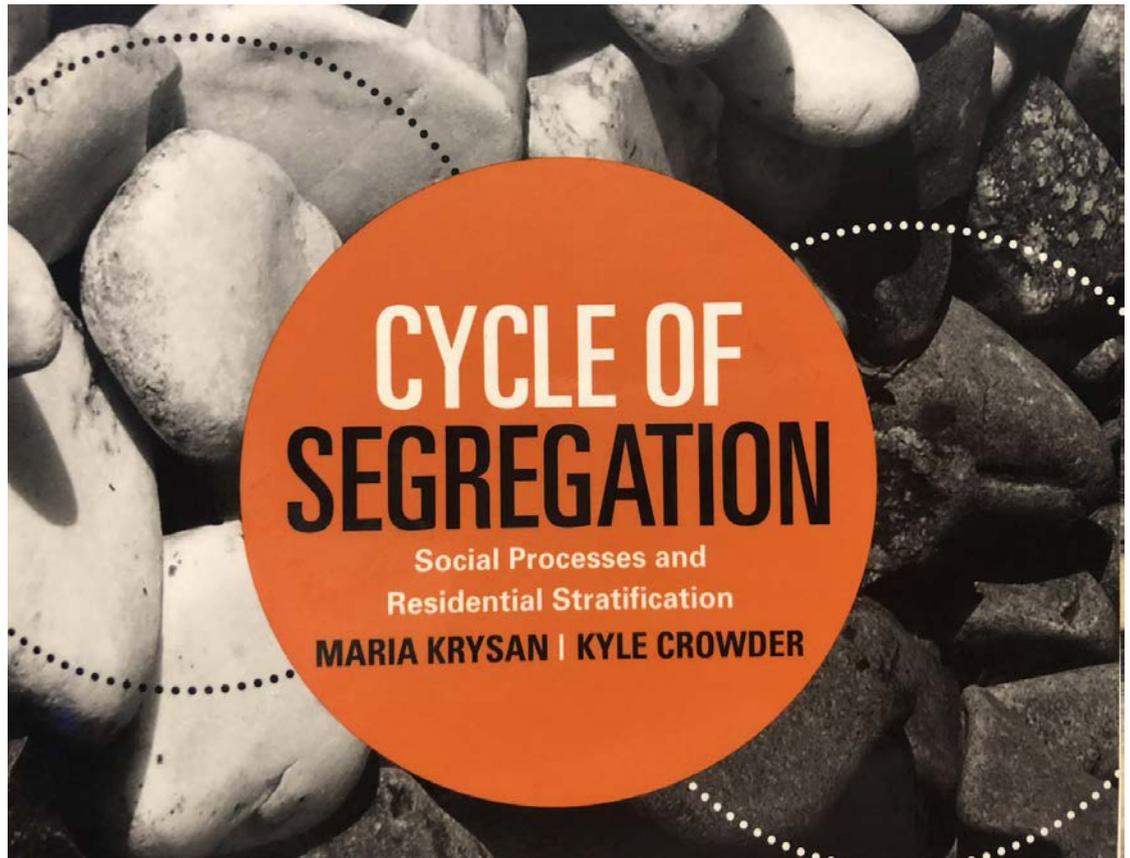
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Consider reading ***Cycle of Segregation***, based on both national and Chicago-area data, and is described as offering “thoughtful policy prescriptions for dismantling segregation.” This book was written by national expert and local author **Maria Krysan**. Interested in hosting a house party to introduce others to the ongoing issues of segregation that continue today? The Oak Park Regional Housing Center can work with you in organizing an event with author Maria Krysan as a facilitator. She will help introduce and contextualize her and Kyle Crowder’s research into the issues of segregation.

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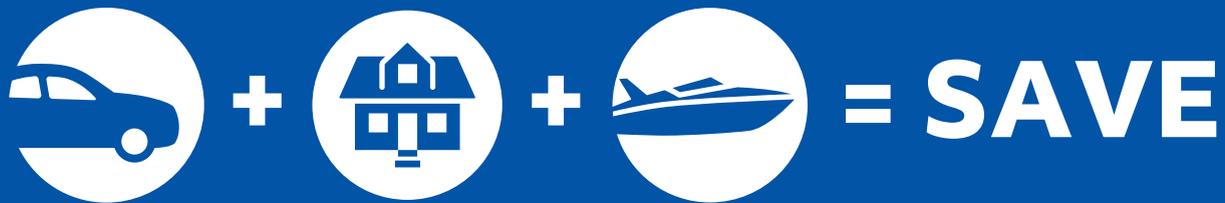
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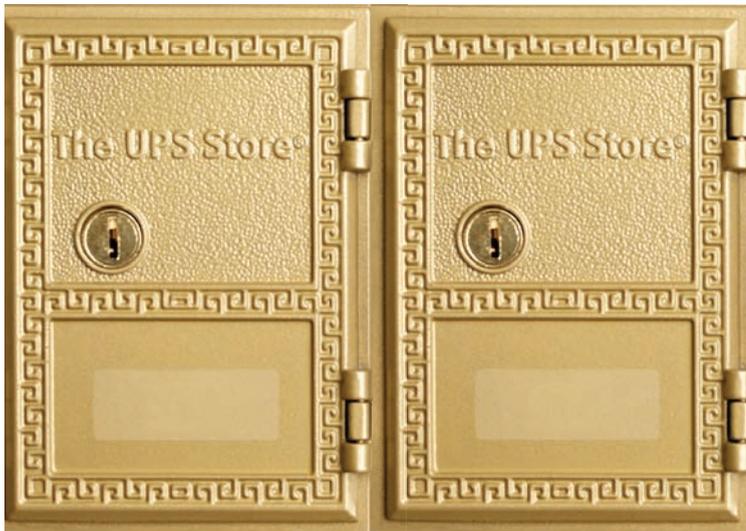
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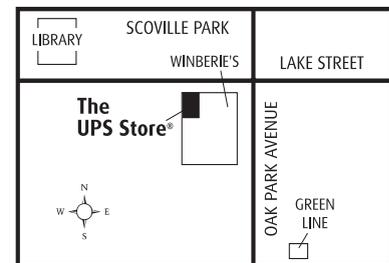
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