

MIAMI VALLEY



FAIR HOUSING

METROPOLITAN  
MILWAUKEE



**NFHA**  
National Fair Housing Alliance

**ATTN: HOUSING and DISABILITY RIGHTS Reporters and Editors**

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*Ohio, Wisconsin, National Fair Housing Groups Sue Housing Developer for  
Discrimination against People with Disabilities*

*Investigation Reveals Violations by Steiner + Associates, et al.*

April 30, 2008 – The Miami Valley Fair Housing Center, Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council and National Fair Housing Alliance today filed a housing discrimination lawsuit against Steiner + Associates, a national developer of town centers that contain retail, residential and office spaces. The lawsuit alleges that Steiner, et al., failed to comply with federal accessibility standards in the design and construction of their properties.

The organizations investigated apartment units at Gilbert Court at the Greene in **Beavercreek, Ohio**, Lofts at Zona Rosa in **Kansas City, Missouri**, and Bayshore in **Glendale, Wisconsin**. All of the properties, including 272 individual apartments, were developed by Steiner + Associates and failed to meet the accessibility requirements of fair housing and disability laws. Steiner is developing additional properties in Virginia, Texas and Pennsylvania.

The lawsuit also names Mecham & Apel, Architects, Inc., Development Design Group, Inc., Torti Gallas and Partners, Inc., Messer Construction Co., Corna/Kokosing Construction Co., and others. The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate based on disability, race, color, national origin, religion, sex or familial status.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 51 million Americans (nearly one in five) have some form of disability. Of that number, more than 2.7 million people over the age of 15 years use a wheelchair. Another 7 million use a cane, crutches, a walker or other mobility aid. These numbers are expected to increase as the population ages and wounded veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The lawsuit alleges that Steiner + Associates, et al., have engaged in a continuous pattern and practice of discrimination against people with disabilities by designing and/or constructing multifamily dwellings inaccessible to people with disabilities. Architectural barriers at these properties include insurmountable thresholds, steps to the bedrooms, narrow hall widths and bathrooms with insufficient clear floor space – all of which prohibit the maneuverability of people in wheelchairs. Apartments also had environmental controls beyond the reach of wheelchair users. In addition, common use areas had accessible routes and passageways, abrupt level changes at thresholds and counter tops that were too high for use by people with wheelchairs.

After an investigation of Gilbert Court at the Green found multiple units out of compliance with the Fair Housing Act, the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in March 2007. The complaint was referred to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, which found probable cause to conclude that discriminatory practices had occurred at the property and referred the case to the Ohio Attorney General for prosecution. After the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council and the National Fair Housing Alliance identified units at Bayshore and Zona Rosa that were inaccessible to people with disabilities, the fair housing groups joined to file a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio.

“Steiner was founded over a decade *after* the passage of the Fair Housing Amendments Act, yet after all these years, people with disabilities continue to face discrimination because of Steiner’s inaccessible designs. We will not allow them and their partners to continue harming the community and denying housing to people with disabilities by designing and constructing inaccessible housing.” **Jim McCarthy – President & CEO, Miami Valley Fair Housing Center**

“Town centers are being developed and built all over the country with the benefit of integrating housing and retail in one place. People with disabilities cannot be left out. Accessible housing is an essential means of ensuring that people with disabilities are able to fully participate in community life. It is time for builders and developers to recognize their responsibility and comply with the law and construct housing units that are accessible for everyone.” **William Tisdale – President & CEO, Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council**

“It has been twenty years since the Fair Housing Act was amended to include disability. There cannot be a single valid reason for architects, developers, and builders to continue designing and building inaccessible housing. Steiner + Associates must undo the harm they have caused to these communities.” **Shanna Smith – President & CEO, National Fair Housing Alliance**

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#### **About the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center ([www.mvfairhousing.com](http://www.mvfairhousing.com))**

The mission of the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center (MVFHC) is to eliminate housing discrimination and ensure equal housing opportunity for all people in our region. MVFHC engages in activities designed to encourage fair housing practices through educational efforts; assists person who believe they have been victims of housing discrimination; identifies barriers to fair housing in order to help counteract and eliminate discriminatory housing practices; works with elected and government representatives to protect and improve fair housing laws; and takes all appropriate and necessary action to ensure that fair housing laws are properly and fairly enforced throughout the Miami Valley.

#### **About the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council ([www.fairhousingwisconsin.com](http://www.fairhousingwisconsin.com))**

The purpose of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council is to promote fair housing throughout the State of Wisconsin by combating illegal housing discrimination and by creating and maintaining racially and economically integrated housing patterns. It engages in several different activities to further its mission of promoting fair housing for people with disabilities and other protected classes throughout the state, including complaint intake, counsel, investigative services and systemic investigations of institutional discrimination.

#### **About the National Fair Housing Alliance ([www.nationalfairhousing.org](http://www.nationalfairhousing.org))**

Founded in 1988 and headquartered in Washington, DC, the National Fair Housing Alliance is a consortium of more than 220 private, non-profit fair housing organizations, state and local civil rights agencies, and individuals from throughout the United States. Through comprehensive education, advocacy and enforcement programs, NFHA protects and promotes equal access to apartments, houses, mortgage loans and insurance policies for all residents of the nation.