



Austin REALTORS® Host Summit to Address Housing Gap for Minorities— October 2014

It was at the annual convention of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) last August that J. René Ward first saw its 2013 report on the State of Housing in Black America, and it left her depressed. As the 2014 President of Austin's fledgling local chapter of NAREB, the nation's oldest minority trade association, she wanted to share the disheartening report with her colleagues back home -- "but I didn't want people to feel as I had. I wanted them to be armed with the information, and be motivated to do something about it."

At the same convention, the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® had presented its Diversity Grant Program, and Ward saw her answer. Returning home, she asked the Austin Board of REALTORS® (ABOR) for help securing a \$5,000 Diversity Grant. Working together, they formulated a plan to hold a two-day joint conference at which they would share the report and address its issues with members and other industry and community stakeholders.

Kelea Youngblood, ABOR's Director of Member Services and Professional Development, says that the proposed conference fell squarely within her association's mission of Democracy in Housing, and she was only too glad to submit the application on behalf of Ward's cause. Ward and her task force refined their vision for the conference in consultation with Fred Underwood, NAR's Director of Diversity. The grant was approved in April, the conference was set for August 19-20, and the team made extensive preparations for an event they hoped would attract 50 participants; they got over 80. "It was a great turn-out!" says Youngblood. "Not only that, but nearly half the participants stayed a full two days, captivated by the truly inspiring program that J. René had put together. We were all so proud."

"We reached out to anyone we thought would be interested," explains Ward. "The fact is, even though NAREB's report is called 'the State of Housing in Black America,' you could replace the word 'black' with any other minority at all. So we invited the local organizations of Hispanic and Asian real estate professionals, the NAACP, the Black Chamber of Commerce and the Urban League. It was the first time all these groups here in Austin had gathered for the housing cause, and it was very moving."

The first half of the first day was spent revealing the report itself, and the second half was devoted to break-out sessions focused on finding solutions. "There was serious discussion about real, practical action items, things that would change the reality of the report," says Youngblood. From education in the schools in order to reach younger generations, to increasing awareness of home ownership to build economic security, to working with the city on policy options to improve housing conditions for minorities, Ward and her AAREB team have already begun acting on a number of ideas that came out of the fervent brainstorming sessions. "We're being held accountable by our promise to report our progress to participants in a monthly newsletter," notes Ward.



On the second day of the conference, the NAREB leadership team led a program for its two-year old Austin chapter on building leadership skills and real estate business. "Again, we opened the program to all," says Ward, "and even though our local AAREB chapter has only about 30 members, there were over 40 people in attendance, taking it all in. We gained four new members at the end of the day, and so much brand awareness and goodwill." Afterward, for example, she was approached by a representative of Wells Fargo, which had been a \$500 sponsor of the conference. "She said, 'send me an invoice for \$1,000,'" reports Ward. "I'm willing to pay for quality, and that was a quality event!"

Putting the conference together brought Ward in touch with many community leaders, including the Mayor pro-tem, who was one of the speakers, and City Council members, as well as representatives of the Urban League and the NAACP, and AAREB's fellow minority real estate organizations in Austin. "Changing the state of minority housing as it is spelled out in the report is going take all of us working together," says Ward, who is heartened by the cooperative spirit and determination she says was palpable at the conference. NAREB leadership has told Ward that they plan to replicate the Austin program moving forward, as they take the report across the country.

Joe Stewart, Vice Chair of the REALTORS[®] Multicultural Real Estate Leadership Advisory Board and the past Chair of the Texas Association of REALTORS[®], was also impressed, saying, "I believe the Austin program could serve as a model for other local and state associations, as they bring the lessons of the report home to their own neighborhoods, municipalities, and regions and begin to correct the inequalities of housing."

To learn more about how the REALTISTS[®] AND REALTORS[®] of Austin, Texas are taking an active part in improving the state of minority housing in America, contact Kelea Youngblood, ABOR's Director of Member Services and Professional Development, at kpiper@abor.com or 512-454-7636, x1600; or J. René Ward, 2014 President of AAREB, at jrene@bestagentsintexas.com or 512.388.3313.



Inspiring Speakers and Motivated Participants Made the Two-Day Conference a Success

