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Portland tour will highlight Oregon's history in race relations

By Sean Parker

from Salem Monthly, Section News

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Conspiracy enthusiasts are often mocked for their theories about code words and secret sigils, but the everyday application of such devices are often far more insidious.

Say, for instance, a smiley face on a renter's application.

"Discrimination is not always immediately obvious, we have even seen codes, in one case smiley faces were drawn on applications to denote an African American applicant," said Jayme Rabenberg, an education and outreach specialist with Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO).

The FHCO responds to complaints when a renter or homeowner feels they've been wronged.

Officials suspect that housing discrimination is far more common than their complaint statistics suggest. A 2007 survey of urban Oregon residents found that one in 10 respondents felt they had been a victim of housing discrimination, but only 22 percent of those "took action." In most of those cases "taking action" meant that the victim moved.

On April 30, FHCO is sponsoring a tour of the Portland area aimed at drawing attention to how far Oregon has come from the days when it was unsafe for an African American family to be in many towns past sundown. The tour leaves from the Ambridge Event Center in Portland at 8:30 a.m. and is expected to wrap up about 2:30 p.m. Following the tour, participants will have an opportunity to hear a panel talk about current issues and trends.

"There has been much attention in the media about race and discrimination in America. We hope that our event can be a place to continue the conversation about discrimination in our neighborhoods, and in Oregon," Rabenberg said.

"The tour will provide an opportunity to see how our troubled history of discrimination has shaped our communities.

The cost is \$40 per person. To register for the tour, or for more information about the event, e-mail registration@fhco.org, or call 503.412.6000.

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