



# The League of Iowa Human Rights Agencies

Volume 1, Issue 1

February 2008

## Welcome to the League of Iowa Human Rights Agencies

The League of Iowa Human Rights Agencies is a voluntary, non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and advancement of human and civil rights. Founded in the late 1970's, the League comprises of the local human and civil rights commissions in Iowa, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and the Iowa Department of Human Rights. While its members are public agencies, the League is a private, non-governmental organization.

The League meets four times a year, two times in Des Moines and two times through the Iowa Communication Network (ICN). During those meetings, League members receive training on a variety of human and civil rights topics and share ideas and concerns among each other. Additional trainings may be scheduled throughout the year as desired.

### The League's 2008 Legislative Priorities

- Granting the Iowa Civil Rights Commission subpoena power over witnesses during the investigation stage
- Expanding the state statute of limitations for filing discrimination complaints from 180 days to 300 days
- Rescinding the federal Patriot Act
- General call to pass comprehensive immigration reform with the goal of solving current immigration problems and furthering family unity.

### League Officers for 2008

President: Rudy Simms

Des Moines Human Rights Commission  
rusimms@dmgov.org

Vice President: Ralph Rosenberg

Iowa Civil Rights Commission  
Ralph.Rosenberg@iowa.gov

Secretary: Kelly Larson

Dubuque Human Rights Commission  
k.larson@cityofdubuque.org

Treasurer: Michelle McMurray

Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission  
m.mcmurray@cedar-rapids.org

Inside this issue you will find:

Strengthening Iowa's Local Commissions	2
Ch. 216 Provision Committee	2
Old and New Partnerships	3
Major 2008 Anniversaries	4
Sharing of Ideas	5
Edna Griffin Word Find	5
Americorps VISTA	6

## Legislative Breakfast: Thursday, February 28, 2008

The League's Annual Legislative Breakfast and League Meeting will be held on Thursday, February 28, 2008 from 7:30 AM to 2:00 PM in Des Moines, beginning in the Legislative Dining Room of the State Capitol. The dining room is located in the lowest level of the Capitol. During the 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM Breakfast, commissioners and staff may greet and meet with their legislators regarding civil

and human rights issues affecting their communities and the state. Informal meetings with legislators unable to attend the breakfast will take place from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM. Afterward, ICRC VISTAs will guide groups between the Capitol and the Level B Conference Room in the Hoover State Office Building for the League meeting, which starts at 11:00 AM and will include lunch. Trainings will be

offered on Study Circles by Walter Reed (Dept. of Human Rights), the new sexual orientation and gender identity law by Ralph Rosenberg (ICRC), on fair housing outreach ideas by the ICRC VISTAs and strengthening local commissions by Rudy Simms (Des Moines). Commissions are encouraged to share best practices, such as the DVD the Cedar Falls Commission recently produced.

Iowa Local Commissions

Ames Human Relations Commission  
 Bettendorf Human Rights Commission  
 Burlington Human Rights Commission  
 Cedar Falls Human Rights Commission  
 Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission  
 Coralville Human Rights Commission  
 Council Bluffs Civil Rights Commission  
 Davenport Civil Rights Commission  
 Decorah Human Rights Commission  
 Des Moines Human Rights Commission  
 Dubuque Human Rights Commission  
 Fort Dodge Human Rights Commission  
 Fort Madison Human Rights Commission  
 Grinnell Human Rights Commission  
 Indianola Human Relations Commission  
 Iowa City Human Rights Commission  
 Johnson County Human Rights Commission  
 Keokuk Human Rights Commission  
 Marshalltown Human Rights Commission  
 Mason City Human Rights Commission  
 Mount Pleasant Human Rights Commission  
 Muscatine Human Rights Commission  
 Ottumwa Human Rights Commission  
 Sioux City Human Rights Commission  
 Urbandale Civil Rights Commission  
 Waterloo Commission on Human Rights  
 West Des Moines Human Rights Commission



## League Yahoo Groups

Iowa Civil Rights Agencies: open forum for all League members to share ideas and assist one another

Population Provision: discussion group on how to strengthen local commissions

## Strengthening Local Commissions

Upholding Human Rights is a long-standing tradition in the State of Iowa. From deciding the case involving “Ralph the Slave” to the active protests of Edna Griffin and company outside of Katz Drugstore, Iowans have stood up for civil and human rights. This is a value that makes Iowa and Iowans leaders in human and civil rights. We are proud of this and it is reflected in the laws of this state that require cities with populations over 29,000 to have human rights commissions and to adequately staff those commissions.

It is important that there be a law. More important to each community in Iowa is the attitude of the people to value the civil and human rights of all people who reside in their community. This is the true strength and test of civil and human rights; just how well do your citizens and community leaders value the pursuit of justice in their community? That could be the key to sustaining human rights in your community. What value is placed on your local commission? Is it embraced by the governmental leaders and viewed as an asset to the citizens of the community? How is the appreciation of your local commission’s work shown?

Civil and human rights have been a given in today’s society. We all have an expectation that our rights will be maintained and our liberties prized. Sounds like a State “motto” to many however it is serious business that rights have to be maintained. Education by human and civil rights agencies within their communities will

“We, as a League of professionals, must define the appropriate standards of our work.”

be the best and brightest way to maintain and strengthen local commissions. It is our responsibility to make the case for justice and the maintenance of our local agencies. People must know of our good work, our contributions to the civility in the community, how we bring conflicting parties and ideas together for better relationships and justice for all of us, not just some of us.

When citizens feel and see the results of the work of human and civil rights agencies in their communities they will value those freedoms and liberties that human and civil rights

agencies fight for everyday and continually educate about working together beyond our differences. It will be then that we get the funding to do the job in the manner that is appropriate for our communities.

We, as a League of professionals, must define the appropriate standards of our work. We must, as practitioners of the field, identify the tools necessary to accomplish the work. As a League, we must identify the reasonable expectations of funding to accomplish the work in our respective local communities. This is the task that we must undertake together and the conversation about all of this has now begun. We must find these answers together; therefore, I have established a committee to address the concerns expressed around chapter 216, not just about the threshold of commissions, but also to define what “adequate funding” really means.

To participate in this conversation and shaping of standards, please feel free to e-mail your thoughts and concerns to me and others who are members of the League of Iowa Human Rights Agencies.

Rudy Simms, Executive Director,  
Des Moines

## Chapter 216 Provision Committee Update

All members of the League are welcome to join in the discussion on the population provision found in Chapter 216 of the Iowa Code. The discussion takes place via email and through a special Yahoo group designated for this purpose. All email exchanges and corresponding files can be found on

the Yahoo group site. To receive access to this Yahoo group, please contact Crystal Schrader with your email address at (515) 281-3041 or [crystal.schrader@iowa.gov](mailto:crystal.schrader@iowa.gov). Though the initial conversation revolved around whether or not to remove the 29,000 population threshold requiring

cities of that number or larger to create human rights commissions, the discussion has expanded to look at adequate staffing and funding standards that would strengthen and enhance the instrumental services local commissions provide to their communities and to the state.

## Civil Rights and Human Rights — Old and New Partnerships

During the fiftieth year celebrations of the Brown v. Board of Education case in 2005, several organizations, such as Gallup, released national opinion polls on discrimination. Many of the polls attempted to measure the extent Americans believed that the goals of elimination of discrimination have been attained, or that significant progress had been made over the past 50 years. The poll responses revealed a somewhat predictable distinction between people of color and white Americans.

Overall, the polls reflected some advancement in the “across the board” beliefs of Americans, in terms of support of diversity in the workforce, the neighborhood, or one’s own family (acceptance of family members of a different race or national origin). However, people of color were less sanguine over the progress. And that is an important lesson for all who are trying to raise the profile of civil rights. One looks around and no longer sees separate drinking fountains; yet, when we examine the data on disproportionate incarceration or disproportionate drop out rates, we are confronted with racial realities.

“Today, some of the battle grounds have changed...they surround national origin and disability or sexual orientation and gender identity...and some battle grounds remain, such as racial disparities.”

We have made progress. We need to make more progress. The battles of civil rights in the 1950’s surrounded race and religion. Today, some of the battle grounds have changed...they surround national origin and disability or sexual orientation and gender identity...and some battle grounds remain, such as racial disparities. We even battle amongst ourselves for whose battle-grounds are more of a priority.

Iowa has been a leader in civil rights. I know many in society want to take the

next step in civil rights and in reaching a higher level of embracing diversity. Since we have a state administration whose bywords include One Iowa, I am sure that progress is possible. I am sure we need to try to build bridges among different stakeholder groups, share our successes, and increase our outreach and education efforts. We have a core of committed and interested Iowans. And those who serve on local human and civil rights groups are our leaders today. What I do know, as a middle aged white guy, is that one challenge we have to overcome in order to achieve a true One Iowa is to understand where we are today. Many people do not understand the reality of the residue of racism, let alone the high unemployment rates for black males or people with disabilities.

ICRC cannot do its job without the work of local human and civil rights agencies. With the changing face and demographics of Iowans, it becomes more important for local agencies to provide their own unique, local brand of casework and diversity education and training. What makes it so hard to crack the current realities of discrimination is its complexity. But, there are opportunities for local involvement. Local agencies can pick a local issue or concern, focus their energy, hone their battles, and achieve success, maybe a success in school for racial and cultural minorities or in greater home ownership or in jobs for parolees or in stronger diversity programs in the workplace. Local stakeholder groups will be the laboratories for change.

At the state level, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission is also working to leverage and expand its resources and share both resources and staff with state and local groups. We know the value of innovative partnerships. We will continue to explore ways to leverage expertise, improve services and create greater value for the agency’s stakeholders. For several years, ICRC has entered into contracts with as many as 12 local commissions to assist in intake and processing of civil rights cases, with the non-profit group Legal Aid to conduct mediation of active cases and assist in the intake process and preliminary screening of cases, and with a

dedicated law school program that focuses on mediation in civil rights cases, which may have been the first law school/civil rights agency partnership of its kind. ICRC collaborates with other state agencies, such as with IDIED, in testing, education and outreach of fair housing laws.

“One looks around and no longer sees separate drinking fountains; yet, when we examine the data on disproportionate incarceration and drop out rates, we are confronted with racial realities.”

In 2006, ICRC became the first state civil rights agency in this country to use VISTA volunteers to engage in capacity building of local human and civil rights agencies, including education, outreach, development and distribution of best practices, grant making, prevention and response to hate crimes, translation and interpretation services, and innovative use of internet technology to promote diversity and civil rights. Initially starting with two VISTA’s working out of the ICRC office, we now have four VISTA’s available to help local commissions across the state and three VISTA’s assigned to specific local commissions in Des Moines and Waterloo.

As an agency, our mission is to end discrimination. We strive to achieve our mission through a combination of investigation and resolution of discrimination complaints, outreach, education, and training. We constantly look at improving our work and process. We do know that we have a better chance to eradicate discrimination with fair and just case investigations, by building upon our existing partnerships with local commissions and creation of links with new partners, and sharing our success stories.

Ralph Rosenberg, Executive Director,  
Iowa Civil Rights Commission



Do you have plans to celebrate any of these major anniversaries or other ones unique to your community? If so, let us know and we will help publicize them to the state.

## 2008 Civil and Human Rights Anniversaries

15th Anniversary of the Family Medical Leave Act  
 35th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act  
 40th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act  
 40th Anniversary of the death Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
 45th Anniversary of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech and "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"  
 45th Anniversary of the death of 4 girls killed at the 16th St. Baptist Church in Alabama  
 45th Anniversary of the Equal Pay Act  
 60th Anniversary of Executive Order 9981 (banned racial segregation in the armed forces)  
 60th Anniversary of the Edna Griffin case  
 70th Anniversary of the Fair Labor Standards Act  
 95th Anniversary of the death of Harriet Tubman  
 140th Anniversary of Iowa's Equal Suffrage Referendum that gave blacks that right to vote  
 140th Anniversary of the 14th Amendment (due process and defined citizenship)  
 145th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation

## Best Practices and Sharing of Ideas and Resources

One of the purposes of the League is for the exchange of ideas and resources among the different commissions. Best practices can describe a successful program, a recent accomplishment or a publication for others to use as templates and examples. To share a best practice from your commission, please contact Jennifer Fath or Crystal Schrader to post it on the League's website: <http://www.freewebs.com/iowacivilrights/>

Best Practice #1 (Below)  
 Utility Bill Insert: Des Moines Human Rights Commission

To reach a larger portion of the population, the Des Moines Human Rights Commission created the insert shown below to be placed in residents' utility bills. The Commission is also hanging Fair Housing posters in a variety of public buildings and in apartment complexes. April 16 will be the Commission's Annual Housing Symposium.

Best Practice #2 (page 5)  
 Edna Griffin Word Find: Iowa Civil Rights Commission

As a way of reaching out to younger audiences, the VISTAs decided to distribute several activity sheets for children and youth. One word find celebrates the 60th Anniversary of the Edna Griffin public accommodations case. Please feel free to suggest or create other handouts celebrating events and heroes in Iowa's Civil Rights history.



**"Fair Housing – It's Not an Option; It's the Law"**  
**Call the Des Moines Human Rights Commission**  
**515-283-4284**

To file a Fair Housing Complaint  
 To learn Fair Housing Rights & Responsibilities  
 To arrange for Fair Housing Training for providers

**"We Are Here To Help You"**

Des Moines Human Rights Commission  
 602 Robert D. Ray Drive, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
 Armory Building  
 Des Moines, Iowa 50309

## Websites of Interest for League Members

League Website: <http://www.freewebs.com/iowacivilrights/>

ICRC Website: <http://www.state.ia.us/government/crc/>

# Celebrating Iowa's Civil Rights History

## 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Edna Griffin Discrimination Case



On July 7, 1948 Edna Griffin sat down at the lunch counter of Katz Drug Store in Des Moines with her young daughter Phyllis, John Bibbs and Leonard Hudson to purchase ice cream. The store manager, Maurice Katz, denied them their request, stating, "It is the policy of our store that we don't serve coloreds." Incensed, the three adults filed criminal charges at the Municipal Courthouse and an additional civil suit against the store and its manager for racial discrimination.

While waiting for the case to go to court, Mrs. Griffin organized sit-ins and picketing at the lunch counter and store. Members of the community joined the courageous woman in her effort to put an end to the horrible treatment by the store and its manager. Finally after having escaped three previous charges of discrimination, Mr. Katz was found guilty of violating Iowa's Civil Rights Law for denying service to Mrs. Griffin and her companions and fined \$50. A week before the Iowa Supreme Court choose to uphold the conviction, members of the local NAACP Legal Defense Fund reached an agreement with Mr. Katz, which resulted in the end of discriminatory practices against customers based on their race.

### Word Find

Court  
Edna  
Equal  
Fifty  
Griffin  
July  
Katz  
Lunch  
Race  
Rights  
Sit-ins

E	B	J	U	L	Y	E	N	G
W	Q	C	R	I	P	A	I	B
D	L	U	S	E	V	H	F	O
A	Z	T	A	K	C	U	F	S
C	K	F	K	L	R	A	I	F
O	Z	S	T	H	G	I	R	I
U	J	X	C	R	E	V	G	F
R	H	N	J	E	D	N	A	T
T	U	R	O	Q	V	O	P	Y
L	E	S	N	I	T	I	S	E

THE  
LEAGUE OF  
IOWA  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
AGENCIES

Celebrating Diversity and Protecting the Rights of Iowans

## Americorps VISTA: A Resource for Local Commissions

What did you think of this newsletter? Was it informative and applicable to your work as a human or civil rights commissioner or as a staff person? Are there other topics you would like to see featured?

This newsletter is a new venture of the VISTAs, though in a way a reincarnation of The Occasional Newsletter from previous years. While the VISTAs may create and distribute the newsletter, it is ultimately the League's newsletter. You are the bright shining stars of hope that light the path to equality.

Therefore, we encourage you to share with us what you would like to see featured in the newsletter and to also share your commission's best practices and ideas. Please send your responses to the ICRC VISTAs by postal mail, over the phone or via email.

In 2006, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) received a three year grant from the Americorps VISTA program to



assist in capacity building for the League and its members. The Iowa Civil Rights VISTA Program now comprises of four VISTAs at ICRC, two VISTAs at the Des Moines Human Rights Commission and one VISTA at the Waterloo Commission on Human Rights. The Des Moines and Waterloo VISTAs will focus on local issues in their cities, while the four at ICRC, two of whom proficient in Spanish are available to help all League member agencies.

### The League's VISTAs

Jennifer Fath, VISTA Leader  
[Jennifer.Fath@iowa.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Fath@iowa.gov)  
Jake Beckwith  
[Jacob.Beckwith@iowa.gov](mailto:Jacob.Beckwith@iowa.gov)  
Karen Miranda  
[Karen.Miranda@iowa.gov](mailto:Karen.Miranda@iowa.gov)  
Crystal Schrader  
[Crystal.Schrader@iowa.gov](mailto:Crystal.Schrader@iowa.gov)

Iowa Civil Rights Commission  
Grimes State Office Building  
400 E. 14th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
Phone: (515) 281-3041  
Fax: (515) 284-9425

---

## Recommended Reading (Suggested by the Iowa Dept. of Human Rights and ICRC)

Executive Session Papers from Human Rights Commissions and Criminal Justice  
Marea L. Beeman, Series Editor

<http://www.hrccj.org/hrccj/publications.html>

HRC #1 (August 2006)

Building Trust after a Police Shooting: Community Intervention Teams in Columbus, Ohio

HRC #2 (October 2006)

Increasing Diversity in Police Departments: Strategies and Tools for Human Rights Commissions and Others

HRC #3 (June 2007)

A Historical Perspective on U.S. Human Rights Commissions

HRC #4 (August 2007)

Performance Measures for Human Rights Commissions