Hoarding has gotten more attention recently because of a television show that highlights the shock value of houses made unlivable with junk stacked to the ceiling in every room.

“That show has increased awareness of the problem,” said Mandy Bartel, sanitarian with the Hamilton County Public Health Department, “so we have seen an increase in the number of calls during the last five years or so.”

Hoarding impacts every community in the county, she said, noting that physical health problems often stem from the excessive collection of animals, plants, clothing, papers or other materials. “Anyone can be affected. We see it in all races, all socio-economic levels, all educational levels.”

Compulsive hoarding often indicates a mental health problem and can be a protected mental disability under the Fair Housing Act. HOME has helped several clients with hoarding problems save their housing by requesting a reasonable accommodation, a fair housing protection for people with disabilities.

Usually the person will call HOME when they are faced with eviction because of housekeeping and health and safety concerns with blocked windows and doorways. A home visit verifies that the landlord’s concerns are valid and HOME staff explains to the tenant that a landlord has the right to make a tenant leave because of the unsafe conditions in the unit. If the tenant is willing to get treatment, it is possible to request a reasonable accommodation to allow them time to clean out the apartment.

It cannot be just a promise to clean up, but a showing that something has changed. For example, the tenant is now receiving mental health treatment or has gone back on medications to control the compulsive behavior and the clean up has begun. Hoarders try to hide their disability and the conditions they are living in. The threat of losing their home can be the motivation they need to seek help.

HOME has a fact sheet about hoarding and fair housing on its website, www.homecincy.org; you can view it here. To learn more about hoarding as a disability, see www.ocfoundation.org/hoarding/about.aspx.
Gentrification Cincinnati Style

Timothy Douglas lives in Brooklyn, but recently spent time in Cincinnati directing a show at Playhouse in the Park. At a community forum sponsored by HOME to discuss issues of neighborhood segregation, Douglas said, in his experience, it is impossible to stop the process of gentrification in a neighborhood once it starts. He had seen his Brooklyn neighborhood turn from a middle class Black neighborhood with a strong history to one in which he is the only African American left and the newcomers really don’t care about the neighborhood’s history.

Several others attending the forum disagreed with Douglas. They live in Walnut Hills and for years had been part of a community dialogue on how to encourage redevelopment while preserving stable housing and a sense of community and history among the current residents. The neighborhood is now seen as attractive for redevelopment and these community leaders are committed to welcoming new investment while not displacing current residents. They firmly believe Walnut Hills can be a stable, integrated, mixed income community.

Over the Rhine is where Cincinnati’s love-hate relationship with gentrification is seen most clearly. For years, community activists fought to stop redevelopment in order to protect the poor residents of OTR from displacement. Their efforts couldn’t stop development, but slowed it and ensured a supply of housing that is owned by nonprofits with a mission of providing affordable housing including OTR Community Housing and Tender Mercies.

Over the Rhine has reached a tipping point in its potential as a stable, mixed-income, integrated community. Cincinnati and 3CDC should use its power to help preserve and create affordable housing that can withstand the economic pressure of gentrification. Over the Rhine has the potential of stabilizing as an integrated, mixed income neighborhood, but we are now at the tipping point. Development is booming and displacement has become blatant. All the homeless shelters are being relocated out of the neighborhood. Despite the number of vacant buildings, private developers now are buying up occupied property and giving the current tenants 30-day notices to leave. This recently happened at the building on Vine Street with Smitty’s clothing store on the street level. It was bought by a developer with plans to turn the 12 affordable units on the upper floors into 4 high-end loft apartments and the current residents had to go.

Much of the new development in Over the Rhine has been encouraged and subsidized by the City. It is time for Cincinnati and its partner 3CDC to take its foot off the gas and become active in preserving and creating affordable housing that can withstand the economic pressure of gentrification. Let’s show Timothy Douglas that it is possible to redevelop a neighborhood and create an integrated, mixed income community.

Don’t Just Wear the Shirt. LIVE IT! 
GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
Donate Now at www.uwgc.org.
New to HOME Board

HOME recently welcomed two new members to its board.

**Ann Hubbard** is a professor at the University of Cincinnati School of Law. She has written extensively in the area of disability law.

**Jeff Gatica** is Vice President and Community Development Program Officer at Fifth Third Bancorp. Before moving to Fifth Third two years ago, he was with the Federal Reserve Bank in Cincinnati.

Still Grateful — Decades Later

HOME Education Director Deb Jetter recently passed on some unique consumer feedback that spotlights the impact of HOME’s service to clients.

“I went to the food market a few weeks ago and while I was there I was stopped by an African American woman who asked if I still worked for HOME. I said, I certainly do. She then asked if Carol Coaston was still at HOME. I told her she was.

“She said that Carol had helped her tremendously in winning a Familial Status case against a landlord who wouldn’t rent to her because she had kids. This was 10-15 years ago.

“She said at that time she was a struggling single parent and was having a hard time just trying to take care of her children. She was so frustrated and hurt that she had to face discrimination because the rent the landlord offered was what she could afford. However, because she was turned down it really placed her in a hard place.

“She said she would never forget how Carol diligently worked with her and won the case against this landlord. Her settlement was such a great help to her financially because she had very little income at that time with her four children. She said she would never forget what HOME did for her, and she was so grateful that such an organization existed.”

Enforcement Coordinator Carol Coaston has worked on behalf of HOME clients since 1970.

Ask Nicole

Nicole Kelch is HOME’s tenant advocate. In addition to serving clients who call the office, she answers inquiries from the ‘Ask a Question’ form on HOME’s website: www.homecincy.org. HOME does not give legal advice, but does provide general information on Ohio landlord-tenant law and helps tenants understand their options.

_Darryl_: I just found out that my apartment building is in foreclosure, do I still have to pay rent?

_Nicole_: Yes. Ohio law requires tenants to pay rent even under the circumstance of foreclosure. Up until the point when the building is sold at a sheriff’s auction, rent is due to your current landlord. You will typically be notified of the auction with a sticker placed on the door. After the sale, rent is to be paid to the new owner of the property. There are laws protecting tenants from being put out immediately by the new owner. If the new owner is a bank, some banks offer a “Cash for Keys” program to current tenants. These programs offer a cash payment in return for the tenant vacating the property quickly.

_Amanda_: I put down a deposit on an apartment, but later changed my mind when I found another place I liked better. Now, the landlord is unwilling to give me my money back. Do I have any rights?

_Nicole_: It depends. The application you complete usually states whether or not the deposit is refundable. You need to check your application to see what you signed. Landlords often make deposits non-refundable when the applicant changes their mind because they are holding for you an available apartment they otherwise could rent. If you let the company know right away, the landlord may be willing to return at least a portion of the deposit. It is best not to give a landlord any money, other than a small application fee, until you sign a lease. Be suspicious of landlords who require you to pay large deposits at the time you submit an application.
Is Your Condo or HOA Violating Fair Housing?

If so, it could cost you a lot of money

The federal Fair Housing Act covers all housing, regardless of ownership. The condo or homeowners’ association may not own each individual property, but the association — including its board, members and representatives — must comply with all aspects of the law. Violations could result in fines and penalties.

Some common fair housing violations by such associations include discouraging families with children from living there or prohibiting owners from making modifications outside their units that are needed because of a disability.

HOME offers quality, professional fair housing training for condo and homeowner association boards and for property managers. For details, call HOME Education Director Deb Jetter directly at 513-977-2629 or email her at deb.jetter@homecincy.org.

1,100 Views and Counting

HOME’s 5-minute video on YouTube has been seen by more than 1,100 unique visitors since its posting last year. For those who haven’t seen it, the video uses humor to spotlight an over-the-top landlord who doesn’t want children living in his properties. When families seek housing, he uses every excuse in the book to reject or dissuade them before getting his comeuppance and learning that children have fair housing rights, too. Check it out by clicking the link at www.homecincy.org, and tell your friends and family, too. Help us spread the word.

Thank you for your assistance.

To make a correction, call Myra Calder:
• You want to be taken off our list.
• You want to receive multiple copies.
• Your name is misspelled.
• Your address is incorrect.
• You want the newsletter by email.
Let us know if:

Please help us update our mailing list.

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To make a correction, call Myra Calder at 513-977-2623, or send an email to info@homecincy.org.