

On-Site Insights

NAHMA'S NEWSLETTER FOR CERTIFIED AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROFESSIONALS

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NAHMA Members Provide Ways To Chase Away Nightmares

BY JENNIFER JONES

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT | MAINTENANCE

In October, attendees at NAHMA's Biannual Top Issues in Affordable Housing Fall Conference learned ways to address staffing challenges, the best practices in working with difficult residents, and possible uses of artificial intelligence (AI). The session, *What's Keeping You Up at Night?*, was presented by Michele Nathaniels, president of Seldin LLC, Jack Sipes, partner and executive vice president of Dominium, and Scott Ployer, president & CEO of National Property Management Strategies Group LLC.

STAFFING CHALLENGES

Nathaniels said Seldin, like everyone else, is facing staffing challenges coming out of the COVID pandemic and changing work ideas among younger generations. She offered some solutions that they have tried to address those issues.

For example, the company has been



LARRY FALKOW

NAHMA CEO Kris Cook moderates the panel featuring Michele Nathaniels, president of Seldin LLC, Jack Sipes, partner and executive vice president of Dominium, and Scott Ployer, president & CEO of National Property Management Strategies Group LLC.

offering flex scheduling, created roving teams to help fill staffing gaps, and allowing hybrid work, which lets people work from home some days and in the office on others. Seldin supplies laptops

to employees. She said the rover teams are employees willing to travel to different sites to temporarily fill in where there are current needs such as maintenance, leasing or compliance.

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NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION is the leading voice for the affordable housing management industry, advocating for developing, managing and preserving quality affordable multifamily housing.

“We’ve added Ring systems at every property, so if no one is in the office, they can still respond,” Nathaniels said.

Seldin also created a Career Path Program that provides training and job shadowing for the position an employee aspires to.

“We try to keep our teams motivated and inspired,” she said. “For 2025, we’re creating hype videos.”

to stay calm and how to get the upset resident to mirror them.”

On-site staff are taught how to respond to the residents to avoid an escalation. Staff are also learning when best to utilize different communication tools. For example, he said minor issues might be solved with an email, while other situations may require an in-person conversation.

with translation for residents who don’t speak English. It can also help with sharing information with the on-site team.

“AI can involve significant costs, so it isn’t to be taken lightly,” Ployer said. “And it is a long-term commitment. We are truly working smarter, not harder.”

He said AI can be integrated into human resources when assessing potential hires’ skill levels. It can also assist in training.

“Training is important. If you say you don’t have money for training, you are setting your employees up to fail,” Ployer said. “What if I pay to train employees

and they leave? What if you don’t train them, and they stay?”

He said there is no cookie-cutter AI program. It has to be a fit for each company. Ployer cautions that AI products will require regular updates.

Incorporating AI doesn’t have to entail a considerable overhaul of your operations. He points out that Nest thermostats and Ring cameras are AI. The technology can also provide virtual reality tours of communities and staff training. AI can even create gamification opportunities to make learning fun or break down analytics.

Even a chatbot can assist on-site staff and residents.

“Over 50% of residents can get answers with a chatbot, if residents know the value of why they are talking to a robot,” Ployer said. “What if something happens at 10:15 at night, and there is no one in the office?”

He recommends anyone incorporating AI create a policy. **OSI**

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

“FOR EVERY 10 BABY BOOMERS WHO ARE RETIRING, there are only two new employees coming in,” Ployer said. “We have to adopt AI technology. Technology is to enhance the human interaction, not replace it.”

The company has also brought back monthly employee surveys for feedback. As far as measuring employee retention, Seldin now reviews six-month loss rates rather than overall loss rates. Additionally, the company started checking in with new hires after 30 days and six months to ask about their training and to see what was and wasn’t working.

Seldin has also been training employees for succession. So, if someone leaves or retires, the company doesn’t lose the employee’s institutional knowledge.

CHALLENGING RESIDENTS

Sipes said Dominion has seen an increase in staff assaults since the pandemic.

“Because of COVID, there was a break in relationships,” Sipes said.

On-site staff is seeing residents coming to the office and getting upset with staff, not following the rules, struggling with mental health, and making violent threats.

“We’ve started doing something like an active shooter drill to train for potential violence,” he said. “We teach communication skills. Staff learns how

Sipes said having and fairly applying community policies have helped reduce issues.

To address mental health issues, Dominion has been utilizing case workers and developing relationships with police or neighborhood security.

“We told our staff, when it comes to violence, don’t get cornered. If they think it will be a difficult situation, they should have someone with them,” Sipes said. “We didn’t think we needed to teach these things before, but we are teaching them now. Some simple skills can help, and it shows as an employer, we care.”

AI IN MULTIFAMILY MANAGEMENT/ OPERATIONS

“For every 10 baby boomers who are retiring, there are only two new employees coming in,” Ployer said. “We have to adopt AI technology. Technology is to enhance the human interaction, not replace it.”

He said, for example, that a resident might be able to resolve their issue quicker through a resident portal, especially if it is after hours. AI can assist

Insurance Task Force Releases Risk Mitigation Recommendations

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

The NAHMA Insurance Working Group released recommendations aimed at limiting insurance claim risks through proactive mitigation strategies. The [paper](#), “Affordable Multifamily Housing Management Industry White Paper: Risk Mitigation Strategy by Region, Exterior & Interior,” can be found on the [Advocacy Resources](#) webpage under the Advocacy tab on the NAHMA website. The Insurance Working Group is sharing its collaborative results that may provide others with strategies to reduce insurance claim risk.

The Insurance Working Group recommends that a standard of risk management practice should emerge that may be recognized by insurance carriers in the future, with an ultimate goal of stabilized premiums or potential discounts.

In early 2024, NAHMA formed a task force to discuss alternative insurance markets and risk mitigation strategies to reduce the number of claims. The task force comprised NAHMA members, including Affiliate (insurance brokers) and Executive members and/or their colleagues handling insurance for their company, and other experts, stakeholders, and practitioners from the affordable housing industry outside of NAHMA. A risk mitigation strategy was developed by region through the working group’s efforts. The objective was to assess the exterior and interior construction/retrofit opportunities and products that would mitigate environmental and living unit claim risks.

The white paper first assesses the exterior environmental risks by region and then by potential risks. The interior

risks are covered broadly below exteriorly, assuming that fire, floods and personal security were common, regardless of the region.

The white paper is among other steps the multifamily industry has taken to address the insurance cost crisis. An industry [coalition letter](#) sent to the Biden administration in June encouraged “the administration, Congress, and all federal policymakers to address the causes of rising insurance premiums across the nation’s housing market, and in particular, the significant negative impacts such increases have had on all stakeholders, including, but not limited to, single-family, multifamily, and affordable housing developers, lenders, investors, owners and our nation’s renters.”

According to the industry coalition letter, “as of the fourth quarter 2023, U.S. property insurance rates have increased for 25 consecutive quarters. Likewise, U.S. casualty insurance rates have increased for 17 consecutive quarters. Further, over the past three years, insurance premiums have been subject to unprecedented increases, with providers reporting annual premium increases ranging from 30% to 100% for affordable rental housing communities.” (Citations for this data are provided in the letter.)

“Ultimately, our primary objective in this letter is to ensure housing providers can meet the long-term housing needs of the nearly 40 million Americans who live in rental homes and continue to foster the growing contributions rental housing makes to our economy and communities throughout the country,” the letter said. **OSI**

—Jennifer Jones

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Discussing the Challenges Of Providing Broadband

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Michelle Norris, principal of N-Sights Consulting LLC, told the attendees of the NAHMA October meeting that during COVID, we all learned the importance of connecting older adults digitally for their well-being, both market-rate and affordable housing seniors.

“Market-rate communities often had connectivity in the resident units, but affordable didn’t. Without this, critical pandemic response communications resorted to the archaic ‘slide the paper under the resident’s door’ method,” she said.

Norris and Kevin Donnelly, executive director of the Real Estate Technology and Transformation Center, presented a session called Challenges of Providing Affordable Housing Broadband Property and Portfolio-wide.

She said many pilot programs had limited success because they were restricted to connecting the community’s common areas instead of addressing the need to provide connectivity in units.

“But think of older adults that may not be able to get to the community room. What about telehealth? What if they have a disability?” Norris said. “Connecting the community room is a good interim solution, but don’t stop there. The internet is not a luxury; it is a necessity.”

Norris said one of the problems is the aging portfolio. The building has older wiring systems that aren’t compatible with today’s technology, and it is too expensive to retrofit the community.

She recommends that as developers build new buildings or renovative existing



LARRY FALKOW

Kevin Donnelly, executive director of the Real Estate Technology and Transformation Center, and Michelle Norris, principal of N-Sights Consulting LLC, present a session on the Challenges of Providing Affordable Housing Broadband Property and Portfolio-wide.

buildings, they include community-based internet solutions such as bulk internet and managed Wi-Fi.

Donnelly said in the conventional housing world, there are technological tools that have been embraced to help with operations. And in a broader sense, technology can help create positive outcomes for residents.

“We have argued for decades that if the government doesn’t step in to subsidize broadband build-out in affordable housing, it won’t happen,” Donnelly said. “The federal government has now made money available, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law made low-income multifamily housing a priority, but the states have a lot of leeway on how they allot that money. We have encouraged policymakers to see bulk broadband and managed Wi-Fi systems as a success for senior and student housing and build upon it in affordable housing.”

He said while bulk internet and managed Wi-Fi, hotel-style internet, hold a lot of promise, it’s also where where communities face policy challenges.

“Policymakers often don’t understand the underlying technologies. On the one hand, they say here is money, and on the other hand, they don’t understand the technology and put forward regulation that undercuts its utility,” Donnelly said. “1996 was the last time Congress enacted legislation to regulate the internet.”

He said the Federal Communications Commission is considering regulating bulk and managed Wi-Fi, claiming they stifle competition.

“In affordable, we are happy if we have a provider who wants to come in,” Donnelly said. “Bulk billing has broken barriers. We need to convince policymakers to slow down and leverage proven tools to bridge the digital divide.” **OSI**

—Jennifer Jones



RESOURCES

[Community-Based-Wi-Fi-Solutions-in-Affordable-Housing-White-Paper](#)
[Bulk Broadband Alliance](#)

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Drawing will be held on Dec. 13, 2024

Calendars make great holiday gifts for your properties, community event giveaways and colleagues. This year's theme, "Dig Into a New Day: Our World Is a Garden of Delights" is illustrated through the unique poster art created by children, seniors and adults with special needs living in affordable housing. Support the drug-free message today. Send in the order form at right without delay. Or, download order form at www.nahma.org.

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pwashington@nahma.org

Order forms can be downloaded at www.nahma.org. Please allow 3-4 weeks for delivery.



Residents' Stories Give Poole's Work Purpose

By Jennifer Jones

NAME: Jennifer Poole, CPO, FHC

COMPANY: Mercy Housing

POSITION: Vice president of operational support



WHEN I HEAR A FEEL-GOOD

STORY from the field, it really amplifies the work we do.

Recently, we had a family that was a final lease-up at one of our properties. They had been going from shelter to shelter.

Now, they have a home and don't need to worry about where they will sleep."

In college, Jennifer Poole pursued her Bachelor of Science in aviation/airway management and operations and business management at Western Michigan University. So, naturally, she held her student pilot's license to fly small planes. Poole took her interest in flying a step further and decided to learn to fly an Extra EA 300 aerobatic plane.

"My instructor got sick on our first instruction flight," she said, laughing.

Her instructor's weak stomach notwithstanding, Poole eventually gave up her license and decided to keep her feet firmly on the ground after she became a mom.

Now Poole is a single mom to a daughter in her 20s whom she describes as a successful, independent human being with a unique spirit who is her pride and joy. She is also a pet mom to a greyhound and cat.

Even though Poole gave up the thrill of flying, she still gets her adrenaline going as a member of the Parker Players Improv Comedy Theater Company, which is gearing up for its holiday show at The Bug Theatre in Denver, Colo. She is busy writing parody songs for the show.

When not sharpening her improv skills, Poole is hard at work as the vice president of operational support for Mercy Housing, a position she has held for the last two of her eight years at the nonprofit.

Initially, Poole worked in the finance world until she was laid off. At the time, she was also going through a divorce.

"The manager at my apartment building asked if I needed a job, and I said sure," Poole said.

That marked her first foray into the housing management field. She began as a leasing agent where she lived, eventually making her way through every on-site position imaginable. Before joining Mercy, Poole held positions at Advenir Real Estate Management, Pinnacle, Steadfast Companies and Janus Capital Group.

"Our residents are the motivation for the work we do," she said. "When I hear a feel-good story from the field, it really amplifies the work we do. Recently, we had a single mom with three kids that was the final move in at one of our new lease-ups. They had been going from shelter to shelter. Now, they have a home and don't need to worry about where they will sleep."

When asked what the most exciting part of her job is, Poole laughed and said, "Attending NAHMA conferences and having cocktails with colleagues. We do a lot, and our work is impactful but the day to day is not necessarily exciting. I do get excited when we open a new building and provide more homes for people in need."

What she doesn't get excited about is email. She calls it her biggest challenge.

"I get so much email. That's truly my nemesis," she said. "I struggle with it and would love people to share tips and tricks on how to manage it! I need an assistant for my email." **OSI**