

FAIR HOUSING

MAKES U.S.

STRONGER



Fair Housing is good for our business and our clients

The Pat Combs Story

For Pat Combs, it's as simple as that. What the Fair Housing Act promises is the right thing to support as a REALTOR®, as a member of her community, and as an United States citizen.

When Pat joined the real estate industry in 1971, she entered a “contentious time.” REALTORS® in Grand Rapids, Michigan, were being tested to see if they were complying with the Fair Housing Act, and the legacy of the race riots of the 1960s were still felt in Michigan’s communities. While Pat felt comforted by the knowledge and training she had been given by NAR, she knew that some of her colleagues felt the testing as unfair and they feared legal consequences.

In her own practice, Pat described witnessing acts of racial discrimination throughout the 1970s. On one occasion after showing a home to a Black couple, a bigoted neighbor found her contact information and called her home. The neighbor threatened to do physical harm to Pat if she sold the house to the couple. Her response? She asked for their contact information and told them she would report them to the FBI because this was a violation of the Fair Housing Act.

Pat, while shocked, did not shrink in the face of this harassment and continued to do her best to follow fair housing practices. She was instrumental in developing self-testing and training programs for the Grand Rapids Association of REALTORS® that have been adopted throughout the country. She wanted veteran and rookie REALTORS® to be able to oppose housing discrimination because it “was good for all of us,” clients and the real estate industry. By partnering with the local Fair Housing Center, Pat created a strong support network for everyone involved in real estate.

As she has continued to be a part of equal opportunity initiatives at the local and national level in addition to serving as President of NAR in 2007, Pat has had the opportunity to see the tremendous progress in the fair housing movement. Describing the young people entering the business, she sees “more openness [to fair housing] and less prejudice.” She believes that training and education in fair housing is key to maintaining this progress.

After all, Pat acknowledged that the fair housing fight is not over. There are new pressures ranging from gentrification to the difficulties of enforcing fair housing practices with international investors. Racism remains an issue. “Back in the early days of fair housing, people thought it was a black and white issue. That still needs attention, but these days we’re [also] seeing a lot of discrimination of people with disabilities and of LGBT people. We’re finding a lot of rental discrimination.”

It is not enough, of course, to just see the problem. Pat believes NAR can continue to give members the tools to “understand [how] to do the right thing to help them with their business and to practice fair housing techniques for those [vulnerable] communities.” Combatting modern problems in fair housing will require efforts on multiple fronts—legislation, community-building, and education.

For more information, resources and to get involved, visit www.FairHousing.realtor



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