

# Arch City CHRONICLE

people, politics, st.louis. july 25 - aug 1, 2006 • volume 4, issue 18

## SICKENING

### NEW MAJORITY FIRES WILLIAMS, PUNTS KIDS' FUTURE

BY DAVE DREBES

Friday July 14, word seeped out of a closed-door, emergency session of the St. Louis School Board: Greg Williams was being fired. Earlier in the week, Floyd Irons, Washon coach-icon (and reportedly a good friend of Williams), was dismissed by the Board. As the news was confirmed, now rumors hit the street—that the two axes were related. It was said that a deal was struck between members of the new majority—one who was itching for Irons' ouster and another bent on

ending Williams' brief, but energetic tenure as superintendent.

Veronica O'Brien emerged from the meeting that night, announcing without explanation that Williams was gone and an untested, un-interviewed, and essentially unknown educator, Diana Bourisaw, was the new superintendent. Hired, weeks

*Fears were confirmed.*

prior, to perform an audit of the district, she was suddenly superintendent of the state's largest district. The search to bring

*continued on p. 11*



Board president Veronica O'Brien greets supporters. photo by Ivette Basso.

## QUARRELS WITHIN HISPANIC COMMUNITY ALLOW CRIME TO FLOURISH

BY REBECCA RIVAS

The discrimination complaints began trickling into the Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing Opportunity Council office two years ago.

They all had common denominators. The victims were Latino and immigrant families. They bought their homes from Cats Realty Investments Inc.

The sale prices were excessively higher than what Cats had purchased them for months before. And, on almost all the loan applications the real estate agency submitted fraudulent employment, income or asset documentation to the mortgage lenders.

Mira Tanna, assistant director at the Council, wanted to verify their places of employment when reviewing the 13 complaints. "When we asked the home buyers if the informa-

tion was correct, they said they had never even heard of the companies," said Tanna. "Some of the places didn't even exist."

Many of victims were afraid to come forward because of their visa status or their limited English proficiency.

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But, after two years of frustration, the trickle cascaded into a class action lawsuit involving about 70 people.

Announced in June, the petition alleges that two Spanish-speaking real estate agents, Denisse Olmos and Christian Joel Juan, recruited Latino immigrants—many single mothers—into "a scheme of deception and fraud" and an "unlawful merchandising practice" organized by Cats owner Joseph Adewunmi. Under Adewunmi, the agents were selling homes for "significantly more money than afford-

*continued on p. 12*

## BAD REPORTS

### 72ND DISTRICT CANDIDATE'S CONFUSING FILING LEADS TO CHARGES

BY J. BAILEY

IN THE ASSOCIATE CIRCUIT COURT OF COLE COUNTY, MISSOURI

MISSOURI ETHICS COMMISSION,

Plaintiff,

v.

CASSANDRA COLQUITT,

Server, Cassandra Colquitt  
206 Maple Avenue  
University City, MO 63130

Defendant.

VERIFIED PETITION FOR COLLECTION OF LATE FEES AND COSTS

The Missouri Ethics Commission, by and through its attorney, the Attorney General of the State of Missouri states the following: For its cause of action



Cassandra Colquitt, candidate for state representative for the 72nd District, may be in hot water with the Missouri Ethics Commission and the Cole County prosecutors office. According to a letter dated April 5, 2006 and sent to the Missouri Ethics Commission, Colquitt has not properly filed all financial disclosure reports as stated on the signed declaration provided by the Secretary of State when filing for the primary election.

The letter goes on to outline a pattern of missing, late, inconsistent and seemingly incorrect financial disclosure reports filed by Colquitt.

Documents obtained by the Arch City Chronicle confirm that there are indeed inconsistencies in Colquitt's filing of both her eight day (before) and thirty day (after) Committee Disclosure Reports.

Both the eight and thirty day financial disclosure reports cover the period between July 23, 2004 and August 3, 2004. Reports for the 2004 primary were

not filed until March 15 2006, nearly two years after the legal deadline. Those reports claim that Colquitt's campaign carried no debt.

On March 31 2006, Colquitt sent in three amendments to her original report, spanning the periods between April and July 13 2004, July 14 to July 19 2004, and July 23 to September 30 2004 respectively. Her

campaign claimed an indebtedness of \$8312.14

A Committee Disclosure Report filed by Colquitt's campaign on July 19 2004, claims \$7712.34 of indebtedness, which is inconsistent with the amend-

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*Candidates are provided with a listing of state campaign finance laws... If the laws are not followed, then the integrity of the candidate is diminished.*

Inside Dirt  
AUG PRIMARY  
PREDICTIONS  
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Urban Almanac:  
LOCAL POLITICO  
ON BIG SCREEN  
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Eclectic  
SLU  
GRAFFITI  
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Final Word:  
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Classifieds  
YOU WANT IT  
WE GOT IT  
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DUARRELS WITHIN COMMUNITY continued from p 1 able" to the plaintiffs and falsifying loan applications.

Most of the victims have overcome their fear. Now they want to be heard. The only problem is: not everyone wants it to be heard.

When lawyers Gustavo Arango and Kenneth Schmitt went public with the case, they were met with grumblings from the professional Latino community who weren't ready to put a blemish on the St. Louis Latino image.

"From the leadership annals, they were trying to create a better impression and increase relations on a more national level," said Sarah Bollinger, legal assistant to Arango and Schmitt. "The case would reflect negatively on the immigrant community."

Beyond that, the situation gets sticky when there's business involved.

Anna Pizarro, a former Catholic Family Services worker, was one of the first to hear complaints from the immigrant community. An immigrant family came to her and explained how Denise Olmos had met them after church and assured them that she was the only one they could trust. Olmos sold the family an overpriced home that now needs \$50,000 worth of repairs.

When Pizarro raised her voice against Olmos, she began receiving phone calls. One was from Yolanda Olmos, Denise's mother who well connected in the Hispanic business leaders community. She asked Pizarro why she was doing this to her daughter.

The pressures also came from members of the Hispanic Chambers

of Commerce, of which Olmos is also a member.

"The criticism of the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce is that they are allowing these things to happen," Pizarro said. "They have the responsibility to approach members and say we've been hearing these things and it needs to stop."

"Everybody knows, but nobody does anything. And, anyone who does anything is put in the shadows. If you want to work with the Latino community, they do a good job of trashing your name."

Lawyers say the real danger comes when everything is kept quiet within the community.

"The Hispanic business leaders who have the money in the community have to make the decision: is this good for business endeavors to speak out against something that might be critical to someone in my business network?" Schmitt said.

"Confining everything within the community and not having somebody that's not in the business interest speak out about it, that's going to allow this practice to flourish."

The other call Pizarro received was from the Hispanic Catholic Ministry telling her to quiet down.

The church holds the position that everyone is welcome within the church, said Maria Lucrecia Knapp, director of Manos Unidas, a non-profit geared towards fighting for social justice. Knapp heard many of the initial complaints at her office located within Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. The nonprofit is not affiliated with the church.

However, being a member of the parish, she understands the church's standpoint.

"You have the enemy and the prey worshipping in the same church. The priest can't be a policeman. If people are not following the gospel teaching, the priest cannot throw them out of the church."

This doesn't mean the complaints didn't make her sad and angry. She can see from the outside what is happening, and she blinds herself to any politics that might stand in her way of fighting for justice. Knapp established and developed the four-year-old Manos Unidas outside of the tight knit Hispanic community. The organization works with the grassroots Hispanic community.

"Many of the Hispanic business

professionals told me to my face that they wouldn't help me, which was good because now I'm not tied up with those business people who are taking advantage of the community," said Knapp. "Not all of them take advantage of the community."

Both Pizarro and Knapp explained that real estate is only one area of wrongdoing occurring within the Hispanic community. There have been other scams of charging immigrants high rates for auto insurance and interpretation.

Anthony Ramirez, a founder of the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce and the Hispanic Leaders Group, said that no one approached him about the problem until after the case was already under litigation.

"I got drinks and drinks that something was going on, but no one told me what that something was," he said. "As to the criticism that the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce needs to step up, I don't know that the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce was ever informed."

Ramirez does not speak for the group, only from his own experience. He is no longer a board member with the chambers. The first time he heard about the lawsuit was in the *Hivayfront Times* article.

He explains that the organization should not be associated with a person's wrongful acts.

"John Wayne Gacy, out of Chicago, was a part of lots of organizations, one of them being the Clown Association. Does it mean that the Clown Association was bad?"

They have not had to police within themselves. In earlier years, they would send out letters addressing issues, but not recently.

"It's human nature," he said. "The best thing we can do is to give more hands-on information to individuals."

"Some activists try to keep some things to themselves for whatever reason," Ramirez said. "There needs to be more collaboration and cohesiveness to advance the community."

"It's really a shame. Nothing is going to get done when everyone is fighting," said John Rutton, a mortgage lender who Adewunmi approached at US Bank. Rutton did not help Adewunmi because he didn't provide Rutton with proper financial documents.

When Rutton first began working with US Bank's former loan program for undocumented immigrants, he remembers thinking: is this ethical to give loans to illegal residents?

"Yes. It is legal for foreigners to own property and we handled the cases as strictly as any others," he said.

The program at US Bank was working well until Adewunmi fabricated fraudulent documents with the bank's other lenders. When the bank executives got a whiff of the fraud, they terminated the entire program.

Rutton decided that it was a good time for a change in career. He had become passionate about helping the Latino population and now for the past year and a half, he's tried to independently get loans for undocumented families.

He's had little success. "With no program, it just opens up the doors for more things like this and more predatory lending," he said.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) dismissed many of the discrimination complaints that Tanna and her coworkers at EHOQ submitted. She explained that HUD investigators were only looking at the cases as single complaints, which makes it difficult to see the wider pattern of discrimination occurring in the Hispanic community.

The Department of Justice is now looking into the cases, she said.

"We still believe there's discrimination and we hope that the investigation shows that." >

*"The criticism of the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce is that they are allowing these things to happen."*

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