

# FAHROgram

FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING AND REDEVELOPMENT OFFICIALS

March/April 2016

## President's Message

### Collaboration Results in MTW Expansion

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who participated in the highly successful FAHRO strategic planning session and board meeting recently held in Orlando. Your enthusiastic support has translated into an emerging vision to fulfill the housing goals and objectives of FAHRO in the coming months.

As we discussed during our meeting, on Dec. 17, 2015, the U.S. Congress approved expanding the Moving to Work (MTW) Program by 100 agencies and extended the existing 39 MTW contracts around the nation. FAHRO, SERC, NAHRO and PHADA have been leading advocates for this expansion.

The success of this initiative cannot be underestimated and is the direct result of collaboration and unity of purpose among housing advocacy groups.

Benefitting from the momentum of our success regarding the MTW expansion, the strategic planning session was also very productive in bringing about plans for the first-ever FAHRO Housing Summit to be held this summer at



Miguel Del Campillo

See **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE** on page 3

## 2016 Legislative Session

### The Midway Point

by Oscar Anderson, FAHRO State Affairs Consultant

As the 2016 Legislative Session reaches the midway point, things seem to be going relatively smoothly between the House and the Senate when you consider the consternation during the last year. In fact, the appropriations process is ahead of schedule. Some big issues remain that have the potential to dramatically impact the overall budget, including the tax packages that have the House and the Senate \$750 million apart, and whether or not the Legislature wants to agree to a new Seminole Gaming Compact that could generate hundreds of millions of dollars.

As it relates to affordable housing, we are starting in a similar place to last year. The House of Representatives has partially funded the housing trust funds at \$47 million for SHIP and \$97 million for SAIL. In contrast, the Senate has fully funded the housing trust

funds, including \$186 million for SHIP and \$97 for SAIL. Typically the budget comes out of conference somewhere in the middle, though my sense is that we will end up closer to the Senate's position for SHIP and SAIL. We will continue to push for full funding of both the state and local housing trust funds.



Oscar Anderson

Three items from our legislative agenda are included in both HB 1235 and SB 1534 related to housing assistance. Those issues are 1) preventing new PHAs from going after vouchers of other PHAs; 2) exempting PHAs from state financial reporting; and 3) clarifying that PHA compensation is handled through federal appropriations. To date, no one has spoken up against these issues.

## Calendar

### FAHRO REGIONAL TRAINING EVENTS

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**HCV & Public Housing Rent Calculation**

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**Supervision & Management**

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40 S. Osprey Ave., Sarasota, FL 34236  
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davelmorgan@hotmail.com

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Email: scha001@chl.rr.com

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Corey Mathews, CAE, Executive Director  
FAHRO Headquarters  
1390 Timberlane Road, Tallahassee, FL 32312  
Phone: 850/222-6000 • Fax: 850/222-6002  
Email: corey@fahro.org

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## Member Feedback

*Do you need help with a project or issue and want to see if any of our readers have the answer? Has a colleague done something wonderful that deserves an attaboy or attagirl? Or are you just frustrated and want to vent? Here is your chance to (anonymously if you wish) say thanks, ask for assistance, vent your frustrations, express your opinion or let us know how you feel.*

- Congratulations to the Housing Authority of the City of Fort Myers on its designation as a high performer in the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) report for 2015 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "We are proud to once again be named a high performer by HUD," says Marcus D. Goodson, executive director of the HACFM. "We continue to excel because of the unwavering support and leadership of our board of commissioners and the commitment from each employee to



give his or her very best to this agency every day."

- The Lee County Housing Authority received high performer status in both its Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) certification and in the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) report for 2015. Congratulations to LCHA!

If you would like to contribute to Sounding Off, please email your comments to Susan Trainor, FAHROgram editor, [editor.trainor@gmail.com](mailto:editor.trainor@gmail.com). 🌿

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE continued from page 1

the conclusion of the 2016 FAHRO Annual Convention and Trade Show in Orlando. The Housing Summit, as currently envisioned, calls for a one-day gathering of public officials, housing providers and housing advocacy groups from Florida and around the nation. The Summit will provide a unique opportunity to seek consensus and to focus on key

areas of interest regarding housing programs and, equally important, will project FAHRO leadership beyond Florida.

I look forward to seeing you all in April at the FAHRO Executive Directors' Forum in St. Augustine, where we will be discussing the FAHRO Housing Summit in more detail. 🌿

# Send Your News to FAHRO!

Tell us about your accomplishments, milestones and other interesting member news. Your fellow members want to know!

Submit your news to FAHRO  
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[editor.trainor@gmail.com](mailto:editor.trainor@gmail.com)

(attach in MS Word format)

Photographs are welcome!







# We Love Our Lindsey Software.

## **Bartow Housing Authority**

Executive Director: Catherine E. Reddick  
Bartow, Florida

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good shortcuts, that it  
doesn’t take me long  
to do anything!”*

— CATHERINE REDDICK —

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- Mobile solutions
- Online rental applications

### **THE SITUATION**

Catherine Reddick, Executive Director of Bartow Housing Authority in Florida loves to talk about Lindsey software. With more than 23 years as a user, she feels that Lindsey is user-friendly, very easy to learn and helps her do her job more effectively.

Catherine began her career in public housing at the Winter Haven Housing Authority. After 13 years, she moved to the Bartow Housing Authority as Executive Director and has been there for 11 years.

### **THE SOLUTION**

Lindsey is a total solution for Catherine and her staff and she is not afraid to tell other agencies. “I know I am not their largest client, but they always treat me like I am,” says Catherine.

Bartow HA uses almost every module Lindsey has, plus the mobile solutions and HousingManager.com online rental applications. They have made an investment in the entire package and like the way everything works together.

### **MOBILE**

Catherine comments, “When we first got the mobile products, I was a little afraid of making the change. Then I went out and did an inspection on the iPad myself and realized that it was much easier than I ever expected.”

### **HOUSINGMANAGER.COM**

Moving applications online has been extremely beneficial in reducing tenant traffic in the office. Tenants are very versatile and have adapted well to filling out applications from their computer, tablet or mobile device.

### **TRAINING & SUPPORT**

Catherine and her staff take advantage of the free training opportunities whenever possible, attending webinars and using the online Portal. “We use support when there is a problem, or something I just cannot figure out. They know me by my first name,” says Catherine with a smile.

Bartow Housing Authority is a satisfied Lindsey customer. After 23 years using Lindsey, Catherine says it would be hard to find another company that could change her mind. “Lindsey has made an investment in this industry by creating products that make my job easier, and I have made an investment in Lindsey.”



# FAHRO Joins Sadowski Coalition in Calling on Florida Legislature to Use All State & Local Housing Trust Fund Monies for Housing

FAHRO is honored to be a member of the Sadowski Coalition, a group comprising 30 diverse statewide organizations. These organizations include advocates for the elderly, veterans, the homeless and people with special needs, as well as faith-based organizations and business associations. The coalition, with FAHRO representatives in attendance, held a press conference to call on the Florida Legislature to use all state and local housing trust fund monies for housing in Fiscal Year 2016-17.

To demonstrate the need for affordable housing in Florida, the Florida Housing Coalition released its “Home Matters Report 2016” for Florida at the press conference. The national “Home Matters” initiative is an effort to educate the public and policymakers about the connection between housing, health, education and the economy. The full report is available at the following link: [http://issuu.com/flhousing/docs/home\\_matters\\_report\\_final](http://issuu.com/flhousing/docs/home_matters_report_final).

This year’s “Home Matters Report” states that 951,000 low-income households in Florida (below 50 percent of median income) spend more than half of their income on housing.

Jaimie Ross is the facilitator of the Sadowski Coalition and president and CEO



Sadowski Coalition representatives join Florida Senator Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee) in a press conference calling on legislators to use all state and local housing trust fund monies for housing.

of the Florida Housing Coalition. According to Ross, Florida has the best model for funding and producing affordable housing in the nation. The Florida Legislature has an opportunity to appropriate all state and local housing trust fund money for housing instead of other purposes. The appropriation of the nearly \$324 million into Florida’s affordable housing programs will create more than 32,000 jobs and more than \$4.6 billion in positive economic impact for the State of Florida.

Corey G. Mathews, executive director of FAHRO, says, “Floridians have long embraced the reasonability and success of

the Sadowski program as a self-adjusting funding formula to provide a critical safety net to those among us who are most vulnerable and most in need of the essential protection of decent, safe and affordable housing. Our state continues to benefit from the prosperity of new jobs and resurging real estate prices. Many Floridians find themselves without affordable living arrangements. By fully allocating the Sadowski Trust Funds to affordable housing as promised, the Florida Legislature has the opportunity to provide necessary housing and to create quality jobs in the process.”

## Florida to Receive \$50 Million in Federal Grants for Public Housing Improvements

Federal officials are giving Florida nearly \$50 million to improve public housing across the state. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development officials said on February 13 that the funds will help complete large-scale improvements like replacing roofs and making energy-efficient upgrades on old plumbing and electrical systems to modernize housing for families and seniors.

The federal government has invested billions in developing and maintaining public housing, but HUD says there has been a net loss of over 135,000 public housing units since fiscal year 2000, representing an average loss of approximately 9,000 units annually.

In 2011, HUD released a third-party independent study that estimated the capital needs in the public housing stock in the United States. The study found that



the nation’s 1.1 million public housing units are facing an estimated \$25.6 billion in large-scale repairs.

(Source: Associated Press)

# Recent EEOC Litigation Decisions and Predictions for 2016

by Tracy M. Evans, Esq.



Tracy M. Evans,  
Esq.

In 2015, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) remained aggressive in its enforcement of equal employment laws and continued its efforts to expand protections for workers. Last year, there was an increase in the total number of discrimination lawsuits filed by the EEOC, from 133 in 2014 to 142 in 2015, and some major victories for the EEOC. The year 2015 was by no means, however, a clean sweep for the EEOC, which also had some notable losses.

The following is a summary of some major decisions from 2015 involving the EEOC and a forecast of cases we expect to see from the EEOC in 2016.

## Major 2015 Cases and Decisions

In February of last year, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit affirmed summary judgment in favor of the employer in *EEOC v. Freeman*, which involved a challenge to an employer's use of criminal background and credit history checks in the hiring process. The EEOC alleged that the criminal background checks had a disparate impact on African-American and male applicants, and that credit checks had a disparate impact on African-American job applicants, regardless of gender. The district court entered summary judgment in favor of the employer,

finding that the EEOC's expert's reports were unreliable, based on the number of mistakes and omissions contained therein. The Fourth Circuit affirmed the lower court's decision, finding no error in the trial court's exclusion of the EEOC's expert's reports from evidence.

Last March, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in the pregnancy discrimination case of *Young v. United Parcel Service*. In *Young*, the female employee filed suit against her employer arguing that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Title VII), as amended by the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, requires employers to provide pregnant employees with light-duty work if they provide such accommodations to non-pregnant employees who are similarly temporarily limited by a condition. Instead of answering the question directly, the Supreme Court provided a new framework for pregnant employees challenging workplace accommodation policies and practices under Title VII.

The new framework requires the female worker to show that she is in the protected group (women who can become pregnant), that she asked to be accommodated when she could no longer fulfill her normal job functions, that the employer refused to offer the accommodation and that the employer did actually

See **LEGAL UPDATE** on page 7

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provide an accommodation for other, non-pregnant employees who were similarly temporarily limited in performing their job duties. Under the new test, the burden then shifts to the employer to establish that its workplace policy was not biased against pregnant workers, but had a neutral business rationale. The worker is then given one last opportunity to show that regardless of the policy's intent, it put a significant burden on female workers on the payroll, and the reason behind the policy was not strong enough to justify the burden.

In April of last year, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in *EEOC v. Ford Motor Co.* rejected the EEOC's claim that an employer violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by refusing to allow an employee suffering from irritable bowel syndrome to telecommute as a reasonable accommodation. The court found that the employee's telecommuting proposal was not a reasonable accommodation because it would not allow her to perform the essential functions of her job. The opinion, however, did not rule out the possibility that telecommuting may be considered a reasonable accommodation in other cases. The decision also highlighted the importance of an employer engaging in a good faith "interactive process" with a disabled employee requesting accommodation, finding that the employer satisfied this requirement by meeting with the employee several times to discuss her accommodation proposal and by offering further meetings to discuss alternative accommodations after rejecting her request.

Last June, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in the religious accommodation case of *EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores*. This case involved a claim filed on behalf of a Muslim woman against Abercrombie, which alleged that the store failed to hire the woman because she wore a head scarf in observance of her religious beliefs, violating the store's dress code. In ruling in the EEOC's favor, the court held that even where a job applicant does not inform management of a religious practice, an employer still violates Title VII when an employer refuses to make an exception based on at least a suspicion or a hunch that the worker follows such a practice and wants to keep doing so, even if contrary to company policy.

Fresh from the victory in *Abercrombie*, the EEOC recently filed another reasonable accommodation case stemming from the application process. In the case filed against McDonald's Corp. in the Western District of Missouri on behalf of a deaf job applicant, the EEOC alleged that a restaurant manager cancelled and never rescheduled the applicant's interview when the manager learned the applicant attended a school for the deaf and would need a language interpreter for the interview. This case was filed in late December and remains pending. If the decision in *Abercrombie* requiring reasonable accommodations for job applicants is any indication, it appears the EEOC may have some strong precedent in its favor.

**See LEGAL UPDATE on page 10**

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## A Visit With U.S. Congressman Alcee Hastings

A delegation from the Palm Beach County Housing Authority met with U.S. Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Florida District 20) to discuss the Moving To Work (MTW) program at the congressman's Palm Beach County district office. Representing the housing authority at the January 20 meeting were CEO Van Johnson, Vice Chairman Roger Rukin and General Counsel Lesleigh Varner. Commissioner Melissa McKinlay and Legislative Delegation Executive Director Todd Bonlarron joined the meeting via telephone. Cheryl Carpenter Klimek, a lobbyist for SPECTRA, also participated in the discussion.

The housing delegation shared with the congressman the PBCHA's focus on helping the Glades area within the district. Johnson noted that PBCHA has the highest HUD ratings, and he reviewed the progress of two \$50 million development projects. Johnson also explained the Campus of Learners, the commitment to a four-to-five-year structured learning program, and how the "live, work, learn" concept would shorten tenancy lengths. He asked Congressman Hastings for his input and assistance with the MTW designation, the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant and Promise Zones.

The congressman recommended inviting HUD Secretary Castro for a site visit and an explanation of the local programs



*Roger Rukin (vice chairman, PBCHA Board of Commissioners), Cheryl Carpenter Klimek (lobbyist, SPECTRA), Van Johnson (CEO, PBCHA), Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (center), Lesleigh Varner (general counsel, PBCHA) and Melissa Ellington (assistant to the CEO, PBCHA)*

in Palm Beach County. Congressman Hastings noted that he had a "great affection for the Glades" and said he would designate someone in his Washington office to help with the issues the housing delegation had raised. 🌿

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## Hello From Avon Park's Irish Interns

Dia Duit! (Hey y'all!) First of all, we'd like to introduce ourselves. Our names are Ashleigh Mulgrave and Tanya Graham (aka the Irish interns). As you can probably guess, we're from Ireland. You're all probably thinking, "How did y'all end up in Avon Park, Florida?" Well, here is our story.

It all started at our university while we were on a field trip. We always dreamed about going abroad for what we call our placement year. We didn't think we'd ever be lucky enough to end up in the "Sunshine State"! Being optimistic, we decided to pursue our goals/dreams!

We began by researching housing authorities in Florida. We then drafted an email and sent it to Corey Mathews, FAHRO executive director, in Tallahassee! What is the chance of that? Anyway, long story short, FAHRO circulated our request, and the Avon Park Housing Authority (APHA) responded affirmatively to accept us for internship, and of course do all the hard work that was involved in trying to get us over to the United States.

Since our arrival in late January, we have filled up our diary with activities ranging from eating gator tail at the local Wild Turkey restaurant to visiting Universal Studios in Orlando. Just kidding; we've been here just over one month and have had the opportunity to attend a Rotary Club meeting, Habitat for Humanity home dedication event, a training day at the South Florida State College and many more American cultural experiences!

Through the internship with APHA, we will gain valuable experience that will significantly help with our future housing careers. While interning, our office is located within the APHA's senior housing community, Delaney Heights. During our time there, we will experience firsthand involvement in activities that we will directly promote and produce to that community. During our six-month internship, we will also be assigned a wide array of tasks to include organizing and producing various resident activities, which will also include setting a budget, a time frame for completion and a delivery plan for each event.

Additionally, we will also be given the opportunity to experience startup management of a new affordable housing development (Cornell Colony). We will be given a budget to complete all aspects of marketing the new development to include managing the design and creation of marketing brochures, classified and grand opening advertisements, flyers, posters and other media copy. We will also negotiate with local businesses, rental centers and home furnishing stores to contribute/loan furnishings for staging a model unit for marketing purposes. Our marketing efforts will also include direct experience with recorded radio ads and participation in community public service announcements. Finally, once the development nears completion and is ready for occupancy, we will be directly involved in screening applicants for admissions as we work earnestly to timely fill the rental units.

The overall experience that we hope to gain at the end of the six months will be a solid foundation for starting our new professional housing careers. We hope not only to have gained experience as a housing officer, but we are also being given the opportunity to be involved in other aspects such as community



*Tanya Graham and Ashleigh Mulgrave, interns with the Avon Park Housing Authority, hail from Belfast, Ireland.*

services, project development, marketing and financial management. The experience gained here in the United States will not compare to any regulations/policies we have seen in Northern Ireland and will therefore give us a unique experience for future job possibilities.

So, we want to thank everyone for this wonderful opportunity we have been given. We have been overwhelmed with the kindness we have received from this small rural Florida community. Even though it's only been a month, we feel welcomed and could see ourselves starting our career here in Florida! (Watch out, you could have an Irish neighbor sooner than you'd expect!) 🌿

Is breá ó Tanya agus Ashleigh! Slan. 😊  
(Love from Tanya and Ashleigh! Bye. 😊)

## 2016 Predictions

One of the EEOC's five commissioners was a keynote speaker at an employment liability insurance conference at the end of January, giving employers a taste of what to expect from the EEOC in 2016. It appears the EEOC will continue its focus on "systemic discrimination," discrimination that involves a pattern or practice, policy or class case where the alleged discrimination has a broad impact on an industry, profession, company or geographic area, which the EEOC has focused on since 2012. Of note, race, gender, pregnancy, leave and accommodation issues were predicted as prime targets for systemic litigation in 2016.

In addition, another area likely to be litigated in 2016 involves discrimination against LGBT workers. Currently, there is no federal legislation covering sexual orientation and sexual identity, so a question on which the courts are likely to weigh in is whether perceived adverse treatment of LGBT workers amounts to gender-based discrimination, currently banned by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Challenges to employer wellness programs are also expected, based on the EEOC's proposed amendment to the rule implementing Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA). GINA was designed to prevent employment discrimination based on genetic information. Disclosure of such information is often required for employee participation in wellness programs, so the EEOC is particularly concerned about forced employee participation in these programs, which may result in adverse employment decisions based on the information

supplied. The proposed amendment will limit incentives employers are permitted to offer for employee participation, consistent with the EEOC's focus on the voluntary nature of participation in these programs.

The EEOC will also continue to challenge overbroad releases and arbitration agreements required by employers as a precondition of employment. In a case pending in the Southern District of Florida, *EEOC v. Doherty Enterprises, Inc.*, the EEOC alleged an employer violated a section of Title VII by requiring prospective employees to sign a mandatory arbitration agreement and to waive any rights to communicate with the EEOC as a condition of employment.

While this article is intended to highlight the EEOC's current key areas of focus, employers should remain vigilant in preventing all forms of discrimination and harassment. Employers should stay well informed of any major decisions in EEOC cases, as well as any proposed rules or regulations issued by the EEOC, and should ensure that their current policies, procedures and employee training methods remain current. A proactive approach with a commitment to harassment and discrimination prevention will be an integral defense to a potential claim made against an employer by an employee. 🌿

*Tracy M. Evans, Esq., is an associate at Saxon Gilmore & Carraway PA.*

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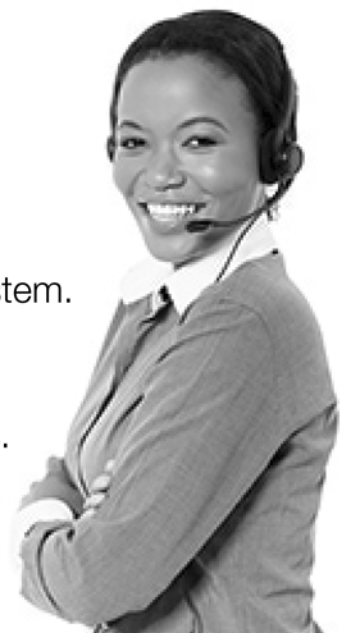
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## Former Daytona Affordable Housing Resident Gives Back to His Community



Anthony Roberts, Jr.

A former Daytona Beach affordable housing resident is giving back to his community by helping high school seniors follow in his footsteps by attending college.

As a boy, Anthony Roberts, Jr., was a resident of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Apartments, formerly known as the South Street Housing Development and now known as the Lake-side Development, owned and managed by the Housing Authority of the City of Daytona Beach. Anthony lived there with his mother, sister and two younger brothers.

He attended Campbell Middle School, located five minutes from the development. Every day after school, Anthony attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. Afterschool Program, which was located in the center of the development. The center was a pivotal part of his life. To Anthony the center meant several things: a safe haven, a support system and positive reinforcement. Adults who taught at the center and empowered him were Ocie Manning (still an employee of the housing authority), Sonya Thayer and Debbie Duncan. Attending the center showed Anthony that there was more to life than the Martin Luther King, Jr. Apart-

ments in Daytona Beach. Anthony realized that education is essential. He wanted to break the chain in his family by being the first to attend college. Working on computers at the center helped to formulate his desire to pursue a career in marketing, social media and the internet.

Anthony lived in the MLK, Jr. Apartments from the time he was born until he graduated from high school in 2003. He attended Johnson & Wales University-North Miami, earning the AA in marketing and social media (2005), a BS degree (2009) and a master's degree in internet marketing and social media (2011).

Now 33, Mr. Roberts says he will earn the PhD before his 40th birthday. He owns an independent consulting company and is employed with a firm in Atlanta as a visionary marketing and news professional.

Mr. Roberts has established two \$500 scholarships for Mainland Senior High School students. The Anthony Roberts, Jr. Distinguished Award aims to highlight and reward exceptional Mainland High School seniors. Applications are being accepted at his website [arjdsa.org](http://arjdsa.org). This is his way of giving back to the community he loved during his early childhood. He shares this advice with the youth and young adults of each and every community: "Don't wait for an audience, applaud yourself." 🌸

## Fort Myers HA Participates in Annual Veterans and Homeless Service Day

For the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the Housing Authority of the City of Fort Myers participated in the annual Veteran Stand Down and Homeless Service Day. This event, now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year, is a collaborative effort of a number of agencies and civic organizations to provide the homeless and veteran populations in Lee County with access to essential goods and services.

Services provided to anyone who was homeless included provisions for food, hygiene kits, backpacks, flu shots, haircuts and information on VA benefits. Referrals for substance abuse and mental health counseling were also available. During the event, the Lee County Homeless Coalition conducted its annual Homeless Census, which provides critical information on the scope of homelessness in the community.

A *stand down* is a military term used to describe a brief respite from combat where troops can access a variety of services. The aim of the Veteran Stand Down and Homeless Service Day was to help homeless individuals get what they need by providing free services and provisions in a one-stop setting.

The HACFM and Lee County Housing Authority have veterans as a preference, which enables them to sign up qualified applicants immediately for programs including Public Housing,



The Housing Authority of the City of Fort Myers team recently helped 14 veterans complete and turn in applications for housing and gave out an additional 10 applications to interested veterans during the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Veteran Stand Down and Homeless Service Day.

Neighborhood Stabilization and the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) programs for both local housing authorities.

A total of 421 homeless people were also served during the event.

# Pinellas HA Resident Achieves Homeownership

Tyshecia Coleman has been a participant of the Housing Choice Voucher Program with the Pinellas County Housing Authority since August 2008. In April 2014, she applied to participate in the Homeownership Program.

Ms. Coleman was referred to Tampa Bay CDC for credit counseling, and she worked diligently for a year and a half to repair her credit. During that time, she also maintained her full-time em-

ployment and completed the required sweat-equity hours for the Habitat for Humanity program. She closed on her Habitat for Humanity three-bedroom, two-bath, 1,291 sq. ft. home on Dec. 14, 2015. Ms. Coleman and her two daughters are overjoyed with their beautiful new home.

Ms. Coleman is proud that she was able to show her daughters that hard work and dedication really do pay off! 🌿



*Tyshecia Coleman receives the keys to her new home.*

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## Waiting Before Updating: How Malware Is Being Disguised as Updates Brought to you by FPHASIF!



Users of the screen-shot sharing application, Puush, were shocked when they discovered the application update they downloaded was actually malware. The developers of the app announced that their system had been breached, and anyone who updated their

Windows-based app to version r49 had been infected. Once installed, the malware was designed to grab passwords from the infected system.

It was users of the app who initially questioned the validity of the update on Twitter, when their anti-malware software was identifying the app as unsafe. Makers of the app quickly took down the update server and released a new, clean update.

Puush suggests that infected users change any vital passwords stored on their device after downloading the clean update. For those who no longer wish to use the app, they also provided a program that cleans the system and removes the app. Mark Wilson "Fake Puush update steals passwords from Windows users," betanews.com (Mar. 30, 2015).

### Commentary

Updating your software and smartphone applications is a vital part of your system security, but as the above information illustrates, it can also be risky. Oracle has had issues in the past with hackers disguising malware as a Java update, and recently Apple announced that hundreds of its apps had been infected with malware. Application developers are fast becoming a prime target for hackers because not only are developers constantly creating new apps, but they are also continually developing updates for existing apps.

In light of this new method of infection, it is advisable to hold off on updating software and applications until checking chat boards to see if any problems with the updates have been identified. Many smartphones are set by default to automatically update apps, so you may want to consider changing this setting for optimal security.

Always be wary of requests to update that seem to pop up without reason. Do not follow a link to the update, but instead go directly to the software maker's website to download the update. Take seriously any warning from your anti-virus software that indicates an unsafe download.

This informational piece was published on Oct. 22, 2015. Republished from *mycommunityworkplace.org* on behalf of Hunt Insurance Group, LLC.



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