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# Fair Housing Center's Landmark 10th Breakfast Gala Nets \$52,000 Amidst Stirring Calls for Justice

Traci Husse





*FHC Board Member Diane Rosenblum presents the Mark Mitshkun Board of Directors Award to Courtney Atsalakis. Photo courtesy of FHC.*

The [Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan](#) (FHC) raised an incredible \$52,000 at its 2023 Fair Housing Breakfast fundraising event, which took place Thursday, October 26th at Weber's Hotel on Jackson Ave. Now in its 10th year, the event included an engaging keynote from nationally renowned civil rights attorney John P. Relman as well as a presentation of the organization's Mark Mitshkun Board of Directors Award. According to the event's website, the annual award recognizes "outstanding work that furthers the mission of the Fair Housing Center."

This year's recipient of the Mark Mitshkun Board of Directors Award is Courtney Atsalakis of Howell, MI. Ms. Atsalakis was honored for her work in opening and operating the [Amber Reineck House](#), which is a home for women who are

struggling with addiction and substance abuse disorders. The facility is named after Atsalakis' sister Amber Reineck, who suffered from addiction and passed on Christmas Eve in 2015, leaving behind two daughters.

Following her sister's death, Ms. Atsalakis dove into learning about addiction and substance abuse disorders and the communities that suffer from their devastating effects. After earning a spot on the board of Ann Arbor recovery service provider Home of New Vision, Ms. Atsalakis learned how difficult it was for those in recovery to find and afford appropriate transitional housing.

In December 2017, Courtney opened Amber Reineck House but was met with pushback from the City of Howell. Determined to reduce the stigma of addiction and substance abuse disorders and increase support for those communities in the name of her sister, Ms. Atsalakis worked relentlessly with the Fair Housing Center and others to push forward and sue the city. After four years, the city of Howell finally relented, changing its policies and settling its lawsuit with her to the tune of \$750,000.

After receiving her award, Ms. Atsalakis said, "I just want to say thank you for the support and thank you for all the work that Fair Housing does." She continued, "Without the work that the Fair Housing [Center] does, we would not have known we were discriminated against and they were there with us every step of the way."

This year's keynote speaker was John P. Relman, who is the founder and managing partner of Relman Colfax and is "widely recognized as one of the nation's leading civil rights lawyers," according to the [biography on his firm's website](#). Relman has been in practice for more than 30 years and has been a part of several landmark discrimination verdicts and settlements ranging from the service industry to housing and everything in between.

Relman's keynote covered summaries of several of his most notable cases, including a successful class action discrimination suit against the national restaurant chain Denny's, resulting in a \$17,000,000 verdict, and a housing discrimination suit against St. Bernards Parish, a municipality outside of New Orleans, post-Katrina.

The Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan is dedicated to helping all

of those with housing discrimination issues. The center provides various services toward this goal including investigation, advocacy, guidance, referrals, and community education and awareness. FHC serves community members in Clinton, Easton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, Shiawassee, and Washtenaw counties. The \$52,000 raised during the event equals approximately 88% of their fundraising goal.

Sponsors of the event include Community Financial Credit Union, McKinley, Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, Old National Bank, Ann Arbor Area Board of Realtors, Bank of Ann Arbor, Beal Properties, KeyBank, Michigan Realtors, University Bank, Zillow, Charles Reinhart Company, Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis, Fifth Third Bank, Independent Bank, Lake Michigan Credit Union, Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), NachtLaw, and Zingerman's Community of Businesses.



Keynote speaker John P. Relman, founder and managing director of Relman Colfax. Photo



courtesy of FHC.

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