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By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

Over the years, I have seen little mom and pop stores get swallowed up by a lot of larger stores. Remember Sun TV and Circuit City before HH Gregg and Best Buy came along? Well again, I see Consumer Protection Agency (CPA) after 44 years helping people get shut down by Cuyahoga County to give the job to Cleveland Housing Network (CHN).

The comparison of watching a big fish swim along and swallow a smaller fish is what I see when people only get help because of knowing someone. It's clear that this agency has helped so many over this time period and then bam it's gone to someone else.

This is the same company who did a job on the people who lived onEuclid Ave.when their apartment caught fire and they put them in a motel with all types of health issues. We all understand how a close friend gets you a job that you are not qualified to do and you act like you are so smart but have no idea what you are doing because you got your relative or close

friend to defend you even when you are wrong.

Things should be fair across the board. Why have a set of rules for one person and another set for a person who is doing the same job? The old saying goes, “It’s who you know and not what you know may…” and is one of the biggest factors for this decision.

“Consumer Protection Association is committed to improving the quality of life by providing a wealth of information at your disposal,” said Executive Director Solomon Harge.

CPA grew out of a faith-based organization in 1967 by a committed community conscious group of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church, whose efforts were dedicated to advocacy and economic empowerment of low-income residents of greater Cleveland. CPA, a United Way agency since 1971, was started with a three (3) year grant from the Cleveland Foundation.

The CPA is currently operating in a crises mode and is literally fighting for its survival. Recent decisions to defund and transfer its core activities to less experienced agencies deals a tragic blow to the inner-city community that it has served exceptionally well over the last 44 years.

CPA has been best known for its Utility Bill Management that allowed consumers to negotiate reduced or graduated payment plans to area utility service providers such as Dominion East Ohio, First Energy, Cleveland Public Power, and Division of Water.

Harge feels that a great injustice is being perpetrated in the inner-city community and is exploring every effort to regain their Utility Bill Management Program, in order to continue their mission to be the advocate and serve the less fortunate.

The Call & Post has attempted to call CHN to see what programs they offer versus CPA and how many clients have they seen and helped and no one returned the phone calls. The newspaper also contactedCuyahogaCountyfor the RFP for the bid to continue the service to the people and at press time had still not received it.

“This problem is bigger then just Cleveland. We have helped many in the suburbs,” said Harge. For all these years CPA has helped people mostly in the inner city and now as its gets bigger, the contract is taken.

While interviewing Harge, you could see the compassion he has for wanting to continue to help people keep their utilities on. “We have had a great participation rate helping people transition off welfare,” he said.

He explained how people are making choices for instant gratification and have been digging deep holes putting them in debt. “They are robbing Peter to pay Paul,” Harge said.

The thought ‘bigger is better’ is not always true where they are just working for numbers. CPA has specialized in their customers and trying to help them not make the same mistakes through their classes.

“If you teach a person how to manage money, they then can live a debt free life,” said Harge. They key to Harge’s statement was budgeting. He feels not everyone understands this c concept.

“We have been teaching people how to budget their money for over 40 years. Our record speaks for itself,” said Harge. CPA tries to get people to understand responsibility and to stop misusing their money.

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