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**CLEVELAND TENANTS ORGANIZATION RECEIVES \$20,000 AWARD
from The Cleveland Foundation and The Center for Community Solutions**

(CLEVELAND, OHIO) The CLEVELAND TENANTS ORGANIZATION received the 2008 Anisfield-Wolf Memorial Award today from The Center for Community Solutions and The Cleveland Foundation. The \$20,000 award is presented annually to recognize outstanding service by a nonprofit organization serving Greater Clevelanders.

Robert Eckardt, senior vice president for programs and evaluation of The Cleveland Foundation, presented the award to Michael J. Piepsny, executive director of the Cleveland Tenants Organization (CTO).

“While Greater Cleveland’s foreclosure crisis and the problems of homeowners are well known, the plight of tenants—the people who are critically affected by foreclosure—is often given little consideration,” he said. “CTO saw the problem and immediately began addressing it.”

Ohio renters facing foreclosure on their residence have little legal protection and are often caught off-guard. There is no requirement for landlords to inform tenants when a foreclosure action is taken. Therefore, even when tenants have faithfully paid rent every month, they may find themselves evicted with as little as three days’ notice. They may lose not only their residence, but also their possessions because they do not have the money to rent a truck, provide security plus rent on a new home, pay for new utilities, etc. Often, families find themselves split up between relatives or shelters with only the belongings they can carry.

CTO’s calls for eviction diversion services pertaining to foreclosures increased from 243 calls in 2006 to over 2,000 calls in 2008. In addition to providing its usual services, without any additional funding, CTO developed a new program to address the lack of help available for renters caught in the middle of their landlords’ mortgage crisis. First, they became the central point of contact to inform tenants of their rights and identify resources to assist with relocation. In September, using data filed with

the County Auditor's Office, CTO began proactively sending letters to tenant-occupied properties facing foreclosure to inform them of the action, provide advance warning that a move will be required, and offer assistance. They took the lead in partnering with other organizations to create a brochure answering commonly asked questions and successfully advocated for financial assistance for those facing an immediate threat of homelessness because of the crisis. CTO is also working with fellow housing advocates on legislation to require that lease agreements remain intact throughout the foreclosure process and transfer of property in order to allow tenants to maintain occupancy until their lease expires.

According to **Robin Cottingham**, Board Chair of Community Solutions, "The current housing crisis continues to impact many across our communities. We are fortunate to have the Cleveland Tenants Organization to ensure that the needs, rights and dignity of renters are preserved and given protections equal to those of homeowners during this time of economic crises."

The Cleveland Tenants Organization was established in 1975 to assist landlords and tenants in understanding their rights and responsibilities outlined by law. Today, its mission is to preserve and expand the supply of safe, decent, fair, affordable and accessible rental housing in Greater Cleveland. For information, call 216-466-3350.

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The Center for Community Solutions is a private, independent, nonprofit organization focused on policy and system reform. It provides strategic leadership to improve targeted health, social, and economic conditions. Established in 1913, it is a United Way agency.

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