



**HOME**  
Housing Opportunities Made Equal

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# INSIGHT



## FAIR HOUSING MONTH PREVIEW

**HOME**  
Housing Opportunities Made Equal

By Steven Haagsma

April is Fair Housing Month and, as always, HOME is celebrating with a variety of events.

### FOR LANDLORDS

HOME is offering multiple opportunities for landlords to learn their rights and responsibilities under fair housing law. We will offer our regular monthly webinar on the 19th along with the always-available on-demand option. In addition, we will be co-hosting an in-person landlord education event with the Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC) in Niagara Falls on April 11.

### FOR TENANTS

We will host a tenants' rights workshop from 11-12:30 on Saturday, April 22. A light lunch will be provided, so please register at [homeny.org/fhm23](http://homeny.org/fhm23) or by scanning the QR code so we know how much food to have! Attendees will learn how to recognize discrimination and how to stand up for themselves if their rights are violated.

### FOR EVERYONE

We are hosting our first-ever song contest with a first prize of \$450! We are looking for original songs on the topic of home. The submission deadline is the end of the day on April 7 with the winner being announced later in the month. HOME is partnering with Ear Quality, Betty Crocker ENT, and Unite by Night to host this great contest.

We will also have a book club running the whole month of April. Matthew Desmond, Princeton professor and author of *Evicted*, has a new book out called *Poverty, by America*. We have 25 copies to give away for free to those who want to join the book club and will have options for written engagement via an online forum and in-person meetings to discuss the book.

For more information about these events or for our full Fair Housing Month calendar, please go to [homeny.org/fhm23](http://homeny.org/fhm23) or scan the QR code!



SCAN ME



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## Save the Dates

### Annual Meeting

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Emerson Hospitality  
86 W. Chippewa St., Buffalo, NY  
5:30pm - 7:00pm

### 60th Annual Dinner Gala

Friday, October 27, 2023

Atrium @ Rich's  
1 Robert Rich Way, Buffalo, NY  
5:30pm - 9:30pm

### MORE INFORMATION:

WENDY MEDNICK  
WMEDNICK@HOMENY.ORG  
716-854-1400, EXT. 22

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY EVENTS ON PAGE 4

## HOME THROUGH THE YEARS: 1960s-1980s

By Steven Haagsma

As HOME celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2023, we want to look back at how we got here through a series of articles about our history. This story will be continued in subsequent issues of *Insight!*

HOME's history begins before the concept of "fair housing" was enshrined into law. We were founded in 1963, a pivotal year in American history. In the early days, HOME was a group of volunteers who worked to integrate Western New York by finding white homeowners who were willing to sell their homes to Black home seekers. There was no legal recourse for anyone denied housing on the basis of their race or any other characteristic.

I spoke with Scott Gehl, Executive Director of HOME from 1981-2016, about HOME's history. "Going back to the all-volunteer days, I remember stories that Art Butler told me about having public meetings of HOME volunteers and then coming out of the meeting and seeing Buffalo Police officers writing down license numbers of cars because Civil Rights was regarded as a subversive activity in the 1960s," he said.

A few years after HOME's founding, in 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. This paved the way for HOME to become what we are now: an organization that works to enforce fair housing law and help people exercise their rights. HOME transitioned from fully staffed by volunteers to a small professional staff during the 1970s.

Gehl shared what he considers to be some of HOME's biggest milestones and largest challenges over the years. Many of HOME's challenges have been confronting a culture that was

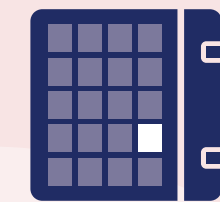
not in favor of integration or of fair housing enforcement. In the 1980s, a spate of racially-motivated arsons targeted non-white families moving into majority-white neighborhoods. After one such fire in Lewiston in 1986 failed to garner a mention in the Buffalo News, Gehl wrote a Viewpoints piece in the newspaper bringing attention to the crime, after which he received arson threats at his own home.

Opposition to equal housing opportunity has not been limited to ordinary citizens over the years: in the late 1980s, the Buffalo Common Council had a majority in favor of passing strengthened tenant protections, including prohibiting discrimination based on source of income and sexual orientation. Mayor Griffin, however, vetoed the legislation and used scaremongering to dismantle a potential veto-proof majority in favor of the law. It would be nearly two decades until the city finally passed similar legislation.

Despite opposition and setbacks, HOME has registered significant victories over the years. One of Gehl's proudest achievements during his time at HOME was fostering an agreement in the early 1980s among local newspapers to stop running discriminatory housing advertisements. This was a crucial victory at a time when newspaper advertisements were the primary means by which most housing providers publicized availabilities.

Another major milestone in the 1980s was the passage of the Town of Hamburg's fair housing ordinance. Hamburg added many tenant protections that were not added at other levels of government or in other municipalities until several decades later.

In the next issue of *Insight*, we will look at the *Comer* settlement, which created HOME's Community Housing Center, and how it began a process of changing and expanding HOME's services, beginning in the 1990s. ▲▲▲▲



## HOME RECEIVED NEAR-RECORD NUMBER OF DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS IN 2022

By Steven Haagsma

Amid rising housing prices, HOME received 415 reports of housing discrimination in 2022, the second-highest number in our 60-year history.

This figure, while alarming, is only the tip of the iceberg. The National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) reports that the majority of housing discrimination complaints nationwide go unreported for a variety of reasons, including lack of knowledge of tenant protections or a belief that nothing can or will be done about it.

Associate Director **Daniel Corbitt Esq.** said, “I am extremely proud of the diligent work done by HOME’s staff in recording and investigating the extraordinary number of discrimination reports that HOME received in the past year. While the sheer number of discrimination reports received in 2023 is disturbing, the human costs of these discriminatory practices is truly appalling. Where you live truly matters. Discrimination leads to housing instability that has devastating impacts on health outcomes, academic achievements, employment opportunities, and drives inequality and

generational poverty. As the 60th anniversary of HOME’s founding approaches, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that all people have an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice, and no one is denied access to safe, stable, affordable housing due to their race, disability status, source of income, or any other protected characteristic.”

In only one other year in HOME’s 60-year history have we received over 400 reports of housing discrimination: 1984, when a record 432 reports were recorded. The high number of reports from last year likely reflect both a rise in true incidence of discrimination, as the NFHA reported a rise nationwide, and a rise in HOME’s capacity to investigate such incidents. Among the 415 reports in 2022 were 128 reports of discrimination based on lawful source of income, tied with 2019 for the most in the agency’s history, and 89 based on disability, the highest number since at least 2003.

“Americans often like to tell themselves that progress is continuous, ... but the reality is that discrimination occurs today just as much as ever.”

Americans often like to tell themselves that progress is continuous, especially on matters such as discrimination, but the reality is that discrimination occurs today just as much as ever—and as we saw in 2022, possibly more than ever. It may be more subtle than at other points in our history, but that does not mean it has disappeared. It’s important for us to continue to investigate these allegations and for all levels of government to

strongly enforce anti-discrimination laws. We appreciate the continued support of our members as we fight this rise in housing discrimination. If you suspect housing discrimination, please report it to HOME via our website or at 716-854-1400. ▲▲▲▲▲

## Q&A HOME’S NEWEST TEAM ADDITIONS

What did you do before you came to HOME?

What excites you about working for HOME?

What hobbies or interests do you have outside of work?

### MURIS AVDIC HOUSING PLACEMENT SPECIALIST

Prior to HOME, I worked in sales management in the transportation industry and in full-cycle recruitment in the IT industry. Most recently, I shifted gears to health & human services and worked in a Care Management role with a local Care Management Agency.

As a Care Manager, I noticed the primary need for most clients and referrals were of the “social” variety, specifically housing-related needs. I realized the disservice taking place for clients in search of private market housing, subsidized housing, and/or affordable housing. I am excited about HOME’s initiative to address this knowledge gap through extensive education, advocacy, and support for its clients. I am chomping at the bit to be a spoke on the HOME wheel geared towards streamlining the housing search process for individuals in our community, especially those from traditionally economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

My hobbies include wrestling, hiking, fitness, and taking our Italian Greyhound to Barkology.

### HALEY BLAZER INVESTIGATIONS COORDINATOR

I recently graduated from Clemson University with a Bachelor of Science in International Health. I worked in the restaurant industry throughout high school and college, where I learned that I enjoy working with a team and interacting with people. My academic career focused on health disparities, the systems that create them, and the interventions that diminish them. I completed undergraduate research in Colombia, Argentina, and on campus. I also became certified in geospatial technology software and student leadership.

I am excited to take everything I’ve learned and apply it to my work. With my background in public health, I have a deep understanding of the role that HOME plays in making Buffalo a safe place for everyone. Housing discrimination is a covert and difficult issue to address, however HOME’s mission truly resonates with me and I am honored to be a part of such a great team. I look forward to inspiring others with my passion and being inspired by those who came before me.

I have a passion for languages. I am now fluent in Spanish, and in my free time I am teaching myself German and ASL. I am continuing some of my research in South America, which will be published in the coming year. I also enjoy painting and going to the gym.

### FADIA ISSA FAIR HOUSING SPECIALIST

I was working as a nutritionist assistant with the WIC program for 5 years.

I believe that I can use my communication and social skills which are imperative when handling clients’ issues. I want them to walk away with renewed confidence in our capabilities and the services that we offer to them in order to make their lives better.

I like to take walks, cook, and play chess.

### TYLER WONG FAIR HOUSING SPECIALIST

Before coming to HOME, I worked as a constituent services liaison in the NYS Senate serving the areas of Westchester County and the Bronx. As a liaison, I advocated for members of the community in accessing state level resources such as unemployment and SNAP benefits. I also represented the Senator at monthly community board meetings which are designed for constituents to gather and discuss issues in their respective neighborhoods.

I’m excited to be working at HOME because of the team’s commitment to making substantive differences in people’s lives. Every client that comes to our agency for help comes out knowing more than they did before. The information and resources we provide empower members of the community to understand their options and rights. Housing impacts many facets of our everyday life. So, when we educate our clients about housing rights, our effect can actually extend beyond housing.

I enjoy cooking, traveling, and going to the gym. There’s always more to learn about different types of cuisines and the science behind cooking. My favorite dish to prepare is Pho Bo – Vietnamese beef noodle soup. It requires a lot of effort and time, but it is well worth it!

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