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For Immediate Release:

Kalamazoo to Host 11th Annual Fair Housing Conference Sept. 17, 2014 ***Conference Will Highlight Removing Barriers in Housing and Creating Accessible Communities***

Kalamazoo, MI - The Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan (FHCSWM), with support from the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, will hold the 11th Annual Fair Housing Conference on Wednesday, September 17 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, 100 West Michigan Avenue in Kalamazoo.

The Fair Housing Conference offers an opportunity for housing industry professionals to learn from national and regional leaders about removing barriers and creating more inclusive and accessible communities. Professionals will be encouraged to think beyond the here and now and look to the future for what is good for the communities where they work and live. The conference begins at 8 am. Registration is free and open to the public.

“Our 11th annual Fair Housing Conference is designed to encourage discussion and, most importantly, action on issues related to design, construction, modification and accommodation so that persons with disabilities can fully use and enjoy their homes,” said Bob Ells, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan. “The cold hard fact is that we all are temporarily-abled bodies and unless we prepare for our future, eventually most of us will find housing inaccessible.”

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., a national expert on universal design, will deliver the keynote address *Designing & Building Sustainable Homes that Make Life Easier*. Universal design is the principle that the built environment should be aesthetic and usable by everyone, regardless of age, ability or status. Rossetti will lead a discussion on marrying universal design with green building, healthy home concepts, and cutting-edge technology to enhance accessibility.

Rossetti brings both professional expertise and personal experience to the issue of accessibility. In 1998, Rossetti’s life was transformed when a 3 1/2 ton tree fell on her, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down. She and her husband Mark Leder created the Universal Design Living Laboratory - a national demonstration home and garden in Columbus, Ohio that is the highest-rated universal design home in North America. Rossetti and Leder consult with builders, designers and consumers, assisting in the design of new and remodeled homes. Rossetti also is an instructor for the National Association of Home Builders’ Universal Design/Build course.

Sara Pratt, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Enforcement Programs for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), will lead two panel discussions on equity in housing and inclusion in the community. At HUD, Pratt oversees the enforcement of the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights laws. Local panelists include:

- Allison Bethel, John Marshall Law School, Chicago
- Joanne Johnson, Disability Network, St. Joseph, MI
- David Lee, Pennings Accessible, Kalamazoo, MI

- Scott Schrum, Director of Residential Opportunities Inc., Kalamazoo, MI
- Sean McBride, Metro Transit Director, Kalamazoo, MI
- Laura Lam, Community Development Director, City of Kalamazoo

During the morning conference, attendees will have an opportunity to explore interactive booths and hands-on exhibits designed to give them a firsthand look at what it takes for housing to be accessible, and how the lack of accessibility impacts individuals and communities.

“Accessibility, visitability, and inclusivity are more than buzzwords – they are important issues facing each one of us and our communities,” said Ells. “They help to define our ability to transform communities and publicly commit to serving all people. But, to do that well, we first must fully understand their implications as well as how we can most effectively and collaboratively take action. At our September 17th conference, we will do just that.”

For the complete conference agenda, and to register online, visit <http://www.fhcswm.org/>. Also available on the FHCSWM website is a printable form that you can fill out and fax or mail to register.

Individuals and organizations interested in sponsoring the event or reserving exhibit space should contact Bob Ells, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan, at 269-276-9100 or bob.ells@fhcswm.org for more information.

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