



Landlords of Linn County

# Landlords Leadership

**Vacancy Rate:**  
Data unavailable at time of print.

**New Members:**  
Linda Miller  
Heaven's Best Carpet Cleaning

**Renewals:**  
Daniel Feld  
Charles Seamans  
Jennifer Loeb  
Sheryl Jahnel  
Terry & Deb Pesek  
Rick Easton

## Upcoming Events for Landlords of Linn County

\*\*\* *May 2009 Meeting will be an evening meeting at the Forest Ridge Apartments—1220 Sierra Dr NE. 7:00—May 14, 2009. Refreshments will be provided.*

*Judy Stevens will be presenting ideas for curb appeal from a master gardener's point of view. Judy is a local realtor with over 20 years experience.*

\*\*\* *Mold and Your Health: A Free Conference for People Concerned about Mold Date: Sat. May 16, 2009*

*Time: 8:30 am to 12 noon (registration begins at 8 am)  
Event Location: Hallagan Center, Mercy Medical Center, 701 10th Street*

*SE, Cedar Rapids  
Speaker Topics Include:*

- \* *Mold: A Fungus Among Us*
  - \* *Post-Flood Information about Air Quality in Homes*
  - \* *Free Home Inspections for Children with Asthma*
  - \* *The New HFA Inhalers*
- While adults are listening to the speakers, children will attend an asthma education class.*
- \* *Families from flooded neighborhoods in Linn County and nearby counties will especially benefit from this event!*
  - \* *Children, teens, and adults*

*with asthma will also learn important information.*  
\* *For more information, please call Dr. Lyla Schweiger at (319)365-9146.*  
*This event is sponsored by the Linn County Asthma Reduction Coalition and its community partners.*

\*\*\* *June 25, 2009 the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Office will be coordinating a Fair Housing Conference. Details inside.*

\*\*\* *The Second Annual Landlord University is slated for September 2009. More details to come.*

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## Up Coming Meetings

**May Meeting**

**Judy Stevens  
Master Gardener**

**May 14, 2009  
7:00**

**Forest Ridge Apts.  
1220 Sierra Dr NE**

**June Meeting**

**12:00 Noon  
Metro Buffet**

**Speaker  
TBA**

For meeting topic ideas, please email feuss99@Hotmail.com. The Landlords of Linn County Board of Directors would like to hear your ideas for program topics. Meetings are typically noon-1pm on the second Thursday of every month.

## Fair Housing Blogging

The [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) designates April as Fair Housing Month to spread the word about your rights when buying, renting or financing a home. This week is [Fair Housing Education Week](#), where HUD representatives visit schools to teach children and their parents about [housing discrimination](#).

The [Fair Housing Act of 1968](#) prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (including children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians, pregnant women,

and people securing custody of children under the age of 18), and handicap (disability) when renting, selling or financing a home. It also makes HUD the primary enforcement agency, so if you think you have a housing discrimination case, [file your complaint with them](#). Keep in mind the law does not protect people who can't pay their rent or mortgages.

I wonder how much of a problem housing discrimination is. According to [recent remarks from HUD's Secretary](#), there were more than 10,000 complaints of housing discrimination last year, though [an older study](#)

estimates that there are 2 million instances of housing discrimination each year. I've never been discriminated against and none of my friends believed that they had been a victim of housing discrimination. Of course I wouldn't consider my friends to be a scientific sample, and most of them believed that housing discrimination would be hard to identify because it might not be overt.

So what do you think? Have you or anyone you've known been the victim of housing discrimination?

FHEO now has a Blog page Check it out!

[http://blog.usa.gov/roller/govgab/entry/ever\\_heard\\_of\\_housing\\_discrimination](http://blog.usa.gov/roller/govgab/entry/ever_heard_of_housing_discrimination)

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[“Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention.”](#)

Abraham Lincoln

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## ScreeningWorks-Savings

As a vendor member of the Landlords of Linn County, ScreeningWorks is pleased to provide the membership with promotional discounts on our tenant screening service. ScreeningWorks supports the tenant screening needs of the small and independent rental owner marketplace (1 – 200 units). For an overview of the service, please visit the website <http://www.screeningworks.com> and review the “Take a Tour” section which provides an online presentation of the service and a

sample applicant screening results report.

The service provides instantaneous and comprehensive resident screening information and includes the following for Iowa:

Criminal Statewide, Eviction Statewide, Credit Evaluation, National Address Search, National Sex Offender, OFAC – US Treasury Dept. Database, and Social Security Fraud Number Check

Use this Promotion Code, **IA888save77**, when screening each applicant

and receive a 10% discount off each applicant screen. This promotion code is valid until May 15, 2010. If you have any questions, please call our customer support line at 888-401-7999.

We are pleased to be a supporting vendor member of the association.

Thanks

- Andy C

## SF 224 Passes—Joe Kelly Provides Insight

105.11 is the Iowa Code subsection which outlines those who are not subject to licensing from the Plumbing Board. New subsection 13 states that the law shall not prohibit a rental property owner, or the employees, from performing routine maintenance. ***In other words, you don't need a license to do routine maintenance.***

**NEW SUBSECTION.** 13. Prohibit a rental property owner or employee of such an owner from performing routine maintenance on the rental property.

**NEW SUBSECTION.** 17. "Routine maintenance" means the maintenance, repair, or replacement of existing fixtures or

parts of plumbing, HVAC, refrigeration, or hydronic systems in ***which no changes in original design are made.*** Fixtures or parts do not include smoke and fire dampers, or water, gas, or steam piping permanent repairs except for traps or ***strainers.*** Routine maintenance shall include emergency repairs, and the board shall define the term emergency repairs to include the repair of water pipes to prevent imminent damage to property. "Routine ***maintenance***" ***does not include the replacement of furnaces,*** boilers, cooling appliances, or water heaters more than one ***hundred gallons in size.***



## Court Fees Increase

The following fee increases have passed the Senate and House for court fees. Governor Culver is expected to sign them into law soon. This can be found in SF 478.

Civil Filing is increasing from \$100 to \$185.

Small Claims Filing is increasing from \$50 to \$85.

Appeals in Small Claims are increasing from \$75 to \$185.

Mechanics Lien Filings are

increasing from \$20 to \$50.

Please watch for those increases so you are not taken by surprise.

Information provided by Joe Kelly.

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**[“There can be no real individual freedom in the presence of economic insecurity.”](#)**

Chester Bowles

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CSG specializes in appliance removal and recycling in the Linn County Area. Contact Calvin Enlts for your appliance removal needs at 721-9599.

### ***Apartment Finder***

The Apartment Finder allows owners and managers to advertise apartments for lease and rent everywhere in the USA. Apartments may be searched on-line or in the apartment magazines available at many grocery stores locally. Contact Gail today for advertising rates—515-266-0993 or visit their website at [www.apartmentfinder.com](http://www.apartmentfinder.com).

## One Members View—

Difficult residents can cost us time and money. Screening applicants remains one of the most important steps in limiting our risk. An example of how helpful screening can be occurred this weekend. The applicant arrived on time for the apartment showing, completed the application, had the appropriate income verification and seemed like a slam-dunk. He was from out of state and had only been in Iowa for about nine months. There was limited information to check in Iowa—he was staying with friends and so didn't have a landlord reference to call. He had a pending DUI charge on Iowa Courts Online but no other charges. On the application he listed having lived with his parents in his home state. Still looked like a good candidate. But, wanting to know more I used [www.screeningworks.com](http://www.screeningworks.com). For \$25 I was able to research his past evictions (there were many), address history, and criminal history (high dollar theft). I received a credit risk assessment (high risk). The tool also checked the sex offender list, Treasury Dept database, and did a social security number fraud check. Quickly, this candidate slipped from "looks good" to denied for falsifying information on his rental application. I have used Screening-Works several times. One frustrating aspect is that the user has to register for just one state. As a result I have separate registrations for several states. I am sure there are other tools available. I found this one from the business cards in the Landlords of Linn County newsletter. After using it the first time I received an e-mail from the rep offering a promotion code. It can be shared so it is listed below. It may expire in May (I'll still try it after 5/15) but I'm sure additional promotion codes will be available. Please share if you have tried other screening products. It is helpful to know what works (and what isn't a value for the money).

IA888save33 (10% off each applicant screen; valid to May 15, 2010)

Marriage (50% off for married couple, spouse; works with the above code as well)

Susan Smith, Mission Builder Property Management

# FAIR HOUSING CONFERENCE

*Education After the Flood*

June 25, 2009

**Intensive One Day Conference**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel**

Sponsored by at the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission



**Speakers:**

Stella Adams, founder/ CEO of S J Adams Consulting which performs research and policy development in the areas of fair housing, and fair lending.

Jill Fenner, Director Fair Housing Center of NE and IA Family Housing Advisory Services, Inc.

Registration fee: \$25.00 (lunch will be provided)

Questions : Call (319) 286-5036 or e-mail [civilrights@cedar-rapids.org](mailto:civilrights@cedar-rapids.org)

Make check payable to:

Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission

Send registration form & check to:

Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission  
425 Second Street SE, Suite 960  
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.....  
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Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_





## **Industry Insight: A Look into the World of Criminal Records By Mike Lapsley, president and CEO of RentGrow, Inc.**

For this month's newsletter, we sat down with our Public Records Manager, Lisa Legere, to provide some insight into the world of public records and criminal background screening.

### **Q&A with Lisa Legere, RentGrow's Public Records Manager**

#### **Lisa, what are "public records"?**

Lerege: In the context of resident screening, the term "public records" typically refers to criminal records, sex offender records, and civil court eviction records and filings.

#### **As RentGrow's Public Records Manager, what do you do every day?**

Lerege: As a public records manager I have two primary roles: 1) I oversee our team of public records analysts, and 2) I manage our public records data sources and products.

I am constantly striving to improve our delivery and turn-around for our customers. I help the team with complex customer questions related to specific public records.

In addition, I constantly research the available public records data sources around the country to ensure that we incorporate the strongest records sources into our products. I work closely with RentGrow's entire management team to make sure we are delivering public records in a manner that pleases our customers.

#### **Where do Criminal Records data come from?**

Lerege: Well, first I should clarify that state and federal law enforcement has its own database of criminal records. The general public does not have access to that database, nor does any private property management company or screening firm. RentGrow and other screening firms' access databases primarily constructed from department of corrections and courthouse records. There are thousands of courthouses and corrections departments across the country. There are hundreds of data companies that retrieve and package those records into databases.

At RentGrow, we get our records from public records data providers that stand out on a regional basis. As a private and independent company, we have the unique advantage of researching and selecting the very best data providers on a local level, then weaving them together to create the best comprehensive criminal screening. We also provide records from the national sex offender registry.

#### **Why do the contents of criminal records vary from state to state? And why is there the possibility of "false positives"?**

Lerege: With credit information there is a national standard for the format and information included on the reports, and all credit reports include Social Security Numbers (SSN). This is not the case with public records such as criminal and court records. The various courthouse reporting practices and state laws regulate the format and information provided on public records. For reasons of privacy, nearly every state and courthouse excludes SSN from public records. In certain states, the public records even remove date of birth or address. Because there are no SSNs on these records, in the event of a common name, results may require additional research to ensure there are no "false positives."

As a professional screening company, we recognize that even the best available public records have these inherent inconsistencies and limitations. The best thing we can do for our clients is to be experts in our field and take care of filtering, deciphering, and servicing the records for our customers. This makes the landlord's job much easier and saves time.

#### **I understand there are national and statewide criminal databases where you have instant access to information, but we've all heard of county-level searches. Why would someone want to run a county-level search? How do you retrieve data on a county-level search?**

Lerege: First of all, there are a few states that don't report substantial criminal information to automated state or national databases: specifically Massachusetts, Delaware, Wyoming, and South Dakota. In those states, a county-level search is really the only viable option.

Even in states where automated data is available, the databases can have limitations and some customers opt to conduct supplemental county searches to be extra thorough. The upside of a county search is that the records are very detailed and accurate. However, because it's a manual search, it has downsides: turn-around varies from next-day to a few days, the geographic scope is narrow, and it costs more than the automated searches.

We retrieve county-level search requests by partnering with professional court runners/researchers around the country. When a customer requests a county search, it triggers one of those researchers to physically go to the county courthouse, check for files, and return the results.

#### **Lisa, thanks for your time!**

Lerege: Thanks. As the Public Records Manager, I can confidently say our team is always working hard to improve our operations and be the best in the industry when it comes to delivering public records.

*ScreeningWorks, a service of RentGrow Inc., is a member of this association and is currently offering association members a 10% discount off their tenant screening services. For more information about this article or ScreeningWorks services please go to [www.ScreeningWorks.com](http://www.ScreeningWorks.com) or contact ScreeningWorks customer service at 888-401-7999.*

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