

NAHP Update

Creating a New Normal During and After COVID

BY JENNIFER JONES

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The past year has created challenges for all of us, especially as the sharp edges of our work and home lives began to soften due to the pandemic. Many faced mandated stay-at-home orders, which turned our homes into virtual schools and offices. While these efforts were designed to keep people safe, they also served to create a new normal without a manual detailing how to navigate the stresses brought on by entire families trying to attend school and take care of work obligations while all under the same roof.

At NAHMA's March meeting, a panel of five affordable housing industry leaders presented strategies for achieving work-life balance by leveraging technology; understanding your strengths and weaknesses; setting realistic expectations and time management goals; creating an optimized work environment; and pursuing overall physical/mental wellbeing through exercise, healthy eating, meditation,



mental health resources, and more. The session, Finding and Maintaining a Healthy Work-Life Balance During and Post-Pandemic, was presented by Melissa Fish-Crane, principal and chief operating officer, Peabody Properties; Alicia Stoermer Clark, president & CEO, Seldin Co.; Karin McGrath Dunn; president, PRD Management;

Noel Gill, executive vice president, Northwest Real Estate Capital Corp.; and Gianna Richards, president, Solari Enterprises Inc.

Besides turning to Zoom for virtual meetings, Northwest Real Estate Capital Corp., said Gill, leveraged technology to go paperless and migrated their accounts

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NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (NAHMA)—Protecting the Interests of Affordable Housing Property Managers and Owners

payable to electronic payments. This allowed the accounting department to telework. The company also worked with residents to encourage electronic payment methods.

"Technology created efficiencies that we will be continuing into the future," Gill said.

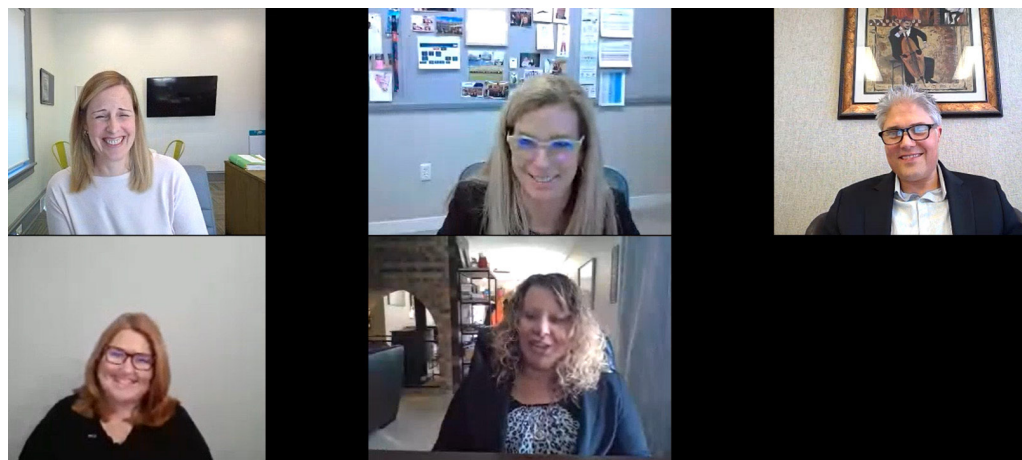
Richards said Solari Enterprises

weaknesses at PRD Management, McGrath Dunn said, they brought in a coach and did a workplace assessment.

"It was a really good reset for our team. It allowed us to know why we complimented each other and why we have impasses," she said. "It allows us to have constructive conversations."

a lot of time on leadership development. We'd have 50 individual retreats, etc. We're very engaged and interactive with employees," Fish-Crane said. "Then COVID hit, and all of a sudden, that didn't happen."

She said the pandemic gave them a chance to reformat what they've been



"We learned it was OK to be vulnerable," Richards said.

prises did a companywide assessment of where they could better use technology and found a gap in their training of maintenance department employees to utilize the tools available.

"Some techs didn't want to use tablets. We sat them down with our IT people—socially distanced—and taught them how to use them," she said. "Pre-pandemic, we probably wouldn't have thought about one-on-one training. Not everyone is comfortable with technology."

To determine the leadership team's strengths and

For the broader organization, McGrath Dunn said they bring in a leadership coach to do one-hour leadership development sessions, and they created Zoom listening labs where the employees talk about and share information on topics related to the job, such as resident interactions, documentation, or delegation.

Fish-Crane said Peabody Properties also did a workplace assessment.

"It helps to understand workforce behaviors. What drives people," she said. "Prior to COVID, we spent

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Karin McGrath Dunn of PRD Management, Melissa Fish-Crane of Peabody Properties, Noel Gill of Northwest Real Estate Capital Corp., Alicia Stoermer Clark of Seldin Co., and Gianna Richards of Solari Enterprises present ways to maintain a healthy work-life balance during and after the pandemic at NAHMA's virtual March meeting.

doing and take a look at their employees' strengths and weaknesses.

"What might have been a strength for someone might not be true now because we don't know what they are going through," Fish-Crane said. "We have to be patient

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with people and be empathic. We have to understand people's strengths and weaknesses, and understand this may not be the norm for people."

Stoermer Clark of Seldin Co. said the pandemic forced

could control, however, was how people worked at home, so they updated their telecommuting agreement.

"We set goals on how it would work," Gill said. "We made it clear they needed to

"WE SET GOALS ON HOW it would work," Gill said. "We made it clear they needed to shut down at the end of the day. That they needed to create separation between work and home."

everyone to be more flexible and get to know their limitations.

"I teach two university classes and couldn't teach my children," she said. "I have five kids, and everyone spent March and April figuring out what the expectations for work and home were."

She said everyone has "lost the 8-5 structure," and that it is crucial to keep in mind every employee's situation is different.

Fish-Crane added that it is just as important to remind people to take time off and to set boundaries.

"We started scheduling emails. We don't do emails at night, and we're not doing emails on weekends," McGrath Dunn said. "There are no meetings on Monday mornings or Friday afternoons."

Gill said his company had spent a lot of money creating efficient and ergonomic workspaces then realized people's at-home work conditions weren't the same. What they

shut down at the end of the day. That they needed to create separation between work and home."

It's important to create a work area that is free from home distractions.

The panelists said they utilized videos more, covering information such as onboarding, various how-to topics, and even company history. One of the benefits of turning to video is that everyone gets the same, consistent message.

And since the pandemic put an end to things like company picnics and holiday parties, everyone had to get creative when it came to employee appreciation events. Many of the efforts focused on people's mental health, as well as physical health.

Gill said they took part in health-related challenges with rewards of gift cards. Richards began sending hand-written notes or flowers to employees.



"We learned it was OK to be vulnerable," Richards said. "People started sharing good news on our chats every two weeks."

Fish-Crane said they sent employees gingerbread kits then had a contest judging the best creations. Peabody also tried to develop other virtual events that incorporated the entire family, such as trivia nights and TikTok Tuesdays.

All of the panelists said

being able to reach out to colleagues to share ideas, talk about lessons learned or even have someone to vent to was invaluable. McGrath Dunn said having peer groups are also helpful for all employees, not just leadership.

"It's been so good to be able to reach out and share the good, the bad, and the ugly," said Richards. **NU**

Jennifer Jones is director of communications and public relations for NAHMA.

Have What It Takes to Be a NAHMA Community of Quality?

Before summer vacations and back-to-school events start dominating the schedule, plan to enter the NAHMA 2021 Communities of Quality (COQ) Awards competition. To compete, existing nationally recognized COQ properties must submit contest forms to NAHMA by Nov. 4.

To enter the awards competition, a property must first apply for and achieve national recognition as a NAHMA Community of Quality with a minimum score of 325 points on its National Recognition application. The deadline for submitting an application to a local AHMA for consideration in the national recognition program is Sept. 2.

“The Communities of Quality Awards honor the achievements of affordable housing providers who make an unprecedented contribution to developing outstanding properties for families of modest means. NAHMA believes

it is essential that outstanding affordable properties—and the individuals who maintain them—be publicly recognized for providing quality housing that offers a safe, healthy environment,” Michael Simmons, NAHP-e, NAHMA president, said. “They are communities supplying essential programs and services for their residents. These awards bring well-deserved valuable attention to the important work we are all doing.”

The awards competition has five categories:

- Exemplary Family Development
- Exemplary Development for the Elderly
- Exemplary Development for Residents with Special Needs
- Exemplary Development for Single Room Occupancy Housing
- Outstanding Turnaround of a Troubled Property

Award winners will be notified in early January 2022. They will receive their awards



Eggerts Crossing Village in Lawrenceville, N.J., is a 2020 Community of Quality Award winner.

in a special ceremony at the NAHMA Biannual Top Issues in Affordable Housing Winter Conference, March 9-11, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

This year's COQ Awards program is jointly sponsored by HD Supply Multifamily Solutions, a leading supplier of maintenance and renovation products to the multihousing industry, and Mohawk Industries, a leading global manufacturer that creates products to enhance residential and commercial spaces around the world.

An overview of the COQ program, along with the awards' detailed application information and submission materials, are available at the NAHMA website at <http://www.nahma.org/awards-contests/communities-of-quality/>.

The AHMAs will also be honoring their local NAHMA Communities of Quality pro-

gram participants. Please check your local AHMA's program details; a directory of the AHMAs is available on the NAHMA website <http://www.nahma.org/membership/ahma-directory/>.

For more information about the COQ program and awards, contact Paulette Washington at 703-683-8630, ext. 110 or pwashington@nahma.org.

NAHMA looks forward to judging numerous applications in every category from every AHMA. The time to start preparing applications is now. —JJ NU



An overview of the COQ program, the national recognition program, and the awards' detailed application information and submission materials are available at the NAHMA website <http://www.nahma.org/awards-contests/communities-of-quality/>.

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Becoming Family for Those Who Need One



NAME: Angela Renee Rickman, NAHP, FHC, CPO

MANAGEMENT COMPANY: Wesley Living

POSITION: Property Manager

About six years ago, Renee Rickman was reevaluating her career and whether it was time for a change.

"I felt I wasn't doing my residents a service," she said. "I got over it. My residents helped me get over it."

Rickman chalks up her moment of self-doubt to her fierce competitiveness. "I don't want to be a failure. I want to be No. 1," she said. "I want to be a good representative for my company."

For the last three years of her 16-year career with Wesley Living, Rickman has been the property manager at the 150-unit St. Mary's Manor, an independent living community for people at least 62 years old and residents with disabilities, in Jackson, Tenn. Before that, she spent 13 years at a small community in Adamsville, Tenn., with 48 units.

Rickman's finding her way to an affordable housing career can be credited to a lazy afternoon riding around with her husband, and a vocational school teacher turned mentor.

One day when Rickman and her husband found themselves in Adamsville, she saw an independent living senior community and wondered what it would be like to work there. At the time, she was attending an 18-month course to become an administrative assistant.

"While I was at school, I had a teacher that was wonderful. She was such a mentor to me," Rickman said. "She asked what I'd like to do. I said I just want to help."

Upon completing her course, Rickman found a job with a trucking company. Not long afterward, her mentor called to tell her about a property manager job that happened to be at the residential community Rickman and her husband had driven past months before.

"She called and said she had a job for me. She helped me with my resume since I never did anything like that," Rickman said. "I got an interview, but I didn't get the job."

At least not at first. The person that was hired didn't stay long. Rickman was offered the position.

"It was such a blessing from the start. I was working at the place I saw the year before," Rickman said. "It's a great company to work for. These people have really been good to me."

That was November 2004,

and she has been with Wesley Living ever since. She has earned her NAHP, FHC, and CPO from NAHMA and a dementia practitioner certificate, Certified Occupancy Specialist, an Alzheimer's training certificate, and has been honored by the SAHMA Excellence Program.

Rickman said she loves the work, especially when it comes to looking after her residents.

"It's like they are your aunts, uncles, grandparents. Some of them don't have any family," Rickman said. "If we don't take care of them, who will? My grandmother raised me. So I was raised by an elderly person. They are our roots. They need us."

She said anyone considering a career in affordable housing should have an open mind and open heart. She said the job won't always be easy, but the good outweighs the bad.

"The technical side is not that hard. Dealing with the residents is the hard part. Just be a stand-up person, be firm, but be kind and have some compassion," she said. "If it's not your cup of tea, don't hang out because the residents need someone to look out for them."

Rickman and her husband are empty-nesters with a daughter, a son, and three grandchildren with a fourth on the way. —JJ NU

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