Tarrant apartment group responds to report of rental discrimination

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Last week's report from a Dallas group that suggested that there is discrimination in North Texas apartment rental practices has the industry's attention.

"We don't tolerate discrimination on any basis," said Michael Walker, president of the Apartment Association of Tarrant County and owner of Walker Holder Residential.

The North Texas Fair Housing Center, a Dallas nonprofit funded by the Housing and Urban Development Department, sent secret shoppers to 40 large complexes in the Metroplex and found different rents, availability, security deposits and move-in specials offered to whites, blacks, Hispanics and families. Different shoppers went to the same properties within an hour of each other, the group said.

Local industry people said that it is difficult to address the report's accuracy but that its findings are surprising given how large properties train managers.

"We don't have the full perspective" on what the report said, Darnell Harris, regional manager of Lincoln Property Co. and a past association president, said. Improper practices are "possible," he said. "It's hard to answer."

Walker and others said software used by larger properties can produce different prices at different times.

"Depending on the software, there's a possibility [managers] have the ability to price in terms of supply and demand," said Lisa Clark, association secretary and regional manager of Bell Partners. But outside of the software's pricing, industry people said, large properties generally don't allow managers to quote different prices.

Support for troops

Fort Worth is one of three Texas semifinalists for the 2011 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest recognition given employers for support of employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

The city was chosen from 4,049 nominations submitted by service members to become one of 148 semifinalists nationwide, the Defense Department said. A national review board will select 30 finalists and the 15 award recipients.

Rabalais I&E Constructors in Corpus Christi and Dell Inc. in Round Rock are the other Texas semifinalists.

The 2011 recipients will be honored Sept. 22 in Washington, D.C. This is the award's 16th year.

Birthday present

To celebrate 40 years in business, Oklahoma City-based Devon Energy's $40K for Kids program will give a $40,000 grant to a North Texas school or other nonprofit educational organization, one of eight such grants that Devon will make.

Submissions must be for an "education-based project or program that is either located in or affects an area where Devon has field operations." Programs or projects that support higher education are ineligible, as are requests for individual support.

An entry form and essay questions is at www.devonenergy.com. Entry packets must be received by June 10 and may be mailed to Devon Energy, Attention: Taylor Luskey, 777 Main St., Ste. 2200, Fort Worth, TX 76102.

Ozarks in Keller

Bank of the Ozarks, a Little Rock institution, is opening a branch Monday at 600 Keller Parkway in Keller, the bank's first Tarrant County office. The branch manager is Joseph Bain, a 20-year local banker.

Bank of the Ozarks entered North Texas in 2004 with an office in Frisco and now has eight offices here, including in Dallas, Allen, Plano, Lewisville and Carrollton.

Staff writer Jack Z. Smith contributed to this report.

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