

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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DAVID CORDERO

## Leading an alliance to help homeless

**100**  
**OC'S MOST**  
**INFLUENTIAL**  
2019'S GAME CHANGERS IN ORANGE COUNTY

Apartment Association executive director has assisted in housing over 100 in the last year

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In the world of those who want to end homelessness, the word of the moment is "collaboration." Of course, it's one thing to talk

### MEET THE PEOPLE WHO SHAPED OUR YEAR

Welcome to Day One of the Register's 100 Most Influential People in Orange County. We are highlighting people who changed our lives in 2019.

Some entertained, some educated. All, in some way, inspired.

You may know their names, but others will be surprises.

about collaboration. It's another to do it.

David Cordero, executive director of the Apartment Association of Orange County, manages to do both.

In September, Cordero brought his association — which represents about 2,900 rental-property owners, property managers and suppliers — into a partnership with Orange County United Way's

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### EDITOR'S NOTE

The Register will reveal its list of Orange County's 100 Most Influential People for 2019 over the next 10 days.

### MORE GAME CHANGERS

Each day of the series, more people will be profiled. Meet more influencers inside. **PAGE A6**

### MORE ON HOMELESSNESS

A new program helps foster kids avoid homelessness. **PAGE A3**



LEONARD ORTIZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

David Cordero, executive director of the Apartment Association of Orange County in Santa Ana. Cordero has engaged the organization in Orange County United Way's Welcome Home OC initiative.

# Cordero

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Welcome Home OC homeless initiative. Renting to people struggling with homelessness — in a market where less risky tenants aren't hard to find — hasn't always been an easy sell in Cordero's world.

But now the Apartment Association and Welcome Home OC are working together to convince local landlords and property managers that they should rent units to homeless people who are using government vouchers to help pay for a place to live. Cordero's group and United Way are providing workshops and other outreach to ease concerns about potential tenants and about the challenges in handling vouchers.

Collaboration with the Apartment Association is crucial to Welcome Home OC's success: Members own or operate some 85,000 rental units, from small apartment buildings to sprawling complexes, throughout Orange County.

And, according to people connected with the program, Cordero's work in educating his members and encouraging them to participate has been crucial to the project's early success.

"He has been a force all throughout the year in terms of getting us where we are today," said Sue Parks, president and chief executive officer of Orange County United Way.

## Perception and reality

Welcome Home OC officially launched in March, but United Way had been testing the waters with a pilot program since late 2018. The initial goal was to get 100 people into some kind of permanent home by the end of 2019.

As of early this week, the project has housed 110 formerly homeless people — individuals and families — whose rents are being subsidized with federally-issued vouchers from programs such as Section 8 and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing. And more than half of those tenants — 57 — are renting units made available by members of the Apartment Association.

Given that Cordero's group didn't begin partnering with Welcome Home OC until September, and only held the first in a series of quarterly workshops to explain the program to interested members in October, the numbers are encouraging to both sides.

A lot of the credit is being given to Cordero, who came on board as executive director of the Apartment Association in March, returning to an organization he first worked for in 1998.

While United Way is providing staff to make Welcome Home presentations to property owners, it's up to Cordero to market the program to his group's



LEONARD ORTIZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

David Cordero is an Orange County native who grew up in Yorba Linda and now lives in Anaheim.

members. His effort has included a monthly conference call with the project's task force and many more personal calls with individual apartment owners, to help gauge their interest, answer their questions and address concerns.

"He's bringing a great deal of exposure about United Way to the apartment owners. He's stressing it," said Julia Araiza, a rental unit owner and long time Apartment Association member who has known Cordero for 20 years.

"I have full confidence in him."

Araiza described herself as a "fairly small owner" but declined to be more specific. She first heard about Welcome Home OC a year ago and, through the program, has rented an apartment the past two months to a woman who is a military veteran and has a voucher to help pay rent.

Araiza admitted to some initial reluctance — including concerns about whether a potential tenant would be someone with mental illness, a drug addiction, or, for whatever reasons, would have trouble getting along with other tenants. But her Welcome Home tenant, who had been sleeping on the streets because she felt more fearful in a shelter, has been quiet, cooperative, and, according to Araiza, ideal.

Araiza looks forward to working with Cordero to share in more detail stories like that of her tenant with other property owners, when and if the tenants are ready. That way, she said, "Apartment Association members (will) see these are real people, and sincere people, with goals."

## Streamlining

Representatives from the Apartment Association and United Way began talking more than a year ago

about the Welcome Home OC partnership. Last fall, the talk came a pilot program involving one property owner, Ernie Schroeder of Schroeder Management Co., an early proponent of Welcome Home OC.

Schroeder made 10 units available to voucher-using tenants. Now, Apartment Association members have opened up 37 units specifically to Welcome Home OC. Cordero wants to build on that over the coming year.

Cordero plays the role of a catalyst for Welcome Home OC. It would be a long, tough slog for United Way to reach out to individual apartment owners, but Cordero can talk to property owners and managers en masse from the point of view of someone who understands their concerns.

He is in a much better position to evangelize the Welcome Home OC program, which falls under the umbrella of the United to End Homelessness campaign that Orange County United Way launched in February 2018.

"I can't imagine how much harder it would be without David's leadership," said Parks of United Way. "He's talking to folks who trust him. He's able to convey the success stories we've had in a unique way because of his leadership role."

It's a role embraced by Cordero, 43, an Orange County native who grew up in Yorba Linda and now lives in Anaheim.

"This does not need to be a scary thing," Cordero said of landlords participating in Welcome Home OC.

But, for many rental-property owners, it is scary. For example, the Section 8 voucher program — which is administered by local housing agencies but follows rules set by the federal Dept. of Housing and Urban Development — has had a "less than stellar" reputa-

tion, according to Cordero.

Property owners and landlords typically view Section 8 vouchers as huge, expensive hassles — with volumes of red tape and paperwork and lost revenue while waiting for HUD-authorized sign-offs on rental units. Because of that, Section 8 voucher holders often are left searching for months to find a place that will accept them, only to have their vouchers expire before they land a dwelling.

The challenges are particularly hard for smaller, mom-and-pop type rental property owners, Cordero said.

Welcome Home OC is designed to streamline the process. The group works with the Orange County Housing Authority and city-specific housing authorities in Anaheim, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana, with a goal of providing more flexibility for property owners and, if necessary, extending the expiration date on a potential tenant's voucher.

In November, the county moved to allocate \$675,000 to Welcome Home OC, money that came after an earlier commitment of \$250,000.

Welcome Home OC helps tenants with financial assistance — everything from security deposits and move-in costs to furniture and initial household supplies. The program can defray the money a landlord might lose by holding a unit off the market during the sometimes lengthy process of HUD inspection and approval for any unit. Case managers with Welcome Home OC also can help smooth over issues that might jeopardize the landlord-tenant relationship.

While United Way representatives have brought up some of the details with Apartment Association members, it's Cordero who now is conveying the ins and outs of the program to the general membership.

## 'Point man'

The first time he worked for the Apartment Association, in the late 1990s, Cordero was a recent (1997) Pepperdine graduate, with a degree in public relations. Since then he's had stints with the Building Industry Association of Southern California and the Municipal Water District of Orange County, and in 2013 briefly served as chief of staff to former Irvine Councilman Jeffrey Lalloway. He most recently spent four years as an account manager with the Orange-based public relations agency, Communications LAB, before rejoining the Apartment Association.

Though Cordero doesn't shy away from being called "point man" for the Apartment Association's partnership with Welcome Home OC, he suggests the role is largely about the magic word — collaboration.

"This is a brand new program," Cordero said. "We're creating this together."