



Resident Connections

a publication of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County

SERVICES NOW AVAILABLE AT TWO CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTERS



OFFICIALLY OPEN! Local and housing officials cut the ribbon on March 3, 2009. HOC officially opened its second Customer Service Center at: 8241 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring.

It's official. HOC now has two Customer Service Centers open and ready to provide assistance to its residents and clients. The newest center is in Silver Spring (8241 Georgia Ave., third floor). HOC's first Customer Service Center opened in Gaithersburg (101 Lakeforest Blvd.) last Spring.

HOC clients should find shorter lines, quicker service and overall improved service by using the Customer Service Centers.

While some clients still do visit the Kensington office, most clients will find it much more convenient to stop by either of the two new centers, which are both located near public transportation and which have shorter wait times than the Kensington office.

Many staff who previously worked out of the Kensington office now have offices in Gaithersburg and Silver Spring. ■



Mark Your Calendar...

- **April 19, 2009:** "CIAO Bella Prom Gown Giveaway" St. Anthony's Bridal shop, a local nonprofit helping brides on budgets, is hosting its annual prom gown giveaway at the Hilton in Silver Spring. Space is limited. Registration required. Details at: www.stanthonybridal.com or www.bellaproms.com
- **April 22, 2009, Elizabeth House, Silver Spring:** Stretch Your Dollar: Tips on budgeting, money management. In English at 2 p.m., In Spanish at 3 p.m. Call: 301-585-6192
- **April 25, 2009, noon to 4 p.m.:** Youth Job Fair, Downtown Silver Spring, 916 Ellsworth Drive. More info: www.letsgetitstartedyouthjobfair.com
- **May 13, 2009:** Seneca Ridge Neighborhood Network, "Who Moved My Cheese?" motivational workshop. Call: 240-773-9349 for information.
- **May 15, 2009:** Tony Davis Scholarship Applications due (see p.2)

Questions?

Call 240-773-9009

(M-F, 8:30 a.m.—5 p.m.) for answers to *any* of your housing-related questions, or email: rentasst@hocmc.org



Rep. Kilpatrick (D-MI, center) met with HOC FSS participant Patricia Rogers (L) and FSS case manager Antonia Whitfield (R) during a visit to Capitol Hill to help lawmakers understand the importance of supporting housing programs and the FSS program. ■
(See p. 2, information on FSS)

THE FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM:

OPENING NEW DOORS TO THE FUTURE

**El Programa Para la auto-suficiencia de la familia
(llame Ud. A Margaret Chapman 301-869-9291)**

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE APPROACHING

HOC is offering two Tony S. Davis Memorial Scholarship awards to deserving high school seniors who live in public housing or participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

The winners of the scholarship award will receive \$5,000 each to pay towards their college education.

To be eligible to win, graduating seniors must attain an overall high school grade point average of at least 2.5 (on a scale of 4.0)

Applicants must submit an essay, SAT/ACT scores and several letters of recommendation. The application and further details can be found on line at <http://www.hocmc.org/documents/ScholarshipApplication2009.pdf>. For additional information contact Stephanie Semones at 301-355-7399. ■

The FSS program is available to all Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing residents who want to increase their earnings, develop career skills and build savings.

You could overcome barriers to success if you enroll in FSS and work regularly with your FSS case manager on short and long-term goals, career development, job training/education, budgeting and problem-solving skills. Limited funds are available for tuition/books and transportation. ■

The FSS Advantage

- **Graduates have raised earnings by an average of \$18,000.**
- **20 Percent of Graduates become homeowners.**
- **As earnings are raised, an FSS savings account created for you grows.**

For further information contact FSS at: 240-773-9393

FSS is un programa con el propósito de ayudar a las familias a mejorar sus ingresos. Le ayudará una consejera a encontrar recursos. Para más información en español, llame Ud. A Margaret Chapman, 301-869-9291.

About Your Rent Check....

DON'T BECOME ABSOLUTE!

Please be aware that paying late rent could be as hazardous as not paying rent at all.

. If you receive four WRITS for unpaid rent within a 12-month period, you will be in an "Absolute Eviction" status. Once an absolute status is reached, you may be evicted even if 100 percent of the rent balance is paid before the eviction date.

A WRIT is short for Warrant of Restitution. It's an order issued by the court that allows HOC to repossess a housing unit through an eviction. Each time a resident is taken to court for non-payment of rent, the judge may issue a WRIT against the resident in default.

The best way to avoid an absolute status is (of course) to pay your rent. However, if that's not possible, it would be helpful for you to understand the legal process so you can avoid an absolute status.

- If your rent is received after 5 p.m. on the 10th of the month, your rent is considered late and legal action is filed immediately.

- On the 11th of the month, a summons is prepared and then forwarded to HOC's attorney to begin legal proceedings.

- A court date is set (usually the month following the month filed on).

- If the rent/late fees are not paid by the end of the month, the next month's rent will be added to that court case.

- On the day of court, the judge gives an order to pay rent within a certain time frame (usually 48 hours).

- If the judge's order is not followed, a WRIT is issued allowing HOC to repossess the unit and a legal fee will be charged.

Remember: If all rent due and late fees are paid before the court date, a WRIT for eviction will not be issued.

Partial payment of rent owed will NOT stop the legal process. Rent must be paid in full, otherwise it is not considered paid. Do not allow rent balances to carry over into the next month. Otherwise, the next month's rent will automatically be added to the court case.

If you are experiencing a documented hardship, you may be eligible for rental assistance through the HOC Emergency Assistance or RETAP programs. For more information please call **240-773-9009** or visit one of the new HOC Customer Service Centers in Gaithersburg and Silver Spring.

For more information about the legal eviction process or to obtain eviction prevention assistance, call the Resident Accounting Division at: **240-773-9346.** ■



Conserve Your Energy...You Pay for It!

The way you use electricity at home offers great opportunities for using energy wisely. Here are some tips from Luis Montoya, HOC's financial literacy counselor, designed to help you reduce your electric bill.

- **Turn off the lights!** Really. When you leave a room, flip the switch.

- **Turn off the video games, TV and computer** when not in use.

- **Unplug the video games, TV, computer, microwave, stereo, DVD player, cell phone charger, etc.** when not in use.

- **Wash only full loads of clothes, in cold wash/cold rinse** (not hot water).

- **Wash clothes only if they are dirty.** Jeans do not need to be washed after each wearing unless you have been rolling around in the mud.

- **Throw a dry towel in the clothes dryer with a load of wet clothes.**

- **If you have electric heat and/or air conditioning, learn to live with the thermostat set a few degrees outside your optimal comfort zone.**

- **Dry full loads of clothes only.**

- **Clean the dryer lint filter before every load.**



- **Dust your light bulbs!**

- **Keep the freezer full.** If you don't have a lot of frozen food, freeze bottles of water. As a bonus, you'll have cold drinking water in case the electricity goes off.

- **Keep the inside of your microwave clean.**

- **Cook using the smallest pans possible and cover them with lids.**

- **Turn energy saving into a game for your kids:** see who can remember to turn off lights when they leave a room, etc.

- **Cut down on clothes dryer time.** Hang heavy items (jeans and towels) to dry for a few hours instead of throwing them directly in the dryer.

- **Throw a dry towel in the clothes dryer with a load of wet clothes.**

- **Choose what you want to eat before you open the refrigerator or freezer.** Don't stand in front of it with the door wide open. Close the door quickly. ■

NEW HOC PROGRAM HELPS RESIDENTS GET THEIR HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

Unlike many of us out there, Mr. Finch, a Montgomery College professor, loves math.

He's been helping HOC residents master the complexities of geometry and algebra at the Seneca Ridge Neighborhood Network Center in Germantown as part of the center's new General Educational Development (GED) program.

"Math is a universal language," said Finch.

"You have to have the discipline to commit to a goal to learn math. That's the hardest part...not the numbers," he added.

More than 30 HOC residents signed up for the program, which met 4 mornings a week this past February and March, to help them pass the GED exam and get their high school diploma. Students also received help with their English and writing skills from Beena Abraham, a Montgomery College English professor.



"Learning math is like learning a new language," said Mr. Finch, math professor in HOC's GED program.

Registration for the fall 2009 session is going on now. If you're interested and want more information, contact HOC Resident Counselor Margery McCarthy-Hall at: 240-773-9349, or send her an email at: margery.mccarthy-hall@hocmc.org. ■

RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARD HAS A NEW LOOK

HOC Resident Designs Board's Logo

The Resident Advisory Board, (RAB) now has an official logo, thanks to the efforts of Shantel Williams, an HOC resident.

The RAB ran a contest among HOC residents to choose their new logo. Shantel's work was picked from more than 56 other designs submitted.

Shantel, a self-taught web designer, is a resident at Magruder's Discovery.



To learn more about the Resident Advisory Board, visit: their website located on the HOC website (www.hocmc.org); the link is stored under the "For Our Residents" page. You can also contact Lillian Durham, the HOC staff facilitator at: 240-773-9332. ■

REMINDER: If you pay your rent to HOC...

HOC has changed its rent collection procedure. Residents who wish to mail their payments should send them to: 10400 Detrick Ave., Kensington, MD 20895, ATTN: Resident Accounting. *Please do not mail your payment to any other HOC location.* If you prefer to drop your rent payment off, HOC has four convenient locations throughout the County. These locations are: the two new Customer Service Centers (addresses below), the East Deer Park Office (231 East Deer Park Drive, Gaithersburg, MD 20877) and 10400 Detrick Ave., Kensington, MD 20895. You may drop your payment off at any of these sites during each location's normal business hours. Call **240-773-9009** or **240-773-9346** for more information.

HOC Gaithersburg Customer Service Center
101 Lakeforest Blvd. #200
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

HOC Silver Spring Customer Service Center
8241 Georgia Ave., 3rd Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910



Housing Opportunities Commission
10400 Detrick Avenue
Kensington, MD 20895-2484