

# Texas Appleseed

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[www.TexasAppleseed.net](http://www.TexasAppleseed.net)

## A Groundbreaking Affair

Hurricane Ike wreaked havoc on Texas' coast in 2008, but now, after years of intense work for fair housing access, a special groundbreaking in Galveston is leading the way to new homes for families—The Cedars at Carver Park and Villas on The Strand.

Ike damaged all of the family public housing units in Galveston, and they were swiftly demolished. Low-income families, mainly African-American and Latino families, were displaced and couldn't return home after the storm. The city initially approved



Community leaders celebrate the groundbreaking of two new developments for low-income families in Galveston.

rebuilding public housing in 2009, but the decision faced stiff opposition from groups who wanted to exclude former public housing residents from the Island. Opponents went so far as to file an unsuccessful federal lawsuit to prevent the housing from being rebuilt.

Texas Appleseed and our partner Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS) worked with local housing and civil rights advocates, including the Galveston County Coalition for Justice, the Galveston Northside Taskforce, Gulf Coast Interfaith, LULAC and the NAACP, and negotiated a rebuilding plan with the City and the Housing Authority.

Texas Appleseed and TxLIHIS also ensured that federal dollars were specifically earmarked to rebuild these multi-family, mixed-income developments. Ultimately, the support from the Texas General Land Office and HUD helped move the project forward.



Madison Sloan (right), with Texas Appleseed, and Chriselle Palay, with TxLIHIS, plant commemorative gold shovels in the sand.

The GLO is also moving ahead with a plan to replace the remaining family public housing units destroyed by Hurricane Ike with single-family homes throughout the Island. These efforts are ensuring that affordable housing is not only rebuilt, but that it is being rebuilt in a better, more inclusive way.

## Michael Morton Act

Texas achieved a huge victory when the Michael Morton Act went into effect earlier this year. Named after Michael Morton, who spent 25 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, the law overhauled the criminal discovery process. Prior to its passage, prosecutors largely determined whether to share critical evidence with the defense before trial. Today, the law requires prompt and broad disclosure of information held by the prosecution in all criminal cases. Texas Appleseed, in partnership with Texas Defender Service, will release a report early next year explaining how district and county attorney offices changed their discovery practices after the new law took effect. Our report will also outline best practices to help these offices comply with the letter and spirit of the law.

# Texas Appleseed

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## From the Executive Director's Desk

BY REBECCA LIGHTSEY

## Thank You & A Fond Farewell

I will soon be leaving Texas Appleseed, and I am delighted to turn the reigns over to our Deputy Director, Deborah Fowler. With the help of so many of you and an incredible staff and board, we have taken on some tough challenges on behalf of vulnerable people in Texas—and made real system-wide change. I am proud that Texas Appleseed was one of the first organizations in the state to document how minority children, particularly African-



Deborah Fowler

American boys, faced harsher school discipline than other students. As a result of our work, **we have seen real changes in school laws and policies** so that those disparities are less likely to occur. We found that low-income communities were overlooked when federal disaster assistance funds flowed to local communities, and we reached an agreement with the state that has now given thousands of overlooked families and neighborhoods **the housing and infrastructure funds they need to rebuild**. We were among the first organizations to recognize the gripping cycle of debt that payday and auto title lenders were causing for working families, and have now **seen 21 cities across the state step up** to help their residents. We took a hard look at foster children languishing in long-term care and now see more judges and others changing their practices and following our recommendations—these **children are finding the permanent homes they so desperately need and deserve**. We have accomplished so much, but much more remains. I leave knowing that, with your continued support, we will accomplish even more in the days and years ahead. It has been a privilege to work with you.

## THE LATEST...

### PEOPLE

■ The Texas Appleseed Board of Directors has appointed **Elizabeth Mack** as chair-elect. A partner at Locke Lord LLP, Elizabeth has been an instrumental board member who helped spearhead her firm's pro bono work on reforming the criminal discovery process.

■ Kudos to Ann! Our very own **Ann Baddour** was appointed to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Consumer Advisory Board. Ann will serve a three-year term, offering her financial insight to the organization, as well as solutions to combat predatory lending practices.

■ A longtime friend of Texas Appleseed has returned. Hailing from an LA-based law firm, attorney **Gabriella McDonald**, who was once our Community Service Fellow, is now our Pro Bono and New Projects Coordinator.

■ We are pleased to announce that attorney **Morgan Craven** has joined Texas Appleseed. Morgan is working with our project team on the School-to-Prison Pipeline. She has a background

in public benefits law, including juvenile (Class C Misdemeanors), education and housing issues. Her experience and passion will be a great asset to Texas Appleseed.

■ Congrats to our fair housing partner **John Henneberger** who was recently awarded a MacArthur Genius grant. He is a true advocate for fair and affordable housing, and his life's work has helped those hardest-hit by disasters.

### PROJECTS

■ HUD is **investigating whether League City is in compliance** with nondiscrimination laws. This is one part of the relief that we and MALDEF requested from HUD when we filed a complaint in response to the city's resolution banning child refugees.

■ Texas Appleseed assists with the full cost of the Kaplan LSAT prep course as part of our Diversity Legal Scholars program to help diversify the legal profession. In 2014, **we awarded 15 scholarships** to deserving students at various Texas universities.

# 2014 GOOD APPLE DINNER

Our annual gala, the Good Apple Dinner, was a smashing good time. The Nov. 20 event honored our Good Apple, former Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson, and several other leaders whose legal contributions have greatly helped their fellow Texans. The *Pro Bono Leadership Award* honoree was George Brothers Kincaid & Horton L.L.P.; the *Pro Bono Recognition* honorees were Vinson & Elkins LLP and The Vernon Law Group PLLC; and our *Exemplary Service Award* honoree was the State Bar of Texas. The dinner was dedicated to the legacy of J. Chrys Dougherty III, one of the founders of Texas Appleseed.



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## Honoring the Legacy of J. Chrys Dougherty III

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Earlier this year, Texas lost a brilliant legal mind when J. Chrys Dougherty III passed away. Our legal profession lost the Texas Father of Pro Bono, and Texas Appleseed lost a founder and a dear friend. Chrys was a remarkable man: He retired from the practice of law in 1995, but not from his drive to make the world a better place. He helped create Texas Appleseed so that we could “sow our seeds of justice.”

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## Veterans Remain Vulnerable to Predatory Lenders

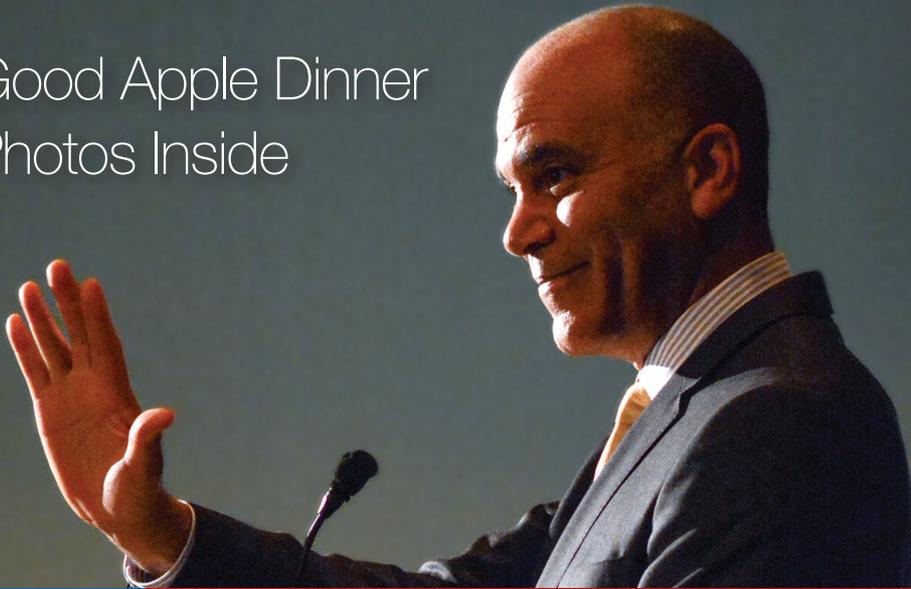
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The Department of Defense made great strides recently by proposing stronger protections for active duty military members against predatory lenders under the Military Lending Act (MLA). Yet millions of veterans are not protected under the law. Our new research revealed that 82% of zip codes that have a veterans' facility also have one or more payday or auto title businesses in the same zip code. Nearly half (48%) of the veterans' facilities in Texas have five or more payday and auto title lending locations within the same zip code. Our research also documented the loopholes that Texas payday and auto title businesses use to bypass the 2007 MLA protections. These protections establish a 36% APR cap for payday loans of 91 days or less and auto title loans of 181 days or less. After visiting 33 payday and auto title store locations around three major military installations in Texas, we learned that 11 of these locations offer payday or auto title loan products that are not covered by the current MLA protections, some with average APRs of 510%.

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## Good Apple Dinner Photos Inside



## San Antonio Visionary Society Reception



Recognizes Comm. Specia

## Texas Lege: A Look Ahead

The 84th Texas legislature convenes in mid-January, and there are a number of hot-button issues that Texans should keep on their radar. We'll monitor the issues important to furthering justice, including decriminalizing truancy as a Class C offense for students and advocating for statewide reform of predatory payday and auto title loan businesses. We will post our legislative agenda on our website, [www.TexasAppleseed.net](http://www.TexasAppleseed.net), and we will report back about what's happening at the Capitol with regular updates on our social media channels and via our e-bulletins.

**SEE INSIDE:** Rebuilding Housing / Michael Morton Act / Payday Lenders & Veterans / Other News

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