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## **THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW**

### **Spokane REALTORS® Opening Doors to Equality**

*Jeannette Karis, President, Spokane Association of REALTORS®*

Across the nation, April is "Fair Housing Month." The REALTOR® approach to fair housing is to work with families, one at a time, to achieve their dreams of homeownership. By expanding marketing efforts to reach all populations, by valuing diversity, by becoming experts on housing programs, and by being active in our community, Spokane REALTORS® are opening doors that make the promises of the Fair Housing Act a reality.

I have a very heartwarming story to share. Just a few years back, a disabled gentleman attended a local home-buyer education class, sponsored by the Washington Housing Finance Commission ([www.wshfc.org](http://www.wshfc.org)). He was living in a hotel-type situation where most of his disability payments were used for housing.

This gentleman had been a successful businessman prior to a bad car accident; but when discussing his desire to own a home, the instructors noticed that he was very discouraged about his current life circumstances. The two instructors were both members of the Spokane Association of REALTORS®. One is a long-time colleague of mine, and the other is a respected local lender.

Both instructors decided to champion his cause, and within a short time, he found a home he qualified for and was approved for financing. Since it was just before Christmas, around the Association we decided to fill his cupboards with food, purchase cooking utensils and bedding, and arranged for some donated furniture. To all our delight, he joyously moved in and was "home" for the holidays.

Spokane REALTORS® take a positive approach to fair housing practices, aspiring to follow the spirit as well as the letter of the law. As an organization, the National Association of REALTORS® works tirelessly to help create an environment where everyone can understand and exercise their rights to choose where they want to live. NAR has also expanded and implemented fair housing education requirements for its members. REALTORS® receive training on the importance of inclusive housing practices and the promotion of minority homeownership through a unique program called "At Home with Diversity®." Over the past decade, more than 25,000 REALTORS® nationwide have completed the course.

In 1988, The National Association of REALTORS® led industry efforts to support important amendments to the Fair Housing Act.

**NAR is committed to:**



- Supporting strong fair housing laws
- Improving access to affordable housing
- Increasing diversity in the real estate market

In addition, NAR's Fair Housing Declaration is your REALTOR'S® pledge to work fairly with home buyers and sellers alike, to ensure equal access to homeownership opportunity. In Spokane, members of the Spokane Association of REALTORS® proudly display a notice of Equal Housing Opportunity (EHO) inside advertised open houses. The Fair Housing Declaration and the EHO flyer are both available upon request from your local REALTOR®.

For 41 years, the Fair Housing Act has protected the basic right of all Americans to pursue the dream of homeownership, free from discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status and national origin. Within the state of Washington, additional protected classes include marital status, sexual orientation and veteran/military status.

Because I married into a military family, my career has afforded me the opportunity to help numerous military families achieve homeownership in Spokane. Last year, an active military family was able to take advantage of combined first-time homebuyer's program benefits as well as their VA benefits, which amounted to more than they initially believed they were eligible for, and they expressed so much appreciation.

I also remember helping two Vietnamese families purchase homes here. The gentleman head-of-household explained his family's personal ordeal before arriving in Spokane. It made me feel very humble, and was just another reminder of all that we enjoy here in America.

The Spokane REALTOR® community is firmly committed to America's policy of fair housing. We believe that equal opportunity in housing is essential for the continued success of our region's housing market and renewed nationwide economic strength. We invite you to contact a Spokane REALTOR® today. We play a vital role in opening doors to equality through fair housing. For convenience, readers may browse local open houses, 24/7, online at [www.SpokaneOpen.com](http://www.SpokaneOpen.com), the official open house website of the Spokane Association of REALTORS®.

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