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GREEN BAY RACE DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT SETTLES

Green Bay, Wisconsin – Barbara Robinson and Shelia Walker have settled a federal lawsuit alleging illegal housing discrimination against Ken McCoy, the owner of multiple rental homes as well as a motorcycle dealership in Green Bay. McCoy will pay Robinson and Walker \$35,000 to settle their lawsuit, which alleged that he denied them housing because they are African-American.

In August 2009, Shelia Walker saw an advertisement in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* for a house for rent. She called the number in the ad and spoke with the owner, Ken McCoy. He told her that the house was located at 339 South Webster Avenue. He said that someone would be working there all day and that she could drop by anytime to see it. Walker and Robinson were happy to hear the home's address, since it was in an area they wanted to live in. Walker went to the home later that day, but no one was there. Walker called McCoy again and told him she'd tried to see it but no one was there, and asked if she could make an appointment to view it. He asked her where she was originally from, and she told him she was from Milwaukee. He told her that he would not rent to anyone from Milwaukee, and that he had had "problems" with people from Milwaukee in the past. A few days later, Walker called McCoy again and asked McCoy to reconsider, and he told her that the neighbors might have "trouble with it," and that it was a nice neighborhood and he wanted to keep it that way.

Concerned that McCoy had discerned Walker's race over the telephone and was discriminating against them because of it, Walker and Robinson contacted the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) and each filed a complaint. MMFHC operates a satellite office in Appleton, the Fair Housing Center of Northeast Wisconsin, which serves the Fox Valley and Brown County. MMFHC counseled Walker and Robinson on their legal rights and conducted a testing investigation into their allegations. Testing is a controlled method of measuring and documenting differences in the quality, content and quantity of information and service afforded to different homeseekers by a housing provider. A white tester called McCoy and told him that she was moving to Green Bay from Milwaukee; she asked to make an appointment to see the home and McCoy agreed. The white tester called McCoy again later, to ask for the specific addresses of the homes available and to ask if McCoy would enter into a year-long lease. The white tester identified herself as the caller from Milwaukee, and again, McCoy had no negative response to the fact that she was moving from Milwaukee.

McCoy subsequently rented the home on South Webster Avenue to a white couple.

With assistance from MMFHC, Robinson and Walker filed housing discrimination complaints with the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division (ERD) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in January 2010. MMFHC also referred Robinson and Walker to Attorney Michael Cohn, and in March 2010, they elected to file a federal lawsuit. Both ERD and HUD issued charges in favor of Walker and Robinson, determining that there was reasonable cause to find that McCoy had violated fair housing law.

In August 2012, Robinson, Walker and McCoy reached a settlement agreement in federal court. McCoy paid Robinson and Walker \$35,000. Despite the settlement, “the experience still hurts,” says Walker, “because it could happen again. People should know that discrimination still exists today. I don’t want anyone to be treated like we were treated.”

Robinson and Walker’s attorney, Michael Cohn, notes that, “In the 21st century, it’s unfortunate that people are still being denied housing because of their race, but it is more common than most people suspect.”

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MMFHC is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose 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 operates satellite offices in Dane County (the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison) and in Northeast Wisconsin (the Fair Housing Center of Northeast Wisconsin).

Persons who feel they may have experienced illegal housing discrimination should call 1-877-647-3247, a toll-free number. Callers within the 414 area code may call 414-278-1240. All services to victims of illegal housing discrimination are free of charge. More information is available at www.fairhousingwisconsin.com.