

MEMORANDUM

To: Community Managers and Administrators

From: Sonja Horn, Regulatory Director

Date: October 29, 2007

Re: Fair Housing Update

It's that time of year when everyone is thinking about what is and what is not considered Fair Housing discrimination. We wanted to take a few moments, hopefully before you finish your holiday decorating, to give you the benefit of the latest word in Fair Housing.

We realize and understand that much of the information that follows is sensitive and you may not personally agree with it. Unfortunately, in today's world, we can't wait for someone to tell us to do things differently, we have to be pro-active. Recently, we have seen more fair housing complaints claiming religious discrimination; we feel that providing you with this information will help make you more aware of recent developments in fair housing regulations and interpretations as well as giving you positive and specific steps you can take to avoid having to defend yourself in a complaint. Regardless of personal beliefs, not making this information available to you would be a disservice both to you and your community.

Much of the information shared below was provided by Steve Edelstein. Before going into private practice where he is a prominent fair housing attorney, Steve worked as an attorney for HUD's fair housing division. He provides more insight than a lot of other sources of information because of his background and he has tried to pare this information down as much as possible.

Remember that the basis of fair housing is to treat all people the same no matter what! So make sure that you and your staff follow these procedures to keep you in compliance and hopefully complaint free.

Holiday Hints:

1. Christmas Trees, Hanukah Menorahs, Santa Claus', Season's Greetings, snowmen, and wreaths are all acceptable icons that are associated with Christmas. Feel free to use them!
2. Any religious symbols or religious words associated with Christmas should not be used. For example, the following items should not be on display: nativity scene (or any of the people represented in the nativity scene alone or together), the Star of David, angels, etc. This means no angel on your Christmas tree either. If you are in doubt of whether or not you should put something out, please call me.
3. This decorating information applies to all common areas, including but not limited to: hallways, offices, community rooms, entrances, etc. Keep in mind that residents are free to decorate their apartments, as well as the exterior door to their apartment (as long as they do not damage the door), however they wish.
4. Christmas dinners, parties, and get-togethers are acceptable. If your community does something like this, it must be open to all residents and be made widely known that all residents regardless of religious affiliation are invited to attend. To be on the safe side you can always call them "Holiday" parties.
5. If you have already finished putting up all of those holiday decorations, please take a few minutes to look them over, removing any items that may be out of compliance.

6. When in doubt...check it out! Call your Regional Property Manager or myself for anything that you aren't certain of.

Community Room Reminders:

1. Community Rooms must be open to all residents for activities.
2. If residents want to have religious activities (for example: Bible studies); they are permitted to do so, as long as you make sure of the following:
 - a. Community room is made available to residents of all religions (shouldn't be a problem since number one is that it must be open to all residents!).
 - b. Management and staff do not participate in, sponsor, or promote any of these activities. This means that the residents will have to do all of the preparation for these activities, including putting out reminders.
 - c. You repeatedly remind your residents that anyone can use your community room. This can be done through the monthly newsletter. It must be widely known that community room can be reserved for persons of all religions.

Bulletin Board Reminders:

(NOTE: There are some properties that allow residents to post information on their own bulletin board, or a portion of the management bulletin board. If you are not currently allowing residents to post information on a bulletin board, you should not begin this practice – please refer only to item number 1 below.)

1. If you have ONE bulletin board in your office/community room, it should be used only for management purposes. Residents should not post any information on it at all.
2. If you have more than one bulletin board, you should designate one for resident use only. This bulletin board should not be used by management for any informational purposes. It should only be used by residents.
3. If you have a bulletin board that is only for use by the residents, you should have the following disclaimer posted on this bulletin board: "NOTICE: This bulletin board is for **resident use only**. The material posted represents the view of only the individual who posted it and does not necessarily reflect the views of management." (I have included this wording as another attachment to this e-mail for you to print and post on the resident bulletin board.)

As always, we are here to help, so if you have a question or concern, please feel free to call your Regional Property Manager or me at (205) 933-1020 ext. 134.

cc: Regional Property Managers
Bill Welden
Lia Smith