

December
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In your community



ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Finding an affordable place to live is a hardship for many Jackson County residents. For the past three years, University of Missouri Extension faculty have been offering Rent Smart, a five-hour workshop to teach people the ins and outs of renting housing.

In Jackson County, 37% of the residents rent compared to the Missouri average of 30%. Of these renters, 65% fall below the median household income, which was \$41,822 in 2002. The 2000 Census shows the median monthly rent in Jackson County is \$536.

In the train-the-trainer workshop, landlords, administrators and individuals working with social service agencies in the Kansas City metropolitan area learn how to help clients deal with a variety of issues related to rental housing. This year, workshop participants estimated they would be able to extend the information to 3,800 people. One client said the program will "really help me to know what to check for when I move, what kind of rights I have as a renter and the legal aspects of renting."

Clients of the Hillcrest Ministries transitional living facility in Independence reported the workshop to be beneficial in assisting them to locate decent and affordable rental housing. Equipped to evaluate lease agreements, they understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants and are prepared to maintain their rental units in a clean and safe manner.



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RENT SMART TOPICS AT A GLANCE

Determining the Amount of Rent a Family can Afford & Other Budgeting Basics

This portion of the program focuses on effective budgeting, tracking income and expenses and developing a workable spending plan to assist in controlling future spending as well as determining the amount of rent a household can reasonably afford.

Rental Application Process – Renters need to understand the methods used by landlords to screen potential tenants. By understanding this process, tenants can often address doubts that landlords might have. Understanding what is in a credit report and why it is used by landlords as a screening tool can be helpful to renters as they work through the rental application process.

Finding a Place to Live – A major challenge facing tenants is finding rental housing, especially affordable, safe rental housing. The focus of this class is what to look for in rental housing, how to locate affordable housing and how to compare one rental unit to another.

Legal Aspects of Renting – Tenants need to understand their legal rights and responsibilities with both a written and a month-to-month lease agreement. They learn about the importance of the check-in and check-out process, appropriate move-out notice, their legal rights and responsibilities related to privacy and security deposits.

Maintaining Positive Landlord-Tenant Relationships – Tenants learn about both the landlords' and tenants' responsibilities for care and maintenance of a rental unit. Part of the focus is effective communication to prevent problems between landlord and tenant.

Indoor Air Quality – Every renter shares the goal of having a safe and healthy living environment. This section takes a look at lead and other hazards sometimes present in older housing facilities.

Home Care—Keeping It Safe and Clean – This portion of the workshop is devoted to procedures and products designed to keep a home safe and comfortable, including information on how to handle many common home-care emergencies.

HONORS FOR EDUCATING KANSAS CITY RENTERS

Two West Central Region Extension Specialists, Marsha Alexander (right) and Carole Bozworth (left), received the Carl N. Scheneman Excellence in Teaching Award for their work with renters in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. Alexander, a housing and environmental design specialist, and Bozworth, a family financial education specialist, were honored for the Rent Smart program at the University of Missouri Extension Annual Conference in October. Rent Smart helps low-income families overcome the challenge of finding and keeping affordable housing. Since 2003, more than 5,600 prospective renters and 65 agency personnel have completed the program. The award, named for former Director of Cooperative Extension Carl Scheneman, recognizes Extension faculty members for innovative educational programs that address issues relevant to Missouri residents.

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