

She Teaches City Officials Fair Housing Requirement

By MARIE MARTILOTTA
Staff Writer

Several avenues are open to persons who have experienced discrimination in housing.

Those avenues and dealing with housing discrimination on a local level are the topics of discussion of a three-day seminar which concludes today.

Shanna L. Smith of the Toledo Fair Housing Center is teaching the mini-course to some members of the Sandusky City Commission, the human relations commission, the fair housing board and the city administration.

Mrs. Smith said, the purpose of an active fair housing program is twofold. The first point is "to educate people about fair housing laws and to make them aware of their rights, remedies to discrimination and how to deal with discrimination," she said.

Realtors and landlords are to be taught "what their responsibilities are under the law and how to follow the law."

The second purpose is enforcement of the law, which should become a responsibility of the human relations commission and the fair housing board, she said.

"You have to find out how much

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discrimination is or isn't occurring in the area," said Mrs. Smith. In many instances when people of a community say there is no discrimination it is a situation in which "discrimination is so subtle many people don't recognize it."

"The main question is how prevalent is discrimination in the community," she said.

To determine that, the people of the community must be educated to recognize discrimination and the city must provide ways to report discrimination, Mrs. Smith said.

In addition city officials and their boards must "monitor the practices of realtors and apartment owners.

"During a specified time period the city would have both blacks and whites inquire (of realtors and landlords) about purchasing particular houses or renting apartments," she explained.

The purpose for doing this is to determine if both the blacks and whites are treated equally, Mrs. Smith said.

She said she is always asked if this practice is considered entrapment, but the U.S. District Court judges for this region do not look at it as that.

By testing realtors and landlords, the city is "providing these people with the opportunity to act the way

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they would normally act. It is an effort to see if there is equal treatment for all people," Mrs. Smith said.

In communities where in-house housing discrimination practices are examined, Mrs. Smith said, the city appoints a staff person to investigate complaints.

If the staff member feels the complaint is legitimate, he presents the facts to the human relations commission for resolution. If the commission does not resolve the problem it is referred to the fair housing board.

These two organizations are not the only avenues open for resolving housing discrimination cases.

A person can take the issue to court, can file a complaint with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is up to the city to let people know these avenues are open to them as well as the city commission appointed bodies, she said.

The reason for establishing a procedure on the local level "is to avoid lengthy and costly litigation in favor of a conciliatory process that could



SHANNA L. SMITH

involve comparable remedies under federal law," Mrs. Smith said.

"The Sandusky system could work.

"The laws are comparable to state and federal laws and the system looks as if it could resolve any problems. Most of its success hinges on the ability to complete a good investigation (of the housing discrimination allegations) and having the evidence to prove it," she said.