

# The Civil Voice



## HRC QUARTERLY NEWS

City of Topeka - Human Relations Commission - April, May & June- 2008 Volume 3, Issue 2

### 2008 CONFERENCE COMMEMORATES 40 YEARS OF THE FAIR HOUSING ACT



On April 29, the Human Relations Commission (HRC) and Housing & Neighborhood Development (HND) commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Federal Fair Housing Act with a Fair Housing Conference. The 2008 yearly event was titled **Celebrating 40 Years of the Fair Housing Act: Identifying Impediments and Overcoming Barriers**. The Conference was held at the Topeka Zoo. Over 100 attendees from across the state of Kansas enjoyed informative topics presented by Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc., (HCCI) and representatives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A panel featuring Mayor Bill Bunten and representatives from HND, HCCI and the State of Kansas wrapped up the conference discussing their views on how to overcome barriers to fair and affordable housing in Topeka.

During breaks in the conference, attendees were able to visit the Topeka Zoo and Gage Park. Those visiting for the first time were very impressed, and long-time Topekans expressed regret that they hadn't come to the Zoo for many years. Both groups promised to return.



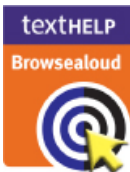
### MEET HRC'S SUMMER INTERN



Ori Elizabeth Onazi is an international student attending Washburn University. She was born and raised in a small town in Northern Nigeria. Ori came to Kansas following in the footsteps of her father Professor Ochapa Onazi, who attended Kansas State University. It was difficult at first for her to adjust to the lifestyle and culture of the American people, but after a year she fell in love with the beautiful city of Topeka. In her first year of college, like many other students, Ori was unsure of what she wanted to major in, but finally decided on a degree in Psychology because she was interested in understanding the human mind and behavior.

Ori heard about the internship here at the City of Topeka and felt that it would be a good way to get her foot in the door of the real world. Ori feels that this experience has been nothing short of a blessing for her. In her own words, "I am learning a lot everyday and truly inspired by the dedication of the team here at the Human Relations Commission. Their dedication to help the people of Topeka to live lives free from discrimination at work, at home and in all walks of life is admirable! My goal in life has always been to help people in whatever way that I can. I am much honored to be a part of this team even for this short while."

### BROWSEALLOUD OFFERS EXPANDED ACCESS TO THE CITY'S WEBSITE



Michael Byington, a member of Topeka's ADA Advisory Council, invited Rio Cervantes-Reed, HRC Executive Director, to provide an overview of the Browsealoud software that is available on the City's website to staff and Advisory Council members from the Kansas Rehab Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Approximately 15 people were in attendance at the June 14 meeting.

Browsealoud reads web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online. Reading large amounts of text on screen can be difficult for those with literacy and visual impairments. According to City of Topeka webmaster Bill Stephens approximately 200 visitors have utilized the Browsealoud program since the City made this software available to the general public. HRC purchased the Browsealoud subscription utilizing general funds earmarked for citizen outreach activities.

The Advisory Council has asked Rio to return to their regular September meeting, along with Mr. Stephens, to provide additional information about the Browsealoud program.

**The City of Topeka's Human Relations Commission holds regular meetings the first Monday of every month. Please confirm meeting time and location by calling our office at (785) 368-3606 during our office hours, 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday.**

## JUNETEENTH CELEBRATED AT THE TOPEKA ZOO

Representatives from HRC attended the Topeka Zoo on June 15 for Starduster's Juneteenth celebration. Co-sponsored by the Topeka Parks and Recreation Department and the Topeka Zoo the event was held at Gage Park and Hillcrest Community Center. HRC distributed approximately 700 sets of mardi gras-style beads with Fair Housing information and HRC contact information attached.

The Juneteenth holiday originated in Galveston, Texas, and for more than a century, the state of Texas was the primary home of Juneteenth celebrations. It was established to celebrate the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas. Although the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued on September 22, 1862, it had little immediate effect on most slaves' day-to-day lives, particularly those held in Texas, which was almost entirely under Confederate control. Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, the day Union General Gordon Granger and 2,000 federal troops arrived on Galveston Island to take possession of the state of Texas and began to enforce the emancipation of its slaves. Juneteenth is now observed in 26 states.

## HEARTLAND VISIONING STEERING COMMITTEE NAMED

The Heartland Visioning Project is designed to promote a community wide effort to develop ideas for changes to be made to better our community. The Steering Committee will meet several times throughout the planning process.



Their responsibilities during this phase are to: create the volunteer Vision Task Force, serve on the Vision Task Force, review and approve the draft Vision Plan. Ultimately this group will present the draft plan to community organizations, then review and approve Topeka's final Vision Plan.

Among those serving on the Heartland Visioning Steering Committee are: Co-chairs Dr. Jerry Farley and Bill Moore, Shawnee County Commissioner Shelly Buhler, **Topeka City Manager Norton Bonaparte, Topeka Mayor Bill Bunten, Topeka Human Relations Commission Executive Director Rio Cervantes-Reed, Dale Cushinberry, Dr. Brenda Dietrich, Barry Feaker, Alonzo Harrison, Laura Kelly, Doug Kinsinger, Fred Martinez, Jim Ogle, Maynard Oliverius, Glenda Overstreet, Jim Parrish, Nancy Perry, Marsha Sheahan, and Barbara Wiggins.** For a full listing of the Steering Committee and the recently named Task Force members, visit [www.heartlandvisioning.com](http://www.heartlandvisioning.com). This information is also catalogued at the Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library.

If you would like to become involved in this important process, you can reach **Heartland Visioning's** Executive Director William Beteta by calling (785) 231-6006 or emailing [info@heartlandvisioning.com](mailto:info@heartlandvisioning.com). The **Heartland Visioning** office is located at 120 SE 6th Street, Suite 100, Topeka, Kansas 66603. You may also track the progress of the Heartland Visioning Project by accessing the website at [www.wibw.com/heartlandvisioning](http://www.wibw.com/heartlandvisioning).

## FUTURE HRC EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- **July 17, 6:00-8:00 PM, Town Hall Meeting, Topic/speaker to be announced.**  
**Location:** Cyrus K. Holiday Building - 1<sup>st</sup> floor Conference Room, 620 SE Madison
- **First Monday of each month, 5:30-7:00 PM, regular HRC monthly meeting, agenda posted at [www.topeka.org/hrc](http://www.topeka.org/hrc).**  
**Location:** Cyrus K. Holiday Building - 1<sup>st</sup> floor Conference Room, 620 SE Madison
- **October 16, 6:00-8:00 PM, Town Hall Meeting, Topic: Racial Profiling, Speaker Panel to be announced and posted at [www.topeka.org/hrc](http://www.topeka.org/hrc).**  
**Location:** To be announced, check the website regularly!



*For reasonable accommodations, contact the Human Relations Commission office at 368-3606 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday thru Friday, at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled event. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted use of the 711 dialing code for access to Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS). TRS permits persons with a hearing or speech disability to use the telephone system via a text telephone (TTY) or other device to call persons with or without such disabilities. To reach HRC using the TRS, please dial 711.*

**It is never too late to give up your prejudices. Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862)**