



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **City of Grand Rapids Awarded \$4.6 Million to Protect Children from Lead Poisoning**

GRAND RAPIDS – The City of Grand Rapids has been awarded \$4.6 million from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to protect children from lead-based paint hazards by fixing an additional 336 homes. The announcement was made this morning by Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers and Mayor George Heartwell at a 9:00am press conference on Calder Plaza.

“We are absolutely thrilled to be able to continue this important work of fixing children’s homes and making them safe,” said Connie Bohatch, Community Development Director with the City of Grand Rapids. “A big part of providing affordable housing is making sure that it is 100% safe for children. Fixing lead hazards must be a part of any comprehensive housing strategy.”

Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers said, “Lead poisoning causes a completely preventable illness, and I am very pleased that I was able to help secure this grant so that homes in West Michigan can be cleansed of lead dust and lead-based paint. This grant ensures that hundreds of homes will be made safe, and that many more can be cleaned through outreach and training programs.”

Under previous HUD funding, the City and its partners in the *Get the Lead Out!* collaborative have fixed 740 homes to date. Previous funding awards are scheduled to run out at the end of 2008.

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“This award is good news for the children and families of Grand Rapids,” said Paul Haan, Executive Director of the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan. “This funding will allow the City to repair yet another 336 homes, meaning *Get the Lead Out!* partners will reach their target of fixing the lead hazards in 1,000 homes in Grand Rapids!”

The grant will be made to the City of Grand Rapids, and a majority of the award dollars will go directly into fixing lead hazards in older homes where children reside. Lighthouse Communities, a non-profit organization, will assist the City with construction management.

Home Repair Services, the Kent County Health Department, the Rental Property Owners Association, and the Healthy Homes Coalition will assist with community education and outreach. Together, these groups will train more than 600 more people in lead-safe work practices and other strategies for protecting children from lead poisoning.

The *Get the Lead Out!* campaign is a collaborative effort of more than a dozen organizations working together since 2001 to eliminate lead poisoning in Kent County. Since 2001, lead poisoning rates have decreased 67% in Kent County.

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**Photo Opportunity:**

Media Announcement  
Calder Plaza  
9:00am, Tuesday, October 21, 2008  
Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers and Mayor George Heartwell  
*Get the Lead Out!* Partners