

Apartment focus

ISSUE 4 | 2020



What's the New Normal? Leasing Apartments During the Pandemic

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The Connecticut Apartment Association (CTAA) is part of the NAA Network – Local, State and National Associations Working on Your Behalf

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CTAA is the local affiliate of the National Apartment Association (NAA). As a federation of nearly 170 affiliates, NAA encompasses over 85,000 members representing more than 9.2 million apartment homes globally.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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EMPLOYMENT LISTINGS

The CTAA website offers a great place for job posting and job searching within the industry. Our job posting service is available exclusively to our members!

LEGISLATIVE VOICE

CTAA employs a highly-skilled lobbying team that monitors proposed legislation that affects the multifamily housing industry and keeps the CTAA membership informed.

CT APARTMENT FOCUS MAGAZINE

CTAA's magazine keeps members updated with important industry issues and CTAA events.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

This member's only section of the website provides you with a listing of property management companies, communities and industry suppliers that are CTAA members. Complete contact information is included.

NAA BENEFITS INCLUDE

- NAA Government Affairs – Protecting the industry through local, state and national advocacy initiatives and grassroots mobilization
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- NAA Education Institute – Skill development that maximizes NOI
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- Industry Resources – National award-winning monthly magazine, newsletters and website, and knowledge-sharing through social media
- The NAA Open Door Program – An exclusive NAA member benefit and not an endorsed product program. Participants in the program are reputable businesses that offer valuable services and competitive prices to our members
- The NAA Resource Center – Quickly find the suppliers, products, and services in the apartment housing industry with the Resource Center.

“Our company's membership in CTAA has provided so many valuable dividends over the years. Utilization of the NAA lease as facilitated through local CTAA chapter membership not only lessens administrative burden for our on-site teams that has a direct impact on operating costs but also provides us peace of mind that the lease meets all legal requirements and will be updated as changes may occur. The opportunity to use this affiliation to network for vendor services helps us meet our firm's competitive bid requirements and find vendor partners who provide quality services at the best possible prices. We have also developed relationships with other member industry professionals over the years and some of those relationships have turned into future team members for our organization. “

-Lori J Ricci, Senior Vice President, WinnResidential

Apartment focus



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Hello CTAA members and supporters, I hope this note finds you all well.

The summer proved very busy with advocacy efforts at the local, state and national levels. The news is not good, with the extension of the eviction moratorium, CDC order and continued extension of the Governor's powers and Executive Orders. The CTAA website is continually updated with information and action alerts, and communications to the membership have increased substantially to keep you all in the loop. I encourage you all to take a look at all that is posted. Thank you to all who have reached out to their local legislators and federal representatives. We will continue the communication, advocacy and education, and we hope you will too.

CTAA is once again proud to partner with the American Red Cross as a Ready 365 charitable giving partner, and we are also hosting blood drives in Rocky Hill. You can read all about the partnership in this issue. Thanks to our sponsors, volunteers and donors that are making these blood drives such a success!

Thank you to all who have renewed their dues with CTAA this year — we appreciate your support and look forward to continuing to serve you and the industry. If you're not sure if your dues have been paid (due date September 30, 2020), please log in to your member portal, where you can update information and pay invoices right online. We wouldn't want you to miss out on all the great benefits of being a member. The networking and advocacy, and even your



Blue Moon lease rights, are affiliated with your membership.

While the format of our events and education at this time continues to be virtual, please know that CTAA is planning for the day when we can all come back together safely and responsibly, to network, gather and share time.

As always, my email (and virtual door) is always open. Take care of yourselves and your communities, and I look forward to seeing you!

Thank you for your continued support. ■

Jessica Olander
Executive Director

The Connecticut Apartment Association Is Partnering With the American Red Cross

The Partnership Helps Support the Red Cross Home Fire Campaign



The Connecticut Apartment Association, based in Glastonbury, Connecticut, has partnered with the American Red Cross for the third year in a row. As part of the partnership, this year, the Connecticut Apartment Association has contributed in support of the Red Cross Home Fire Campaign. It is entering its third year as a Ready 365 Bronze level supporter.

“We are grateful to the Connecticut Apartment Association for their continued support of the Red Cross and for their commitment to support the Home Fire Campaign,” said Brandon Ponder, Chief Development Officer, American Red Cross Connecticut and Rhode Island Region. “The Connecticut Apartment Association’s partnership helps the Red Cross prepare communities for the largest disaster threat, home fires.”

Every day seven people are killed and another 36 people suffer injuries because of home fires. And annually, the Amer-

ican Red Cross responds to nearly 62,000 disasters — the vast majority of which are home fires. Here in Connecticut, the Red Cross responds to about two home fires each day across the state. Having working smoke alarms cuts the risk of dying in a home fire in half. To save lives, the Red Cross started their Home Fire Campaign in 2014, and to date, the campaign has saved more than 760 lives nationwide. The Connecticut Apartment Association’s contribution to the Home Fire Campaign helps the Red Cross install free smoke alarms and provide important preparedness information to families. Emergencies don’t stop, and the COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented Connecticut families from experiencing home fires or the Red Cross response to these disasters.

“Helping to alleviate suffering due to home fires and displacement resonates with our organization. Sometimes it is our own apartment communities and residents that are affected by fire, and the American Red Cross is always there

to assist,” said Kelly Dematteo, president-elect of CTAA. “We value our relationship as a Ready 365 partner and are looking to grow our involvement as well. We are partnering with ARC to host multiple blood drives in Rocky Hill. July 21st was the first of what we hope to be many more events with the Red Cross.”

The financial contributions of corporate citizens, like The Connecticut Apartment Association, enable the Red Cross to make a tremendous difference every day for those who rely on our services in disasters, like home fires and other emergencies.

About Ready 365:

Ready 365 Giving Program members are businesses that value the local impact and global reach of the Red Cross; they want to deepen their commitment to our mission, and they are ready to help save lives every day of the year. To learn more about how your business can help the Red Cross become Ready 365, visit www.redcross.org/ct.

About the American Red Cross:

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies about 40% of the nation’s blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit redcross.org/ct or visit us on Twitter at @CTRedCross.

About the Connecticut Apartment Association:

The goals and objectives of the Connecticut Apartment Association (CTAA) are designed to advance and protect the welfare of the multifamily housing industry in Connecticut. CTAA’s members’ interests are served nationally through its affiliation with the National Apartment Association (NAA). CTAA represents over 50,000 units, 85 owner/manager companies and 100+ business partners. ■

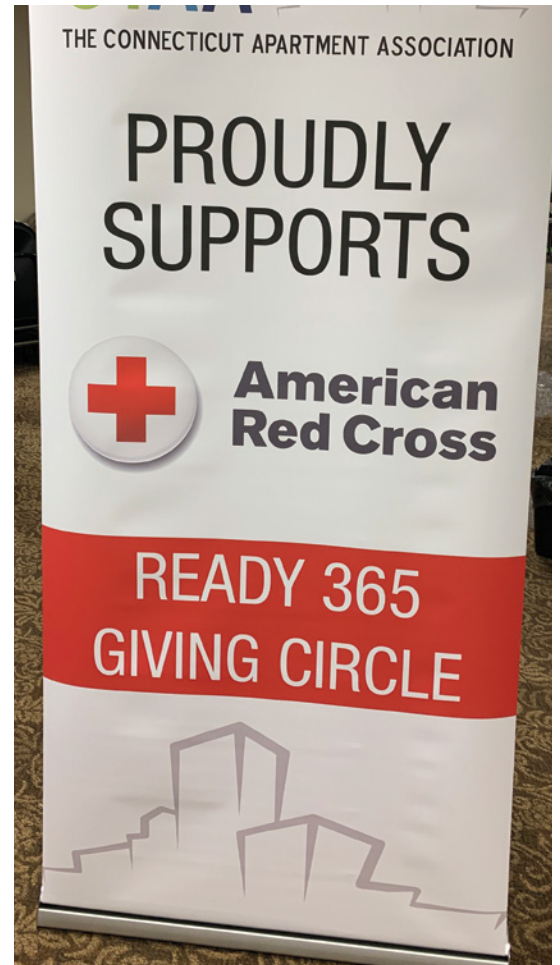
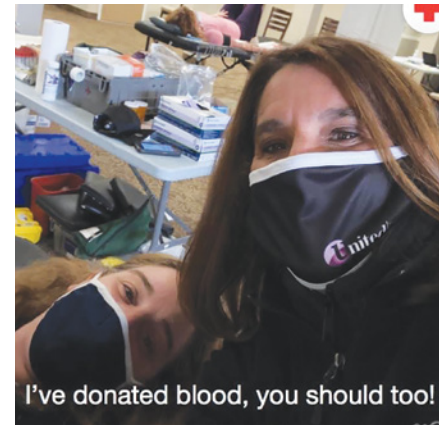
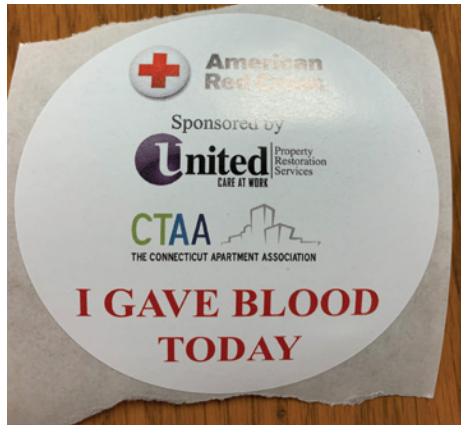


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Move for Hunger Receives a \$50,000 Donation from the Assurant Foundation

Assurant's Employees Participated in the Turning Miles Into Meals Virtual Fundraiser to Support Move for Hunger's COVID-19 Relief Efforts

Move for Hunger announced September 3 that it had received a \$50,000 donation from the Assurant Foundation to support its COVID-19 relief efforts. The donation will help Move for Hunger provide 120,000 meals to children, families, senior citizens and vulnerable communities facing hunger during the pandemic.

Assurant, a global provider of housing and lifestyle solutions that supports, protects and connects major consumer purchases, donated on behalf of its employees, who recently completed their Turning Miles Into Meals virtual fundraiser.

Assurant's employees were encouraged to stay active, at a safe social distance, to show support for Move for Hunger's mission to reduce food waste and fight hunger. From April 12 through May 11, 2020, 162 Assurant employees participated. Together, they walked, jogged and completed other activities in which they collectively traveled 14,345 miles to raise awareness about how the coronavirus is exacerbating food insecurity in the United States.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased the number of people who are struggling financially with the ability to put food on the table, so completing this challenge and supporting the great work of Move For Hunger is more important than ever," said Ryan Lumsden, president of Multifamily Housing, Assurant.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had a massive economic impact and has drastically increased the need for emergency food assistance nationwide. Move for Hunger has delivered more than 2 million pounds of food to food banks across the United States since March, but the nonprofit organization relies on the support of partners like Assurant to help coordinate food rescues, organize food drives, and expand its network.

"More than 37 million Americans were food insecure even before the pandemic, and we know that number has increased substantially," said Adam Lowy, Executive Director/Founder of Move for Hunger. "We are so grateful to Assurant and their employees for stepping up and helping us fight hunger during this unprecedented crisis." ■

Move for Hunger is a national non-profit organization that has created a sustainable way to reduce food waste and fight hunger. We have mobilized the leaders of moving, relocation, and multifamily industries to provide their customers, clients and residents the opportunity to donate their food when they move. Members of Move for Hunger also organize community food drives, participate in awareness campaigns, and create employee engagement programs. For more information, or to find out how you can host your own food drive, visit www.MoveForHunger.org.

Assurant, Inc. is a leading global provider of housing and lifestyle solutions that support, protect and connect major consumer purchases. Anticipating the evolving needs of consumers, Assurant partners with the world's leading brands to develop innovative products and services and to deliver an enhanced customer experience. A Fortune 500 company with a presence in 21 countries, Assurant offers mobile device solutions, extended service contracts, vehicle protection services, pre-funded funeral insurance, renters insurance and lender-placed homeowners insurance. The Assurant Foundation strengthens communities by supporting charitable partners that help protect where people live and can thrive, connect with local resources, inspire inclusion and prepare leaders of the future. Learn more at assurant.com or on Twitter @AssurantNews.



The Eviction Wave Is Still at Sea: Will It Make Land?



The eviction moratorium announced this week by the Trump administration ended fears of an immediate wave of evictions. But the eviction ban, in effect through the end of the year, merely postpones the inevitable problem if double-digit unemployment rates persist and federal aid remains stalled in the U.S. Senate.

Tenants with diminished income will miss rent payments, which has led to dire predictions that a wave of evictions is on the horizon. For example, public policy think tank The Aspen Institute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project generated headlines last month with a publication warning that “an estimated 30-40 million people in America could be at risk of eviction in the next several months.”

An eviction tsunami, however, has not yet materialized. According to data from 17 major metros compiled by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, between the weeks

of Dec. 29, 2019, and March 15, property owners filed an average of 5,700 evictions per week. Between March 22 and mid-August, as the economy began feeling the effects of the pandemic, average eviction filings in those same metros fell to 1,700 per week, a drop of 70%.

Filings have declined for many reasons, including the plethora of federal, state and local eviction moratoriums; federal unemployment aid and renter assistance programs; a backlog in the courts; and the reluctance of property owners to act aggressively during the crisis.

The action of policymakers and industry advocates have averted an immediate crisis. However, questions persist, including the potential scope of evictions and what can be done to prevent a wave after the moratorium is lifted. In other words, how long can evictions remain at bay if the underlying problem — many residents don’t have enough money to pay rent — doesn’t change?

The Aspen/COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project study was based on a census bureau study of renters. It tallied the number of respondents who said they might have difficulty paying rent in the current or next month.

How Many Residents Are at Risk?

The Aspen/COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project study was based on a census bureau study of renters. It tallied the number of respondents who said they might have difficulty paying rent in the current or next month. Roughly a quarter of 12.6 million renter households in the survey said they had little or no confidence that they could pay the next month's rent. The study noted that residents who didn't pay rent are at risk of evictions.

The Aspen survey didn't take into account mitigating factors such as eviction moratoriums, the length of time that evictions take to go through the judicial system, the eagerness (or lack thereof) of property owners to file for evictions or the steps that industry organizations such as the National Multifamily Housing Council (NMHC) or National Apartment Association (NAA) have taken to help property owners avoid evictions.

A patchwork of eviction moratoriums throughout the country covers potentially one in two renters. The Federal Housing Finance Authority has a moratorium on eviction through the end of the year on properties financed through Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the largest lenders in the multifamily industry. The Federal CARES Act mandated a moratorium that expired in late July, and now landlords are required to give residents 30-day notice before filing evictions. Plus, many states and municipalities have implemented eviction bans.

It's not just moratoriums that are stopping eviction filings. Court systems throughout the country are operating well below normal capacity. In any event, many property owners are reluctant to go through the time and expense of an eviction proceeding. "Eviction is always a part of property management, but under normal circumstances, it is the last resort," said Paula Cino, a vice president of construction, development and land-use policy for the NMHC. "The industry is used to working with residents."

Even when they get to court, less than half of eviction filings typically result in evictions, says Paula Munger, an assistant vice president of industry research and analysis at the NAA. Taken all together, there doesn't seem to be a danger of an imminent spike in evictions. "I just don't see where we're going to have this huge wave," Munger said.

Sam Gilman, a co-founder of the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project, agreed that moratoriums and court closings have put off many eviction filings, but said that the group's analysis remains sound. "The conditions that lead to a spike in evictions have been building," he said.

Rent Collections Strong, But For How Long?

Source: Eviction Lab at Princeton University

Apartment rent collections have been better than expected, given that more than 20 million Americans have lost their jobs and more than 10% remain out of work. The NMHC started a rent tracker in March that measures the payments of 11.4 million professionally managed units nationwide. The tracker has consistently found rent payments to be roughly two percentage points lower than historical levels.

The NMHC survey covers relatively high-quality apartments, which tend to have wealthier residents and professional managers that have greater resources to communicate with residents and to help them access aid programs. Surveys of smaller and lower-quality properties not covered by the NMHC database show worse performance. Published studies have indicated a 7.5% to 9.0% increase in missed rent payments for residents at smaller apartment properties, Munger said.

There is widespread agreement that the biggest factor keeping rent payments steady was the federal government's enhanced unemployment program, which added \$600 a week to state unemployment aid. That additional unemployment aid expired at the end of July, which means that the risk to rent

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There is no consensus way to view eviction, even among property owners. Some owners want to keep properties occupied, while others would rather move out non-paying residents. Eviction moratoriums for residents who lost jobs through the pandemic are humane, but blanket prohibitions prevent landlords from removing residents who are violent, threatening to neighbors or inflicting property damage.



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payments will continue to grow unless Congress acts when it returns from a break in September. The Democratic-led House of Representatives passed a bill in May that extends the \$600 additional weekly unemployment through the rest of the year. Still, the Republican-led Senate is trying to shrink or eliminate the payment.

Multifamily trade groups are lobbying for a set of comprehensive relief packages that include reinstating enhanced unemployment aid, housing-specific assistance and an end to blanket moratoriums. “Lawmakers in Congress and the Administration need to come back to the table and work together on comprehensive legislation that protects and supports tens of millions of American renters by extending unemployment benefits and providing desperately needed rental assistance,” NMHC president Doug Bibby said.

Is the Worst Yet To Come?

There is no consensus way to view eviction, even among property owners. Some owners want to keep properties occupied, while others would rather move out non-paying residents. Eviction moratoriums for residents who lost jobs through the pandemic are humane, but blanket prohibitions prevent landlords from removing residents who are violent, threatening to neighbors or inflicting property damage. In markets with weak demand and high vacancy rates, owners

may be more willing to extend forbearance because there is little potential to bring in paying residents. In areas with strong demand, owners might prefer to evict more quickly to bring in paying customers.

Though it might seem that residents and owners are on different sides, in reality, what is good for one is good for both. Owners don’t want vacant units or to spend time and money in court. Rent payments help owners to pay mortgages and maintain the properties for the benefit of residents.

Though a large wave of evictions hasn’t occurred and doesn’t seem imminent, apartment residents are facing an extraordinary hardship given the loss of jobs that is likely to persist beyond this year. Eviction moratoriums are not a long-term solution, and the payment calculus can deteriorate rapidly, depending on the state of the economy and government policy.

“The industry remains encouraged by the degree residents have prioritized their housing obligations so far, but each passing day means more distress for individuals and families, and greater risk for the nation’s housing sector,” Bibby says. “If policymakers want to prevent a health and economic crisis from quickly evolving into a housing crisis, they should act quickly to extend financial assistance to renters.” ■

Source: multihousingnews.com



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Can You Pick and Choose Your Felons?

By Elaine M Simpson

Is your city, county or state considering a “Fair Chance Housing” Law? We have all heard about Fair Housing, but how about Fair Chance Housing?

Human rights commissions around the country have been promoting the passage of “ban the box” or “fair chance” laws to eliminate the criminal-record questions from job and housing applications and to postpone background checks until later in the application process for applicants to be considered on their merits first. Proponents feel the best way to ensure that an individual is successful after he or she leaves

the unfortunate situation of being incarcerated is to ensure that they find housing and to ensure that they find a job.

New laws and ordinances, such as “just housing,” have already passed in several areas. The issues and the laws surrounding them are complex. As one might expect, Seattle and San Francisco were among the first. Still, Detroit recently adopted a housing ordinance to assist those with a criminal past to obtain housing and “facilitate their reentry into society.”

Continued on page 14

Providers may be asked to give the applicants a copy of the background report and identify a particular conviction or Applicants might be able to provide evidence of rehabilitation and letters of recommendation. Providers may be asked to give the applicants a copy of the background report and identify a particular conviction or unresolved arrest on which an adverse decision or action was based.

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The ordinance bars most city landlords from considering conviction history until independently determining whether the applicant is otherwise qualified apart from conviction history. The ordinance specifies the kinds of convictions that may disqualify such an applicant from renting and what type of evidence they may provide for consideration. For example, you may not consider arrests that did not result in a conviction; juvenile records; perhaps a conviction more than seven years old; an infraction, etc. Applicants might be able to provide evidence of rehabilitation and letters of recommendation. Providers may be asked to give the applicants a copy of the background report and identify a particular conviction or unresolved arrest on which an adverse decision or action was based.

For now, these new rules apply to affordable housing providers, not private housing providers; however, ALL housing providers should be cautious in using criminal records in making rental decisions. Back in April 2016, HUD's Office of General Counsel issued guidelines on the use of criminal records for real estate-related transactions. Recent federal court decisions have followed the OGC's guidance in determining liability under the Fair Housing Act for disparate impact discrimination.

If you are conducting property management of affordable housing in one of these jurisdictions, your resident selection

process and marketing and advertising will be affected. For example, it will become illegal to state "no felons" or "no criminal history allowed" in your advertising. A housing provider will have to wait until after determining the applicant is legally eligible to rent the housing unit and is qualified under the provider's criteria for assessing rental history and credit history. Historically, most of us were taught that "you can't pick and choose your felons," but now we might have to based on crimes to person or property, to preserve our duty to protect the other residents within our communities. ■

The following links are provided for further examples of legislation to help prevent unfair bias in housing against renters with a past criminal record:

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-met-housing-ordinance-arrest-record-20190425-story.html>

<https://sf-hrc.org/fair-chance-ordinance>

<https://www.seattle.gov/civilrights/civil-rights/fair-housing/fair-chance-housing>

www.ci.richmond.ca.us/3698/City-of-Richmond-Fair-Chance-Housing-Ord

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Steven Santiago — New Maintenance Technician at The Royce at Trumbull for Paredim Communities

Jonathan Sewell — New Maintenance Technician at Spectra Pearl for Trio Properties

Holland Florian — New Property Manager at Front Street Lofts and 81 Arch for Trio Properties

Ashlee Castellano — New Leasing Consultant at The Novella for Trio Properties

Alexis Chambers — New Leasing Consultant at Rivers Bend for Trio Properties

Haley Criscitelli — New Leasing Consultant at Spectra Pearl for Trio Properties

Zachery Peters — New Leasing Consultant at Trail Run for Trio Properties

Emily Scott — New Leasing Consultant at Spectra Plaza for Trio Properties

Kay-Ann Davis — New Leasing Consultant at Broadleaf Boulevard for Trio Properties

Kristen Perkins — New Leasing Consultant at Whitney Modern, Front Street Lofts and 81 Arch for Trio Properties

Kristin Lamarre — New Leasing Consultant at Harbor Heights for Trio Properties

Emmerson Davis — New Maintenance Technician at Rivers Bend for Trio Properties

Brittney Ferrell — New Leasing Consultant at Highcroft Apartments for Trio Properties

Brad Comollo — New Maintenance Technician at Rivers Bend for Trio Properties

KathyAnn Roche — New Human Resources Administrator for Trio Properties

Promotions:

Zeanetsey Zayas from Konover Residential has been promoted to Property Manager

Tomas Medina — Maintenance Supervisor at Whitney Modern for Trio Properties

Courtney Perkas — Property Manager and Software Support for Trio Properties

Special Designations:

Congratulations to **Jennifer Woelfel** from Parallel 41 on her recent CAM designation! ■

CTAA Vendor Spotlight



Who are you, what company are you with, and what do you do at your company?

My name is Licia Ciotti. As the sales manager at United Cleaning & Restoration, my main focus is on developing and maintaining strong relationships with our

clientele. Through our “Care at Work” business model, we put “care” in everything we do. Care for our clients, our team members, our business partners and, most importantly, our product. Coordinating networking events, interacting through social media, and hosting educational and social events at our large facility are responsibilities that I whole-heartedly enjoy!

How long has United Cleaning & Restoration been in business?

United Cleaning & Restoration has been a family-owned and operated business since 1998. Many of our team members have been a part of the United Family since their inception.

What services does United Cleaning & Restoration provide and who is the clientele?

United Cleaning & Restoration is a 24-hour property damage, cleaning and restoration company. We offer all services related to your property damage, such as Emergency Board Ups & Loss Mitigation, Mold Remediation, Asbestos Abatement, Packing & Moving Contents, Contents Cleaning & Storage, Building & Surface Cleaning/Disinfecting (including hoarder units), Reconstruction & Remodeling. We handle residential and commercial losses of all sizes with our in-house teams. Each production manager has a specialized crew of experienced tradespeople, a mitigation team and an in-house coordinator to ensure all our clients’ needs are met. Our clientele is anyone who suffers a property loss who is looking for caring guidance, open lines of communication and a superior work product.

What benefits will clients experience by working with your company?

United Cleaning & Restoration’s “Care at Work” business model is what has claimed us as a leader in our industry.

This is something all our clients experience and benefit from. Our signed Certificates of Satisfaction speaks to our highly regarded reputation. With over 35 years of expertise in the industry, our creativity, willingness to work with any claim, our customized care plan and our impeccable relationships with insurance companies, adjusters and claims managers are what delivers our clients a wealth of value.

What is unique about United Cleaning & Restoration?

As the sales manager at United Cleaning & Restoration, I feel strongly that it is essential for you to share your tragic experience with me, directly, rather than an answering service, which is why all my clients have my personal cell. In this case, I can assist you immediately. Also, United Cleaning & Restoration produces the majority of our jobs from start to finish, in-house. We engage specialized tradespeople, if necessary, but the majority of our work is our own. We are a one-stop-shop in nature, with a personal touch, on the job. You will feel our “Care at Work” from the initial phone call through the last day on the job.

What steps should be taken for interested parties who are interested in establishing a relationship with United Cleaning & Restoration?

Please call me, Licia Ciotti, 24 hours a day/7 days a week, at United Cleaning & Restoration at (203) 464-4171 or (800) 835-0740 to let me know-how I can help you or any of your clients! ■

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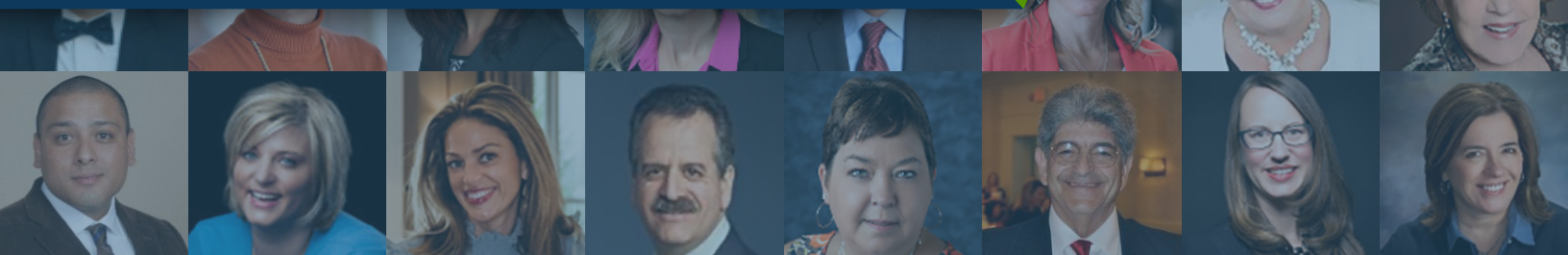
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What's the New Normal? Leasing Apartments During the Pandemic

By Elaine M Simpson



“The times, they are a-changin’.”

Even though the first point of contact for a prospect is still the phone call or email, in today's “pandemic” environment, leasing and move-in practices have temporarily changed. Basically, a person can rent an apartment and move in without being face-to-face with a leasing consultant. Who knows, these changes could become the “new normal.”

With limited opportunities to build a relationship with your prospect, first impressions based on telephone techniques and customer service, community and apartment interior appearance, quality of your virtual tours/photography, closing techniques and follow up become your best tools of the trade.

Terrific Telephone Techniques — Let's start with the telephone. Your prospect has been surfing the web, and your community made their “shortlist.” They picked up

the phone and called you first. How are you going to make that great first impression that will ultimately influence their decision-making process by making your community stand out above the rest? Your customer service skills must shine!

Do you have a “suggested” leasing script for your staff members? It helps to coach and guide them, especially if they are new to the business. If you don't have one, we can supply you with a basic one that you can customize. The person answering the phone should have a smile in their voice and introduce themselves before asking each caller for their name, a preferred telephone number to use in case of disconnection of call and asking how they heard about the community. Follow that by asking what type of floor plan they are interested in and how soon they need to move. Please ask if they are familiar with the community, then offer to

simultaneously review the community website with them to take a virtual tour.

Have each staff member create their own description of the community, its amenities and each floor plan. Paint a picture with words so each prospect can follow along and visualize each amenity and each room of their new home. We have a great list of recommended words to help you with this task. Remember to sell the features and benefits while personalizing the call by using the caller's name during the conversation. Be friendly, energized and start using your assumptive closing techniques from the beginning.

Some communities are allowing self-guided physical tours, but by appointment only. When the prospects show up, they are given a packet by a staff member standing behind a protective shield. The packet contains a key fob and a map with directions on finding the models and or vacant apartment homes. When the tour is over, the packet is placed in a box on the way out, and the key fobs are sanitized for the next tour. Take this opportunity to ask the prospect what they thought of the home; what did they like the best? Ask for any objections so that these can be addressed and discussed and hopefully overcome.

Community and Apartment Home Appearance — Quality of photography and videography is important for online tours, but the physical appearance and attributes of the asset must

Have each staff member create their own description of the community, its amenities and each floor plan. Paint a picture with words so each prospect can follow along and visualize each amenity and each room of their new home.

be addressed before photos. How is the curb appeal of your community? Do you need to have the maintenance staff or the landscapers tidy up your entrance with a few freshly tended flower beds and fresh paint on the curbs and parking areas? Are the signs and directories clean and up to date? Has the parking lot been swept, and is the asphalt in good condition? Are the weeds under control, and have the sidewalks been swept and maintained? Check out the path to the model or vacant apartments too.

Inside the apartments, sounds and smells are important but not as important as the lighting and layout of the floorplan. Mini models are still a great way to highlight apartment features. Try adding a few eye-popping items to pique interest and make the viewer remember your unique apartment. Add something quirky and fun in an unusual spot in the kitchen or bathroom. Use color to enhance the experience. After setting the stage, make sure you choose a professional photographer or videographer to create your photos and videos.

Closing Techniques — All of the closing techniques you learned can still be used, but you have fewer opportunities to use them when a prospect is doing a self-guided tour. You may no longer have the luxury of a stroll around the community with your prospects, so be sure to close them whenever possible.

The window of opportunity is much, much smaller now. Need a refresher on all the different ways to close on a prospect? We have an e-learning course for that!

The Follow-Up — Say you knocked their socks off with your greeting and descriptions, and they have gone on their virtual tour. What's left? The follow-up is your last opportunity to close and collect! A timely follow up by telephone, text, mail or email expressing your desire to welcome them to your community will set you apart from the competition. You would be surprised how many apartment communities do not follow up with their prospects, and studies show that 25% of your prospects you follow up with will lease from you.

The Move-In Process — So perhaps, without ever meeting your prospects, they chose your community to be their next home and have submitted their application and qualifying documents online. You and your great customer service were the icing on the cake. All leasing paperwork is now computerized and finalized with e-signatures. If a "wet" signature is required, a special area inside or outside your leasing office can be designated for pick-up and drop-off of documents.

Of course, by now, we assume that everyone is following the CDC Guide-

lines regarding sanitizing everyone and everything and are following the proper social distancing rules. That includes procedures for making each vacant apartment market-ready. Be ready to explain to each prospect the methods your company is using to keep prospects, residents, employees and vendors safe. If you have special cleaning chemicals and protocols, tell your prospects about them. Knowledge is power. Make them feel comfortable about their decision to become a part of your community.

And what about the keys? Agree upon a specified time for the move-in and unlock the home in advance or upon arrival. Leave the keys inside the apartment with a written request to text or call the office upon receipt OR use the packet approach again. Do a pre-inspection and mark all items that you know are not perfect, and leave the list for the new resident to complete and return or scan and email back to the office.

It's still all about the basics with a few new twists and turns. Are you struggling with the changes? Occupancy Solutions offers online e-learning courses and webinars on all of these topics and more. I am also available to do custom webinars now and once the current pandemic passes, in-person training sessions or keynotes. Visit our website at www.occupancysolutions.com and call 1 (800) 865-0948 for your free consultation today. ■





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