NA PUpdate

Highlighting the Important Work Members Are Doing

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6 Taking Pandemic Lessons into the Future AHMA wants to shine a light on some of the good that has been quietly happening around the country during the pandemic, so we've asked member management companies to submit stories and photographs highlighting the staff, volunteers, and residents going above and beyond during these difficult times. NAHMA will periodically publish the submissions in an occasional series.

COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN HOUSING AUTHORITY

Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority's response efforts included several activities centered around four main areas: personal protection equipment, food distribution, testing and vaccination, and programs such as a virtual summer camp, the Making Connections initiative that assists with free or reducedcost internet and digital equipment, and the HOPE Fund, which helps residents have an opportunity to receive rental and utility assistance through several partnerships.

With the cooperation



of volunteers and community partnerships, CMHA staff provided the following between 2020-2021: 3,950 bottles of hand sanitizer; 4,888 masks; 26,942 meals; 2,557 produce boxes; 220 bottles of shampoo; 650 bottles of hand soap; 200 packs of paper towels; 1,920 rolls of toilet paper; 590 \$25 Kroger gift cards; 450-plus summer camp

Greenville Summit, managed by the Westminster Company, distributed much-needed supplies in holiday gift bags to its residents.

slots; 126 digital equipment; 4,500-plus free/reduced cost internet service; \$141,870.13 rental assistance; 1,690 Central Ohio Transit Authority passes; 449 COVID-19 tests; 332 COVID-19 vaccinations. *continues on page 2*



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

HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANT WORK MEMBERS ARE DOING, continued from page 1

EAH HOUSING

Submitted by Michelle Parker, manager, resident services: "March 2020 is when we sent out an email stating our community spaces will be closing in response to COVID-19. In a matter of a few short weeks, we could not have fathomed the impact it would have on Resident Services at EAH. We were We continued with our digital literacy program, graduating over 1,000 residents. We worked tirelessly to Get Out the Vote. Voter registration increased by 28%, with a 70% poll turnout. We hosted 41 COVID vaccination clinics and vaccinated over 1,812 residents. Property management and services requested over a rebuild and overcome the unknown."

Additionally, in January 2021, EAH Housing announced that its senior housing residents had begun to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.

Residents at Reflections at Barbara Ann, a 64-unit senior affordable housing apartment

"OVERALL, THE CHALLENGES made us stronger. We learned a great deal about our ability to reconstruct, rebuild and overcome the unknown.""

no longer able to provide direct services, and all programming had to be reevaluated.

We quickly built in safety protocols that allowed us to continue essential services. Our teams connected with residents via phone and email. Services focused their attention on wellness checks, food distributions, and virtual opportunities. We had over 82,000 touchpoints [throughout] 2020. million dollars of rental assistance from federal, state, and local agencies.

To address the summer slide, we offered youth and seniors educational packets. The services team created activities based on age groups and our StayWell model of programming. Overall, the challenges made us stronger. We learned a great deal about our ability to reconstruct,

NAHMA WANTS TO SHINE A LIGHT on some of the good quietly happening around the country during the pandemic. Therefore, NAHMA is asking members to submit stories and photographs highlighting the staff, volunteers, and residents going above and beyond during these difficult times.

Please share quantifiable information, for example, data on the number of vaccination clinics hosted/residents vaccinated, amount of emergency rental assistance requested/received, other resident support through prepayment agreements with residents, or special morale-boosting events. Feel free to submit any press releases.

This information will be used for an occasional series published in *NAHP Update* and shared with elected officials and lawmakers. Please make sure you have permission to use any names and images included in your submission.

If you have great stories or photos to share, please send them to Michal Machnowski, NAHMA government affairs manager, <u>mmachnowski@nahma.org.</u> community in North Hollywood, Calif., received their first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine as part of an on-site immunization clinic provided by Walgreens.

EAH Housing is working in conjunction with Walgreens and CVS to provide on-site COVID-19 immunizations for thousands of seniors and vulnerable residents throughout California and Hawaii.

Reflections on Barbara Ann is owned by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles and is a part of a larger portfolio of affordable housing apartment communities managed by EAH Housing.

The on-site immunizations are in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its national retail pharmacy program to distribute and administer the COVID-19 vaccinations.

LEE MANOR APARTMENTS

Submitted by Renee Byrne, service coordinator, Lee Manor Apartments, Owensboro, Ky.: continues on page 3 NAHPUpdate

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"Here at Lee Manor Apartments, we have been able to help our residents through the pandemic by accepting donations of food, hygiene items, and cleaning supplies. We also received several donations of alcohol to sterilize our facility from OZ Tyler Distillery and the hospital. Hundreds of masks made and donated from Helping Hands, a group of schoolteachers located in Nebraska, were sent. We were also very blessed to be able to provide COVID-19 testing and vaccinations to our residents through the health department and Walgreens.

stamps, which meant they were able to eat healthy meals throughout the entire month."

NATIONAL CHURCH RESIDENCES

Across the nation, the recent increase in COVID-19 infections due to the delta variant shows that the battle against this pandemic is far from over. Medical professionals warn that the delta variant is highly contagious, increases hospitalization risk, and is more resistant to current vaccines. This threat has compelled National Church Residences to add another measure All three vaccines have proven safe and effective at preventing serious illness, but this new variant is a threat to vaccinated individuals and is especially dangerous to seniors and those who are unvaccinated.

"All of our residents and staff members deserve to live and work in a safe and healthy environment," said President and CEO Mark Ricketts in the release. "Therefore, we have made the decision that all National Church Residences' employees, volunteers, and contract staff will be required to be fully vaccinated."

There will be exceptions

"THEREFORE, WE HAVE MADE THE DECISION that all National Church Residences' employees, volunteers, and contract staff will be required to be fully vaccinated."

Blue Water Laboratories and Audubon Area Services provided the testing biweekly in our community room. Walgreens provided Pfizer vaccinations a total of three times to meet the needs of our residents and staff. And lastly, the increase of food stamp benefits really helped provide for our residents in their time of need. I know I slept better knowing they at least they had food. Our residents, who are all elderly, handicapped, or disabled, only receive up to \$16 a month because their utilities are included in their rent. That's a \$300 credit they do not get when they apply for SNAP benefits. Through the pandemic, each eligible resident received \$194 in food to best protect all residents, clients, staff, and their families. Effective Oct. 1, 2021, National Church Residences will require that all staff members be fully vaccinated.

"As more dangerous variants emerge and quickly spread, we must take extra precautions to protect our most vulnerable populations," said Dr. John Weigand, chief medical officer at National Church Residences, in a press release. "Mask wearing, handwashing, and social distancing efforts aren't enough to protect us from the delta variant. Our best defense is to continue wearing masks in public combined with getting vaccinated in order to suppress the transmission of this deadly virus."

for medical or strongly held religious, moral, or ethical beliefs. In addition, National Church Residences has reinstated masking requirements for all persons inside the organization's communities and office buildings.

National Church Residences has put in place extensive preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. The organization has implemented increased levels of precautionary measures, including visitor restrictions, routine screenings, intensified sanitation cleanings, and heightened use of personal protective equipment, as well as on-site vaccine clinics for staff and residents. National Church Residences has not only been diligent about complying with guidance from the CDC in addition to local health agencies, but its measures often have exceeded those recommendations.

PEABODY PROPERTIES INC.

Submitted by Melissa Fish-Crane, president & chief operating officer, Peabody Properties Inc.: "We never thought we'd be celebrating our 45th anniversary on the tail end of a worldwide pandemic. And during this incredibly challenging time for our team members, residents and clients alike-it was our mission-driven approach, vision, and core values that directly and positively impacted not only business continuity but also the lives of all those who call our managed communities home.

This past year, Peabody jumped on the chance to join the CDC's Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program and was one of the first property management companies to offer the COVID vaccination clinics to its communities and residents in the Northeast.

The LTC Program provided end-to-end management of the COVID-19 vaccination process, including cold chain management, on-site vaccinations, and fulfillment of reporting requirements, to facilitate safe vaccination for residents of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and affordable senior housing developments while reducing the burden on LTC facilities and jurisdictional



health departments.

Evidencing our commitment to the communities we serve and our residents, we're proud to say that to date, Peabody has managed to vaccinate a total of 268 staff, 3,231 residents, and 301 community members (volunteers, staff from partner organizations, etc.). All of which As we've found, strong resident services programming, remote interactions, and support have befitted everyone in good times and in bad. And, as we hope for better days ahead, we've committed ourselves to work hard to make the more challenging days a bit easier to bear with a strong network of services for all of our residents, In partnership with Loaves and Fishes and the YMCA, Westminster Company volunteers delivered grocery bags to the 102 apartments at Greenville Summit.

ming including activities such as scavenger hunts, weekly food banks, and sidewalk chalk art contests. There were seasonal activities including gingerbread house making, a pumpkin "guess my weight" contest and valentines making. Peabody also scheduled outdoor and virtual concerts.

WESTMINSTER COMPANY

Submitted by Robin Meyer, operations administrative manager, Westminster Company: "Greenville Summit [in Greenville, S.C.] has been riding the COVID tide of change and unknowing with the rest of world. Sitting idle seemed to be the worst option for our collective physical and mental well-being. Instead, we adopted Marine Corps values and employed an 'improvise, adapt, and overcome'

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was achieved by hosting 165 clinics at 58 unique sites.

In normal circumstances strong operations and robust resident services programs are critical for stable occupancy levels within rental communities. Still, the past 18 months have proven that offerings provided by Peabody's incredible team were literally lifesaving. ... clients, team members and communities, alike."

Peabody created several channels of communication including weekly wellness calls, a resident resource guide, weekly newsletters, video-based programming, smartphone-based programming, and conference calls. Peabody also created "at-home-together" programmindset.

Before COVID, we had a weekly Community Table from which all our residents were invited to pick up supplemental food. COVID disrupted that, but thankfully, we were supported. Through partnering with Loaves and Fishes, the YMCA, and some amazingly courageous volunteers from both inside our apartment community and the surrounding community, we delivered at least two grocery bags per month for all 102 apartment units in the building. We beefed up our flexibility muscles and became quite good at scheduling rotations of residents, so we were able to have holiday meals and gift bag distribution.

We were vigilant about masks and distance and installed hand-sanitizing stations throughout the building. Even so, COVID took the life of one of our residents during the holiday season. Though COVID was a threat to us all along, [his] death kicked us into fight mode.

Our resident services coordinator (RSC) worked with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to schedule a testing clinic. On Jan. 8, we went door to door and offered on-site testing for every apartment in the building. We had several people who received confidential positive results and were able to quarantine inside their apartments. Our RSC worked with CVS Pharmacy to set up on-site vaccination clinics available to all residents, staff, and caregivers. We scheduled three vaccination clinics, and by March 16, we had fully vaccinated 97 people.

Writing this narrative is a reminder of obstacles that seemed insurmountable at the time. COVID continues to present us with unknowns, but our community is still standing, and we have proven we can work together in challenging times." NU

Taking Pandemic Lessons Into the Future By Jennifer Jones

year and a half ago, none of us had a playbook for dealing with a global pandemic. Everyone's normal went by the wayside and in its place was uncertainty and constantly changing recommendations from federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Masks, hand sanitizer, and social distancing became the new normal.

While many people found ways to be able to work from home, that wasn't an option for the on-site personnel of affordable housing communities. Management companies had to find new ways of making sure residents and staff were safe. have anyone afraid to come to work, but a couple of times, the shifts were understaffed because personnel tested positive for COVID-19 or were quarantined.

"Anybody who got exposed got exposed outside of work," he said.

Wesley Living serves over 2,200 residents in two assisted living communities and 28 senior housing communities in West Tennessee, Western Kentucky, and Arkansas.

Even though working from home wasn't possible for on-site staff, Wesley Living "changed everything," Budynas said. "We have an emergency action plan for all of our properties, but a pan-



MICHAEL SWAN/FLICKR

work into a box to avoid unnecessary contact.

At the communities, the fitness centers were restricted

favor of the pre-pandemic open-door policy. The social distancing restrictions were planned to be lifted after the Fourth of July.

"We set up vaccine clinics in January and February, and that's when we started to go back to normal," Budynas said. "We're about 90-95% back to normal."

As for Wesley Living's corporate office in Tennessee, personnel was restricted to no more than 10 people in the office at any given time. The accounting department came in to handle the finances, but everyone else worked remotely. The entire corporate office came back to working in the office full time after Memorial Day.

"We'll be updating our emergency plan. We're making sure we have plenty of PPE [personal protective equipment] on hand. We

continues on page 6

"WE'RE ALL ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES, so staff had to be there," Ron Budynas, vice president and chief operating officer of Wesley Living, said. "They realized if they weren't there, there wasn't going to be anyone take care of the residents."

"We're all assisted living communities, so staff had to be there," Ron Budynas, vice president and chief operating officer of Wesley Living, said. "They realized if they weren't there, there wasn't going to be anyone take care of the residents."

Budynas said they didn't

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The interviews for this article took place between June and early August before the current spike in COVID-19 infections due to the Delta variant. demic wasn't in there."

Budynas said he listened to the experts, and as a result, several measures were put in place to protect the health of employees and residents. Service workers began calling residents every day to check in with them. Managers were going into the office for a half day to do paperwork. The maintenance staff only worked on the common areas. Residents had to make appointments to meet with managers and drop all paperto only two people at a time. The movie areas were closed, and access to the libraries was limited.

As infection rates began to drop, Wesley Living slowly started moving closer to how it operated pre-pandemic, including opening common areas but keeping occupancy restrictions in place and having maintenance workers entering apartments. The properties were loosening up the requirements for masks and office appointments in know to put social distancing requirements in place, and that closing common areas work. We now know how to effectively clean and disinfect all the common areas," Budynas said. "I think we lost a lot not being able to interact with the residents. We are a service-oriented industry. The bricks and mortar are a small part. The services we deliver are so employee dependent, I don't full-time job."

McGrath Dunn said they installed service windows kind of like you'd see at a bank. "They were mandated at first, but we found the staff really liked having them. So, they'll be staying. We were very conscious that people had fears," McGrath Dunn said.

PRD began having weekly Zoom meetings with each department to keep love to continue with those. We'll probably have to have some on-site meetings."

People started to be more planful, she said. For example, by creating hours when staff would be at the service windows, it allowed residents to still have that touchpoint and gave staff the time to do the other things they needed to do without interruptions.

"By not having an opendoor policy, it gave staff a bit

"WE INSTALLED SERVICE WINDOWS—kind of like you'd see at a bank. They were mandated at first, but we found the staff really liked having them. So, they'll be staying. We were very conscious that people had fears," McGrath Dunn said.

know of any other way to do them."

For PRD Management, which manages 2,000-plus apartment units in the mid-Atlantic region, including the hard-hit areas of New Jersey and New York, it was a learn-as-you-go situation since they were among one of the first areas impacted by COVID-19. The company is headquartered in New Jersey.

"The first thing I did was take a pause and see what would make everyone feel safe," Karin McGrath Dunn, president of PRD Management, said. "We stopped work orders except for emergencies. We closed offices for a little while and flexed staff and maintenance crews. We increased cleaning protocols. The guidance and notifications became like another employees informed and have a chance to speak up about their concerns freely. The company also set up a monthly "study hall" type of Zoom call where managers could log on and assist each other in their end-of-themonth reporting. The sessions were recorded so those who couldn't participate in the live discussions could watch them later. McGrath Dunn said the sessions were so well received the company plans to continue them.

"We saw efficiency in the office work because there weren't any walk-ins allowed. The residents had to make appointments. We'll be keeping the appointments," she said. "Owners meetings on Zoom were also more efficient, and it cut down on commute times. I'd of control to feel safe, but it added a bonus of control over their time," McGrath Dunn said.

PRD also turned to creating online training programs, which will continue to be used as an orientation tool moving forward. McGrath Dunn said they had to find a way to do all of the things they could no longer do in person. One solution was to create two-minute videos covering the topics they would repeatedly do in person every time someone was hired. The videos included various procedures, how-to topics, and the company history. They were posted to a "training wall" on the company website, including links to necessary forms and documents.

"We hired 10 people

between March and October and needed them all to do orientation," she said. "We will keep this as a tool and build it out."

Leadership also simplified its review process. "I don't think we'll go back to the old process. It was complicated, and nobody liked it," she said. "We looked for ways we could simplify, and we will continue on that track."

WinnResidential, unlike PRD, had a chance to see what was going on in other parts of the country before COVID reached them and had time to begin preparing. WinnCompanies, through its companies WinnDevelopment, WinnResidential, and WinnMilitary, acquires, develops, and manages affordable, senior, mixed-income, market rate, military, and mixed-use properties nationwide. Its corporate offices are in Massachusetts.

"Early on, we were fortunate. Other places were a couple of weeks ahead of us, so we saw it coming and started to plan," Patrick Appleby, president of Winn-Residnetial, said.

That plan included leveraging relationships with vendors to get supplies before they became scarce.

Like everyone else, the company stopped performing lower-priority maintenance, stocked up on PPE, reduced staff interactions with residents, and ramped up communications with residents.

"We didn't have the option to close down," he

TAKING PANDEMIC LESSONS INTO THE FUTURE, continued from page 6

said. "These are people's homes."

Winn took advantage of technology, including electronic documents and even FaceTiming with residents.

"We tried to accommodate how the residents preferred to communicate with us. In-person—in a safe way, text, email, whatever," he said. "We leapfrogged ahead idents could attend online school and helped residents get their prescriptions.

"One thing we anticipated but were not prepared for was the packages being delivered. That was a challenge," Appleby said. "And the amount of garbage and recycling being generated with everyone staying at home." Winn concentrated on will continue the town hall meetings for employees and stakeholders, and an added benefit is they cut down on travel.

The company expects to see some residents continue to work from home, so it is rethinking its common spaces.

"I can see us converting some common areas to shared

"WE WERE ALWAYS TRYING to increase the number of people paying their rent online. Thanks to the pandemic, more and more people have shifted their lives online, and we found that to be a benefit in getting residents comfortable with electronic documents and email."

in the technology investment."

Winn had already been planning to make investments in technology, but the pandemic sped up their timeline.

"We were always trying to increase the number of people paying their rent online," Appleby said. "Thanks to the pandemic, more and more people have shifted their lives online, and we found that to be a benefit in getting residents comfortable with electronic documents and email."

The pandemic also forced Winn to expand its definition of safe.

"What we use to think was providing a safe environment—locks, security cameras ... became more than that," he said. "But we never lost sight that we are dealing with people's homes."

Winn created "learning stations" where young res-

expanding its relationships with employment groups, health-care providers, and educators who could connect with residents. In 2020, Winn created its Housing Stability Program to reduce eviction by 50% across its portfolio by 2025, using a strategy of education and intervention as soon as tenants have difficulty paying rent. During the pandemic, the company had 16,000 residents who were helped to get rental payments.

The company set up an internal webpage to help communications between the corporate office and employees spread out over 23 states. The page would be updated with the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where to get PPE and safety posters for the properties. They also held monthly virtual town hall meetings. He said moving forward, they workspaces," Appleby said. And I see people looking for a two-bedroom instead of a one-bedroom so they can have an office."

The company has also turned to technology to recruit new employees through virtual job fairs. Employees also adopted technology, using pads for things like work orders, taking inventory, and providing virtual property tours.

"We recognize that employees are dealing with the same issues as residents," Appleby said. "We made sure we didn't have crowded work environments. We let employees leave early on Fridays. We created an award for 'COVID Champions,' for 100 employees that have gone above and beyond, nominated by their peers." NU

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

Welcome New Certificants!

NAHP

- Stephanie Curry River Edge Behavioral Health Service Macon, GA
- >> Jennifer Rajecki WinnResidential Springfield, MA

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