Welcome New Arrivals!

The third quarter of 2022 saw more new employees joining the West Virginia Human Rights Commission (WVHRC). We are excited to welcome these new members into the WVHRC family.

Chase B. Armstrong started as an Investigator I in the employment/public accommodations investigation unit on August 29. Chase previously worked for the WV Division of Corrections for 10 years, and at the WV Division of Motor Vehicles for two and a half years. Chase’s personal interests include music production, mostly sample-based production, multiple instrumental programming, and mixing and mastering.

Jason P. Robinson is an Investigator I in the fair housing investigations unit who started work on September 4. Previously, he was a private investigator in Kentucky, and a firefighter/EMT at the Mount Hope Fire & Rescue Department. Jason is the father of five children (and one dog), and enjoys research, boxing, and playing brass musical instruments.

Sherry L. Walker started at the WVHRC on September 19 as an Office Assistant III. Sherry previously worked for 10 years at St. Francis Hospital as a Certified Clinical Medical Assistant for a General Surgeon/Gastroenterologist. In her free time, Sherry likes spending time with her nephew and nieces and going to their baseball, softball and football games. She loves basketball and football, and is a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers and WVU Mountaineers.

WVHRC Multifest August 2022

Several of the WVHRC staff took shifts to hand out pamphlets and discuss what the Human Rights Commission does. Every year, the booth has a set goal for visitor signatures, and this year it was met thanks to the many interested Multifest attendees.

2022 Civil Rights Day Ceremony

On August 29, the WVHRC hosted the annual Civil Rights Day ceremony via virtual event on Facebook Live. Governor Jim Justice provided a proclamation designating “Civil Rights Day in West Virginia” and a personal greeting that included a special message from Babydog. U.S. Senator Joe Manchin and U.S. Senator Shelly Moore Capito provided messages emphasizing the importance of the country’s civil rights laws. WVHRC Commission Chair Dr. Darrell Cummings and DHHR Cabinet Secretary Bill J. Crouch also provided messages recognizing the importance of civil rights and the work of the WVHRC. The audience was treated to a moving spoken word performance by Tiehra Williams and a rousing rendition of the National Anthem by “Harmony Rechoired.” The event concluded with a keynote address by Marshall University’s Maurice Cooley, who honored the WVHRC’s work and its history and thoroughly explained the benefits of diversity in the workplace. West Virginia Public Broadcasting aired a television broadcast of the event on September 5, which can be viewed on the WVHRC’s Facebook page.
**Shaping the Vision of Post-Pandemic Housing**

WVHRC displayed a table at the West Virginia Housing Conference that attracted more than 250 housing advocates, lenders, developers, administrators, and policy makers from the non-profit, public, and private sectors. This year’s theme, “Shaping the Vision of Post-Pandemic Housing,” featured over 45 workshops with national, state, and local experts.

**Building Bridges**

On September 28, 2022, WVHRC Executive Director Tia Welch and Administrative Law Judge C. Joan Parker attended “Building Bridges: West Virginia Civil and Human Rights Summit” sponsored by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of West Virginia and the City of Charleston, WV and hosted by West Virginia State University. Executive Director Welch presented on fair housing during the summit.

**Fair Housing Education and Outreach**

With a financial grant provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, WVHRC Executive Director Tia Welch went on the road to deliver presentations about the Fair Housing Act and the WVHRC. Director Welch is pictured on July 12 at Grace Bible Church in Charleston along with participants Rev. Matthew Watts, Rev. Ronald English, and Lt. Col. Kenneth Hale. Another Fair Housing Seminar was held in Beckley on August 2 at Heart of God Ministries. Both seminars provide information about housing discrimination, sexual harassment in housing, and the rights of persons with disabilities including their rights to service and support animals.

**Equal Employment Opportunities**

WVHRC Executive Director Tia Welch attended the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2022 FEPA/Leadership Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. The conference focused on legal updates, DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) information, outreach and education best practices, as well as networking opportunities.

**WVHRC Supervisors Attend IAOHRA Conference**

Executive Director Tia Welch and Investigator Joseph Saunders attended the 73rd International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA) Conference, August 14-18, 2022 at the Sheraton Grand Los Angeles. This year's theme was "Human Rights: A United Vision for Equity & Justice." Several topics related to sexual harassment, discrimination, diversity, equity and inclusion filled the agenda with a one-day visit to several historic museums in the area. The banquet speaker featured renowned scholar, ordained Baptist minister, and public intellectual Michael Eric Dyson who shared an interesting and unifying speech. Several opportunities were given to network and share best practices. WVHRC is a member of IAOHRA.
WVHRC General Counsel On The Road Again

WVHRC General Counsel Cameron McKinney traveled across the state in September to speak to groups on discrimination law and policies. On September 22, McKinney spoke at the West Virginia Office of Equal Opportunity Training Conference at Stonewall Resort on anti-discrimination laws, the WVHRC, and the best available data and policy recommendations to prevent workplace harassment. This year’s conference was attended by more than 100 EEO Counselors and Officers from numerous state agencies, including Tony Spenia, WVHRC’s EEO Counselor.

Cameron is pictured with Kim Nuckols, Executive Director of the West Virginia Office of Equal Opportunity at the conference. Cameron gave a similar presentation on September 21 for the Human Resources Development Fund at their annual training conference at Canaan Valley Resort State Park.

Commissioners Hold Annual Election

On August 25, 2022, the WVHRC Commissioners held their annual election for the Chair and Vice Chair. Rev. Darrell Cummings of Wheeling was reelected as the WVHRC’s Chairman by unanimous consent. Timothy Hairston of Morgantown was also unanimously elected to remain as the Commission’s Vice Chairman. The other current Commissioners are Karl Gattlieb of Charleston, Marie Redd of Huntington, Randall Morgan of Ashford, and Rev. Wesley Dobbs of Fairmont.

Honoring the Memory of Katherine Johnson

Please join the WVHRC in honoring West Virginia native Katherine G. Johnson for her posthumous induction into the 2022 National Women’s Hall of Fame on September 24, 2022, in Seneca Falls, New York. This event served as a National Occasion for one who has contributed so much to so many in our state and nation.

Additionally, the Greenbrier Historical Society honored Dr. Johnson on her birthday on August 26, 2022, in her hometown of White Sulphur Springs, WV. The West Virginia Senate designated the day “Katherine Johnson Day” in a Senate Resolution to honor her.

Dr. Johnson’s accomplishments are numerous. In the 1960s, John Glenn asked for her calculations as he knew they were better than any computers for the task of manned spaceflight. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2015, and was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2020. She received 13 honorary degrees, including one from Johannesburg, South Africa. There are four major buildings with her name, including two NASA facilities, one of which is located in Fairmont, WV. In 2016, her story was made into a movie titled Hidden Figures, and in 2017 that film won an Oscar for Best Picture.

Dr. Johnson says that she got everything from her father, Joshua Coleman, and that she was always curious and a visionary. She was inquisitive and wanted to learn everything at a young age; as a child, she was taking advanced courses like analytical geometry, alongside French and musical training.

Outside of her career, her passion was sharing information with others. She said, “What good is knowledge if others don’t know the information as well?” She played golf, tennis, rode a motorcycle, and took boxing class at the age of 88 to stay in shape. Her other interests included crossword puzzles, bridge, and volunteering as Choir Director and Financial Secretary for her local church.

From 2015 until her death in March 2020, Joseph Saunders—now a Human Rights Commission employee—served as Johnson’s executive protection, accompanying her across the country. In this time he heard her response to praise and awards, “What is all the fuss about, I was just doing my job!” She also advised anyone seeking success to “Always do YOUR best, because you can’t do any better than that! And remember, you are no better than anyone, but no one is better than you.”