



MULTIFAMILY FLORIDA

2022
LEGISLATIVE SESSION
**LEAVES MUCH
UNWRITTEN**

SUMMER 2022



**KEEPING YOUR
COOL WHEN
RESIDENTS
AREN'T**

PAGE 12

**FEMALE CAMTs
USING THEIR
TOOLS FOR
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PAGE 18

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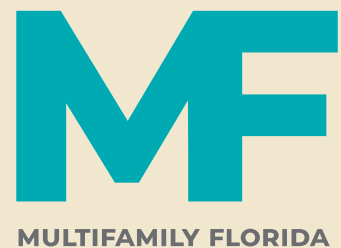
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CONTENTS

FEATURES

06

COVER STORY

2022 Legislative Session Leaves Much Unwritten

BY AMANDA WHITE

FAA GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DIRECTOR



12

Keeping Your Cool When Residents Aren't

BY PAUL BERGERON



18

Female CAMTs Using Their Tools for Success

BY CAMILA CAL



DEPARTMENTS

03

President's Message:

Customer Service Is Crucial

BY KRISTI NOVAK, CAM, CAPS
ALTMAN MANAGEMENT
COMPANY

04

FAA Update:

Feeling the Burn...out?

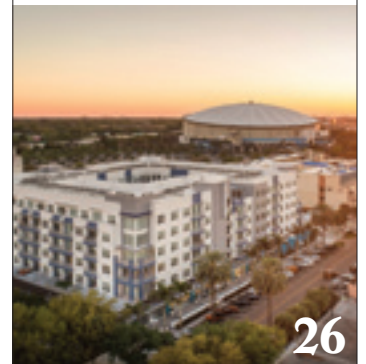
BY CHIP TATUM, CAM, CAE

26

Community Spotlight:

930 Central Flats: Community-Centered in the EDGE District

BY CAMILA CAL



32

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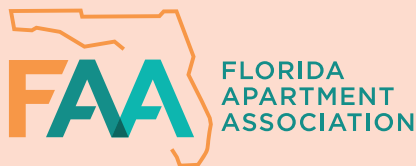
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Customer Service Is Crucial

BY KRISTI NOVAK, CAM, CAPS | ALTMAN MANAGEMENT COMPANY

HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED to you?

You're shopping in a nice clothing store or staying in an upscale hotel and you make a request that seems so simple, only to be told "No, we can't do that." Maybe the reason given has to do with company policy, or maybe no reason is given. At any rate, you're left with a bad feeling, wondering why something that seems uncomplicated turned into such a negative experience.

Likewise, we don't want our residents — our customers, if you will — to feel that their requests are being rejected without real consideration. True, current staffing levels are challenging and sometimes residents can seem demanding. At the same time, rents are rising, and residents are frustrated. Too many times, we say no without even trying for a yes. You know that great customer service can make a property excel, leading to renewals, new leases, and better net operating income, and bad customer service can make a property decline. Great customer service can also prove to be a measure of prevention when it comes to on-site conflicts.

So, how do you provide the best service with limited staff and few resources? There are three things the staff must have: professionalism, patience, and a people-first attitude.

As the saying goes, "Professionalism is not the job you do, it's how you do the job." Professionalism can set the tone right from the start, whether that's how you sound when you pick up the phone or your appearance when greeting someone in the office. We all know that the office staff should stand, smile, and greet everyone who walks in the door, but do they? Do they even notice when someone walks in? Practicing professionalism until it's second nature makes it more likely that staff members will respond appropriately to an unhappy resident. If a resident is upset about an experience with an employee or situation, it can be very easy to be defensive and react to their complaints with the same tone and volume. Keeping calm provides reassurance that the resident's concern is solvable and that you

are there to help. When someone complains, look at it as a chance to learn and improve. Usually, the team can dissect and learn from the resident's complaint. Maybe the office hours need to be changed, maintenance associates need to be more tidy, office staff needs to answer the phone promptly, etc.

Patience is essential to good customer service, and that includes listening without interrupting. You may think you know what the resident is going to say next, but if you cut them off, you're likely to be perceived as rude. That's not exactly winning over your residents or guests. Have you tried saying no and yes at the same time to a resident's request? Instead of just blurting out no, stop, think, and figure out how you can say yes while still meeting your company protocols. Example: "I am sorry that you cannot reserve the clubroom inside for a personal gathering. Let me show you our pool pavilion that you may reserve instead." Take the time to really listen to the request and then think about how you can make at least part of it happen. Most residents will be so happy that you listened and tried.

A people-first attitude builds on professionalism and patience. With this attitude, your customer service strategy should reinforce the idea of human connection. You must build relationships with your residents. This does not mean you are besties with your residents, but rather that you listen to them, get to know them, and handle their requests with respect and timeliness. No matter what the solution or resolution is, everyone wants prompt follow-up. Unfortunately, follow-up is so lacking that a little goes a long way.

Staff members who are professional, patient, and have a people-first attitude can provide great service even when a community is short-staffed. Once you have built the relationships and truly taken the time to understand the concerns, residents will work with you on the timeline of completion.

A final note: Don't forget about the employees. They also need you to carry these traits when working with them. Happy employees will lead to happy residents. **MF**



Feeling the Burn...out?

BY CHIP TATUM, CAM, CAE | EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

FOR SO MANY OF us, mentally processing what seems like an unending series of challenges, nonstop news, and even a new “bug” to be scared of (monkeypox, really?) is beyond overwhelming. You could reasonably argue that the pressures on property management professionals have never been felt more acutely than they are currently. As has been widely reported, a number of factors are contributing to this increased pressure: staffing shortages, supply chain issues, limited supply of housing — the list goes on and on.

This strain on the workforce is taking a toll on many people’s mental health and can contribute to burnout. You’re probably thinking, “Geez dude, this is not helping to boost my mental health,” but fear not: There is light at the end of the tunnel. The housing industry and many organizations are researching and focusing on providing new or expanded resources to support team members struggling with their mental health and burnout.

Last year, the National Apartment Association and SwiftBunny conducted a “Mental and Emotional Health” survey of property management professionals from across the country. The takeaways from this survey, which is being updated this year, demonstrated clearly that this renewed focus on mental and emotional health is well placed.

Some of the findings from the survey included:

- **40%** of respondents took time off as a result of “not feeling emotionally well enough to perform their jobs” (12% took a week or longer).
- **42%** of respondents reported that mental and emotional health had interfered with their personal lives.
- **27%** of respondents were unsure or unlikely to remain with their companies within the next 12 months, signaling that the “mental and emotional health issues identified in the survey warrant attention.”

(2021 NAA Mental and Emotional Health Survey, NAA, SwiftBunny)

Overall, the NAA survey concluded that the housing industry must emphasize employee mental and emotional health.

The Center for Workplace Mental Health reports that employee burnout is pervasive across a multitude of industries. In “*Beating Burnout at Work*,” the center cited a 2021 Catalyst survey that reported 88% of employees are experiencing at least some burnout, and 60% have reported high levels of burnout. Why is this important? Burnout can impact many aspects of a person’s life, including productivity, mental health, how they interact with family and friends, and their overall health.

The center provides employers and managers with six areas of focus that can improve team members’ morale and reduce burnout in the workplace.

- **Workload:** Take steps to ensure that team members at all levels have the resources to complete their tasks.
- **Autonomy and Control:** Empower team members to make decisions about how to tackle their responsibilities.
- **Reward and Recognition:** Acknowledge successes and accomplishments and reward team members for a job well done.
- **Community and a Sense of Belonging:** Find ways for your teams to connect and engage with each other outside the normal scope of their responsibilities. This connection on a more human level helps to establish rapport and trust.
- **Fairness:** This can take many forms, but most important is that all team members feel like they have opportunities to advance in their careers. Leaders should communicate the steps team members can take to position themselves for advancement.
- **Values and Purpose at Work:** We all like to believe what we are doing matters. Find ways to demonstrate how each team member’s specific

contributions positively impact the community, company, etc.

(*Beating Burnout at Work*, Center for Workplace Mental Health 2021)

Many of these suggestions might seem obvious, but many organizations and leaders are quickly realizing that a renewed focus on these fundamentals is desperately needed. The good news is, leaders do not have to wait for a companywide rollout of new resources to focus on many of them. Sometimes it just takes an inward look at how their style or behavior can impact the teams in their charge. Could they more clearly outline expectations? Could they focus on their own mental and emotional health a bit more? Could they take more time with their teams to connect outside the workplace and bond?

As Benjamin Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Every step taken now to tackle burnout and support mental and emotional health could alleviate employee turnover, boost productivity, and make a company or community the envy of its peers! At “**Cultivate,**” the *FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show* in September, experts in emotional intelligence, mental health, and harnessing resilience will inspire leaders and their teams to focus on these issues. Did someone say oceanside yoga and meditation? Heck yeah, we did!

If we are going to make an impact on mental health, morale, and burnout, we have to start with ourselves. This first step is important, but it can also be daunting. Start by establishing personal goals, and for inspiration check out the “*Anti-Burnout Challenge*” released by *Associations Now* in April. The “*Anti-Burnout Challenge*” encourages readers to focus on five specific steps to reduce burnout.

Associations Now Anti-Burnout Challenge:

- **Day 1:** *Practice Shutting Down.* Find yourself working way beyond normal operating hours? At a certain point each day pick a time where you “shut it down” and go off the grid.
- **Day 2:** *Find a Moment of Self Compassion.* Beating yourself up over

missed deadlines or a mistake? We can be our own worst enemies sometimes. Focus on a specific thing that you have been too hard on yourself about, and give yourself a pass.

- **Day 3:** *Complete the Stress Cycle.* After stressful situations or days your body needs the opportunity to physically release the tension and recenter. It’s all about using your body, not your mind, to complete the cycle. Physical exercise, measured breathing, making art, and even having a good laugh or cry can be effective.
- **Day 4:** *Remember Your Purpose.* If your job is stressing you out, that can lead you to become cynical about the value of your contributions to the profession. Grab a pencil and some paper, and take 15 minutes to scribble down how you came into the industry, the people you have impacted (team members, peers, residents), and why what you do matters. (P.S. - It DOES matter.)
- **Day 5:** *Make a Connection.* Call that friend or family member you haven’t chatted with in a while or send someone a random thoughtful note. Remind yourself of the importance of human connection. Don’t worry fellow introverts — you can make these connections on your own terms. (*Anti-Burnout Challenge*, Associations Now 2022)

The beauty of this challenge and the other steps described is you don’t have to tackle them all, and certainly not all at once. It would be ironic, to say the least, for you to be stressed out by your plan to stave off burnout. Pick the approaches that make the most sense to you, and give them a try. We can all move toward improved mental wellness — one step at a time. **MF**

You can read the full articles online on our mental health resource page: <https://www.faahq.org/mentalhealth>

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2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION LEAVES MUCH UNWRITTEN

BY AMANDA WHITE

FAA GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

The 2022 regular 60-day Florida legislative session ended on March 14 with much still unsettled, but the state's apartment industry had numerous advocacy victories this year.

Not long after the hanky drop in the Capitol to celebrate the end of session, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed the Legislature's newly drawn congressional district maps and called a special session for the week of April 18. Another special session related to property insurance was scheduled for May.

Regardless of what shakes out of a special session (or sessions), Florida's multifamily industry can celebrate that many of the bills the industry supported made it to the governor's desk once the dust settled. Equally important, however, are the numerous and onerous measures blocked from advancing through the legislative process.

Codify Apartment Employee Screening and Key-Access Best Practices

In fall 2021, Miya Marcano was brutally murdered by a maintenance technician who worked at the same property where she worked and lived. This crime sparked a flurry of debate among local and state elected officials regarding apartment safety and employee background screening procedures.

In light of pre-session discussions related to apartment safety after the tragic murder of Marcano, it became clear legislation related to apartment employee screening and key access was likely to be introduced during the 2022 session. At the Platform meeting, FAA leaders and members determined that it was critical for the apartment industry to be proactive, rather than reactive, in identifying a policy solution. The decision to be proactive ensured that the industry had an alternative to the overly burdensome solutions that were being discussed by legislators, such as Florida Department of Law Enforcement background screening and fingerprinting that would be conducted on an ongoing basis throughout an individual's employment.

Prior to the start of the 2022 session, FAA drafted an alternative policy solution that merely codified industry best practices related to employee background screening and key access. Thankfully, after many meetings with Sen. Linda Stewart and Rep. Robin Bartleman (D-104), the alternative proposed by FAA was ultimately included in the legislation.

As a result, FAA supported Stewart's SB 898 and Bartleman's HB 577. This legislation was nicknamed "Miya's Law."

Miya's Law

- Requires all apartment employees to undergo a background screening as a condition of employment. This screening can be done by a credit reporting agency in accordance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act and must screen records in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. (effective Jan. 1, 2023).
- Requires apartment communities to establish policies and procedures related to key access and to maintain a log accounting for the issuance and return of keys. The state Department of Business and Professional Regulation can request proof of compliance during annual inspections (effective Jan. 1, 2023).
- Increases from 12 to 24 hours the reasonable notice to enter an apartment home (effective Jan. 1, 2023).
- Prohibits hourly rental of an accommodation (effective July 1, 2022).

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Miya's Law Informational Webinar

SB 898, to codify apartment employee screening and key-access best practices, is the subject of an informational webinar for FAA members, tentatively scheduled for July 27 at 10 a.m. Attorney Roger Feicht of Gunster, who specializes in labor and employment law, will provide an overview of the new statute and best practices for compliance. More information regarding the webinar and a link to register will be shared with FAA members. If you are an FAA member and would like to be on the distribution list for the webinar invite, please email amanda@faahq.org.

SB 898 passed both chambers in the final days of session and was sent to the governor for his signature.

Permit Affordable and Workforce Housing Property Tax Discounts

Florida's housing affordability challenges have taken center stage, and the apartment industry stands ready to be part of the solution. This session, FAA urged the Legislature to pass HB 495 (Rep. Anthony Rodriguez) and SB 1150 (Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez), which provided local governments with the ability (but did not require them) to waive or reduce property taxes for affordable and workforce housing apartments.

SB 1150 had strong bipartisan support in the Senate and as a result, the bill cleared its first two committees, which was a significant accomplishment. Unfortunately, the legislation stalled because the House companion (HB 495) did not advance. While the House's lack of action on this bill was disappointing, FAA believes bipartisan support for this legislative concept remains strong and it is possible that the industry will continue to pursue this as a legislative priority in 2023. If passed in a future

session, this legislation would be a game-changer for Florida's housing supply and unlock additional financial incentive opportunities at the local level for affordable housing.

Clarify Fire Radio System Requirements

Across the state, the patchwork of local regulations related to fire radio system requirements remains a significant challenge for apartment owners and operators. Some local governments are holding certificates of occupancy hostage, while others are constantly moving the goalpost for compliance. In response to this issue, FAA urged the Legislature to pass legislation to clarify fire department radio signal requirements for new and existing high-rise buildings.

Unfortunately, the language that was drafted by FAA did not get introduced during the 2022 session. However, other legislation related to this issue, SB 1190, which was strongly supported by FAA, passed both chambers. SB 1190 exempts certain apartment buildings from having to comply with the fire radio signal requirements. The exemption applies to buildings with:

- Wood-frame construction.
- A maximum of 150 units.
- A maximum height of 75 feet.
- Dwelling units that discharge to the exterior or a corridor that leads directly to an exit.

At the time of this publication, SB 1190 was still awaiting DeSantis' signature.

While this legislation is an important first step, FAA believes more must be done to standardize the policies and procedures concerning fire radio system



requirements across the state. As such, FAA anticipates the association may continue to advocate for further reforms during the 2023 session.

Affordable Housing Funding

The FY 22-23 state budget was also a victory for the apartment industry because it included record funding for affordable housing, with \$53.25 million in funding for the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program and \$209.47 in funding for the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program.

FAA Defeated Problematic Legislation

Successful advocacy isn't just about celebrating the legislation we help pass. In fact, the bills that you are able to stop dead in their tracks are just as important. During the 2022 session, FAA successfully opposed legislation or amendments that would have:

- Established source of income protections statewide.
- Capped rent increases.
- Established an eviction expungement process.
- Sealed eviction records related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and more. **MF**

2023 FAA Legislative Platform Meeting

While it's important to celebrate the industry's 2022 victories, it is never too early to think about 2023, and FAA needs your input. All FAA members will receive an advocacy survey via email, which will provide you with an opportunity to weigh in on the issues impacting your business and the legislative initiatives that you think the association should concentrate on in 2023. Please take time to complete this survey, and plan now to attend the FAA Legislative Platform meeting at the 2022 FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show in Hollywood, Florida, on September 28. In the meantime, if there is a legislative proposal or advocacy initiative that you would like to see FAA focus on in the future, please email amanda@faahq.org.



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Keeping Your Cool When Residents Aren't

De-Escalating Conflict Is Vital in Today's Apartment Living Culture

BY PAUL BERGERON



RESIDENT CONFLICT CAN BEGIN seemingly innocently before escalating rapidly.

Community manager Aileen Ocasio knows firsthand about the experience, having dealt with a resident this year who left her “shaking” and eventually fearing for her life through intimidating behavior after she pointed out a simple lease violation of him leaving too many boxes on his porch.

The situation began weeks earlier when this new resident was flagged for leaving his birdcage and other unapproved items on his front porch. After an initial verbal warning, the conversation became volatile — “he was livid,” Ocasio said — before he ultimately understood and removed the items. “Once we came to terms, the mood turned to laughter and he was telling me that I was his friend, etc.,” said Ocasio, a 20-plus-year industry professional whose community is in Brooksville, Fla.

Soon after, while walking the property, Ocasio noticed that the same resident left tall stacks of boxes on his porch — another violation.

“I approached him, and he began screaming, pointing to what he said were other violations on the property,” she said. “I tried to explain, but he just continued shouting at me. We were just going around in circles.” Ocasio walked away, and he followed her to her car, screaming, right up to her car window — to the point that his words turned to spit, too. “I told him that this conversation is now over and everything will be handled in writing from now on.”

The resident then began following her when she walked the property, and because Ocasio lives in the neighborhood where she works, she said this resident even began tracking her down at the local grocery store. “He even stopped traffic one day at an intersection just to keep up with my car. I reported his behavior to law enforcement and, unfortunately, there wasn’t much they could do. It was a very frightening experience.”

She soon after sent an eviction notice, and he was removed on Jan. 31. Ocasio said that at least one other resident broke their lease to move out because of this resident’s similar behavior.

“From this experience, I learned to ignore verbal threats and to handle more communication in writing if I have to,” Ocasio said. “Generally, I want to give others the courtesy of trying to talk to people and reason with them, but nowadays you never know what might happen. I was relieved when he finally left.”

Survey information from the past year consistently shows that residents are a bit “angrier” than they were pre-pandemic. And why not? Health and economic stresses created difficult and sometimes devastating effects on their lives.

Apartment communities’ on-site staff members, too, are stressed and stretched in most cases. New responsibilities — ones some would say they “didn’t sign up for” when they took their jobs — are weighing on them each day that they arrive to work.

These colliding forces can result in short fuses in the residents and perhaps even unhealthy reactions by on-site staff — whether it be the property managers, leasing professionals, or maintenance teams. Disagreements with co-workers can escalate as well.

De-escalation is a group of communication strategies designed to reduce tension and remove communication barriers in conflict situations. Anyone can learn de-escalation skills, but they take practice to master.

Often, such interactions with residents play out with them being more interested in venting than hearing anything on-site staff members have to say,

according to training material for apartment management professionals developed by South Carolina-based Grace Hill.

“It’s a trigger from any variety of daily or persistent frustrations in their lives; it’s human nature, right?” said Stephanie Anderson, CAM, CAPS, Grace Hill’s senior director of communication and social media.

Anderson spent many years as an on-site team member.

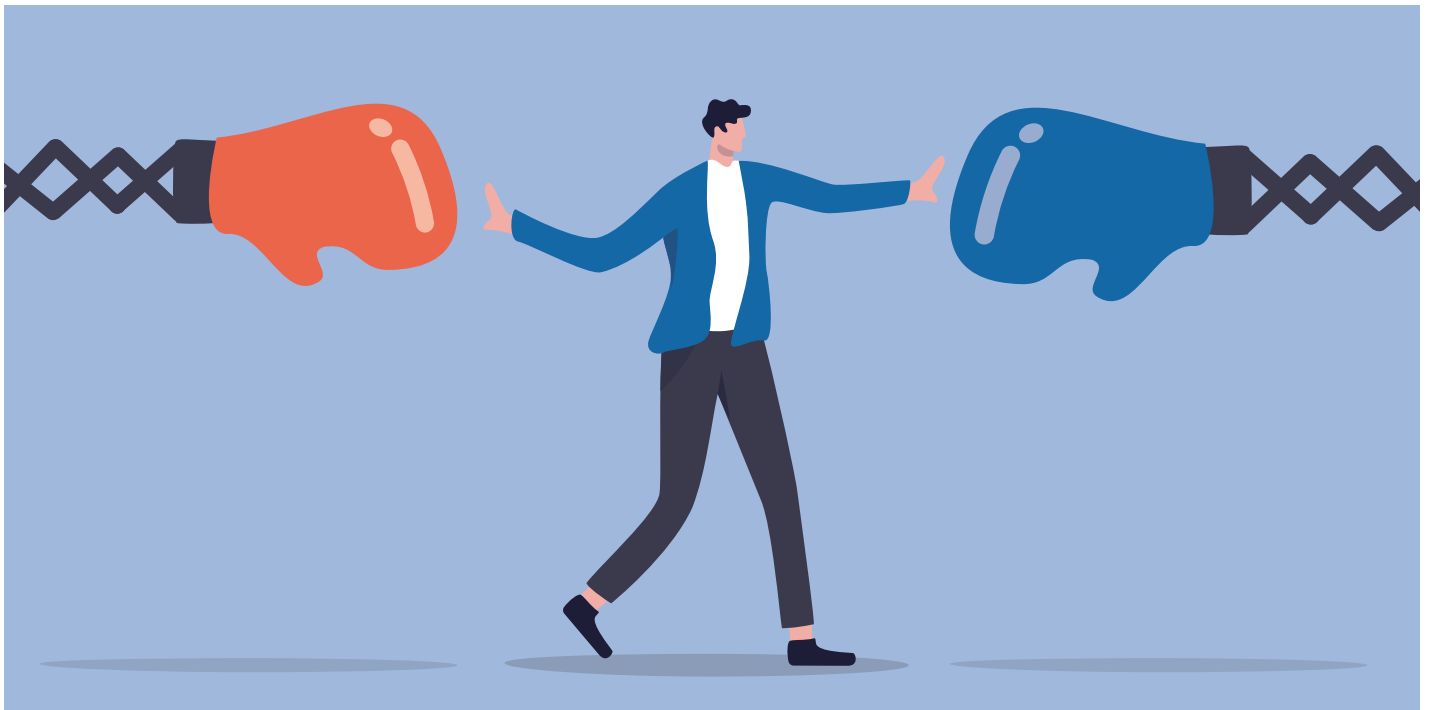
“It can be hard to know what to do when anger is directed at you,” she said. “How can you respond in a constructive, respectful way? How can you keep yourself safe and avoid making the situation worse?”

What do you do? Anderson said you must resist the temptation to respond aggressively.

“Raising your voice, shaking a fist, and getting in someone’s face isn’t going to stop a confrontation,” she said, citing recommendations from Grace Hill training materials.

“It’s more likely to escalate it. You might want to try to convince the other person to relax. Unfortunately, telling someone to calm down often has the opposite effect.”

“Maybe you decide to diffuse the tension with a joke. While humor has its place, it often backfires in the middle of a conflict. You might think you’re lightening the mood while the other person thinks you’re not taking them seriously or, even worse, making fun of them.”





Life of an APAC Dollar

Since 1971, APAC has helped to elect pro-multifamily industry candidates from across Florida.



1. FAA Members Contribute to APAC

FAA members make personal and/or corporate contributions to APAC in several ways throughout the year. All contributions are pooled together to help elect or reelect local and state candidates who support the apartment industry.



2. The APAC BOD Budgets for Success



Each election cycle, the FAA government affairs team and the APAC Board of Directors (APAC BOD) prepare a budget to support candidates based on the industry's strategic goals and regardless of political party.

3. The APAC BOD Oversees the Contribution Approval Process

The APAC BOD meets at least three times a year and is responsible for election cycle budgeting, the candidate screening and endorsement process, and the approval of political contributions throughout the year as Florida's political landscape evolves.

Bipartisan campaign contributions are prioritized by the APAC BOD based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to:



a Candidates who serve or will serve as committee chairs or in leadership positions for both political parties in the Florida House and Senate.



b Candidates who have demonstrated a willingness to work collaboratively with the apartment industry or who have a voting record that aligns with the industry's positions on many issues.



c Strategic races or regions in the state where the FAA is making an effort to build stronger relationships with elected officials.

4. APAC Disburses Campaign or Political Committee Contributions

Upon approval from the APAC BOD, the FAA government affairs staff disburses APAC funds to local and state candidates from both political parties throughout the election cycle in accordance with the APAC budget and the industry's strategic objectives. This process typically involves an in-person meeting with the candidate to discuss the policy issues that matter most to the apartment industry.

A financially strong APAC ensures FAA and its local affiliates can continue to build strong relationships with candidates and elected officials at the local and state level. Ultimately, these relationships provide FAA members with a valuable seat at the table when public policy is being made locally or in the halls of the state Capitol in Tallahassee.



Visit FAAHQ.org/APACNOW to invest in APAC today.

Another doomed course of action is the passive-aggressive response to conflict, which can be summed up this way: “I’ll let you win this time, but I’ll get revenge.”

“You choose to accommodate the other party and resolve the issue to their satisfaction,” according to Grace Hill. “Rather than putting the issue behind you for good, however, you let bad feelings about the conflict grow. Finally, they bubble to the surface as sneaky, indirect behavior intended to punish the other party.”

Passive aggression is rarely useful or effective. Instead, it can lead to greater conflict. A passive-aggressive response is never recommended.

The National Apartment Association (NAA) offers some tips and guidance.

“While one approach to conflict resolution is avoidance, it is often not recommended. When a resident is upset, avoiding the situation may not help,” according to NAA.

“Making oneself unavailable or prolonging a meeting may cause further negative feelings that could otherwise be prevented if handled in a more timely manner. If the manager is unavailable to speak with the resident, have a plan in place for either an assistant manager to step

in or assure the resident that the manager will be in contact within a specified amount of time.

“This amount of time should be determined by the owner/management company and will vary depending on the size of the community and employee workload. Regardless of the time frame, immediately handling situations helps prevent upset residents from experiencing further distress, sharing negative thoughts of the community with family and friends, and even posting reputation-harming content on social media and review sites.”

Follow these tips from NAA:

Stay calm. This isn’t just about professionalism — if you remain calm, the other person may mirror your response.

Watch your body language. This is very important. An angry person is quick to pick up on — and sometimes exaggerate — nonverbal cues. Try to be relaxed but alert, confident but nonthreatening. For example, don’t cross your arms, roll your eyes, sigh, or clench your fists.

Maintain personal space. This helps demonstrate a nonthreatening demeanor and keep you safe. If the other person crowds you, politely request that you both take a step back. Don’t touch the other person.



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Be empathetic. Empathy is a key component of communication. Being able to understand someone's feelings will help you understand the impact your words will have on them. Always consider the other person's point of view. Don't be dismissive of their feelings or concerns.

Be a good listener. Many times, the key to de-escalation is listening. People want to feel heard and understood. Set aside your assumptions and judgment and truly listen to their words. Then, summarize what you've heard. This helps avoid miscommunication and demonstrates respect.

Offer choices. If you tell someone what you think they should do, they might disagree with you simply because the ongoing conflict makes them feel that the two of you are on opposing sides. When you can, propose a couple of choices instead. This helps create a more collaborative atmosphere and empowers the other person.

These strategies are effective, but remember, no two situations are the same. If you feel unsafe or conflict continues to escalate despite your best efforts, contact your supervisor. **MF**



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FEMALE CAMTs

Using Their Tools for Success



BY CAMILA CAL

IT'S NO SECRET THAT the maintenance technician profession has long been a male-dominated field. In fact, according to career planning website Zippia.com, 95.7% of all building maintenance technicians are men, while only 4.3% are women. The multifamily industry, however, is taking strides to close the gap thanks to an increasing number of women stepping into roles within apartment maintenance.

Kris Millerschone, CAMT, PMC, is a regional service manager at Mid-America Apartment Communities (MAA) as well as a CAMT instructor for the First Coast Apartment Association. Prior to her current role, she was a maintenance supervisor with MAA for 13 years.

"Believe it or not, I didn't even want to do maintenance. I started out as a painter and love to do painting. Then I was kind of thrown into a unit with a big, long list and [my employer] said 'punch this unit' and I'm looking at this piece of paper like I don't have a clue what I'm doing. The next thing I knew, I was on call," she said. Millerschone went on to obtain her EPA and pool certification, and a year later was offered a supervisory position. Since then, she has remained in a supervisory role for almost 30 years.

"[Maintenance] is something that I didn't want to do that I love to do now," she said. "When it gets in your blood, it's in your blood. You can try to get out all day long, but it just brings you right back."

Millerschone said she has observed more women working in technician jobs and as they grow and are promoted, the industry will see an increasing number of women starting the CAMT certification process. She believes that, in the past, women have been scared to work as maintenance professionals because it is a predominantly male field.

"I remember the first day I started teaching in 2012. My first class was like 50 people. I was so nervous because I'm thinking 'I'm in a room full of men.' It wasn't the fact of speaking in front of anybody. It was the fact that I'm in a room full of men and I'm a female and a

KRIS MILLERSCHONE

"Be yourself. Don't try to get male acceptance. Just like any other job that you're doing, you may get some pushback, and that's okay. But you stand your ground. Don't let anyone push you around because you're a female. Get as much education as you can. Continue to move forward, continue to grow. Being in a male-dominant field is not going to stop you from going as far as you want to go. It's your destiny."



supervisor. What is the feedback I'm going to get?" she said. "And I was amazed at how I was accepted with open arms. I've never had a bad class. I've never had a bad experience. They're very open. I mean, it's like I'm one of the guys."

Along with the basics of maintenance, she teaches her students to prioritize customer service, treat their residents and teams with respect, balance work and home life, and remain humble as they progress. She emphasized that one of the most important lessons she instills in her students is that they must possess loyalty and passion for the multifamily housing industry.



“Your passion is actually what’s going to get you through some of your hardest and toughest days. I look at this industry as a love/hate relationship. There are days that you’ll love it and there are days that you’ll love to hate it. But we keep moving forward because of the passion we have.”

Valerie Gonzalez Arroyo, maintenance technician at Springs at Cape Coral, is the Southwest Florida Apartment Association’s second-ever female CAMT graduate. She also recently passed her EPA certification exam.

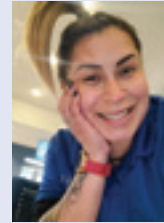
“I feel very proud to be the second female CAMT in my area, especially because it’s a profession that is generally dominated by men. To me, this shows that there are no limits if you are passionate about what you do.”

Arroyo explained that she chose this field because she knows she possesses the preparation, capacity, and experience to carry out the tasks that the position requires. She considers herself to be a versatile, multifaceted woman who enjoys learning new things every day to improve her skills, a quality that is vital when it comes to fast-paced maintenance work. Her favorite part of the job is the ability to solve problems that occur in residents’ apartments. She said it fills her with satisfaction to see the residents happy and thankful for a job well done.

“The professional field of maintenance is completely new for women since it is a job that is dominated by men. But now we are in a time period where we can no longer say that a job is for a man or a

VALERIE GONZALEZ ARROYO

“The most important lesson that I’ve learned as a CAMT is that there are no limits to wanting to achieve something. You have the capacity to learn and acquire knowledge, no matter age or gender. Always complete your tasks with professionalism, and always remain conscious of everyone’s safety.”



woman. We all have the capacity to prepare ourselves and achieve what we like to do.

“Jobs don’t belong to a gender, they belong to a person that prepares themselves, dedicates time and effort, and possesses the knowledge to succeed.”

There’s no one who understands the qualities necessary for success more than Chiccorra Connor, founder and CEO of Occupancy Heroes Inc., which provides a suite of services to help multifamily teams manage, maintain, and optimize their properties. Part of the company includes Maintenance Heroes, a division that is focused on all things maintenance – staffing, training, and more. Occupancy Heroes

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CHICCORRA CONNOR

"Do it, do it, do it — and be great. You're paving the way for so many and you have no idea who is watching you. So if you're not going to be great for yourself, be great for them. Go out and be great. Just do it."



has seen a 12% increase in females applying for its available maintenance positions nationwide since 2020, Connor said.

"It is a recent change. But that's not to say that women were never interested before, because I can name at least three award-winning female maintenance techs that have been in the field for years. What I am saying is that more women are now having the courage to express that interest out loud.

And that's for a few different reasons," she said. "Number one is because so many more people, both male and female, are having conversations about women empowerment. And, as a nation, we are striving to be more intentional about inclusion, not only in the workplace but in our everyday lives. This has given women the confidence that they need to step out and do things that maybe they've always wanted to do but didn't have the confidence to do before."

Connor said that women are simply seeing the maintenance field as a career opportunity with great benefits, which can benefit their families, too. She believes the change involves women having the desire to be certified in order to bring more to the table professionally, especially because they have to face obstacles and judgment that their male counterparts do not.

"Oftentimes, women deal with a lot of male chauvinism. I don't even do labor-intensive stuff, but I'm constantly dealing with male chauvinism. In order to eliminate this nonsense — because that's what it is, just pure nonsense — we have to grow as people and we have to understand what it is to be totally inclusive. And then we just need to do it. To do that, we must change our thought pattern and our language."

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Using maintenance job descriptions as an example, Connor encourages the industry to remove the requirement that applicants need to lift a certain amount of weight because that eliminates and disqualifies many highly skilled people.

“So maybe a woman can’t lift a certain amount of pounds, but she excels at other things. [Occupancy Heroes] hires women who are amazing, with amazing attention to detail. And that’s a great asset to any maintenance team.

“If you look at the world today, everything is moving over to tech. I mean, we’ve got smart homes and apps galore. Maintenance teams now need thinkers and savvier people to get the job done. It’s not just about having the muscle and being able to repair something anymore. We need to focus more on the technical aspects of the job and put it in writing. Because when you put something in writing, it becomes the standard that your teams go by. [Teams] will constantly judge women based on physical requirements and throw it up in their faces anytime they struggle until we change the narrative for everyone,” she said. **MF**




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930 Central Flats: Community-Centered in the EDGE District

BY CAMILA CAL

IN DOWNTOWN ST. PETERSBURG, the historic EDGE District is a widely sought destination and an ideal urban residential area. As a Florida Main Street and Main Street America member, the EDGE District aims to plan, promote, and advocate for a vibrant community that remains focused on maintaining its distinct personality. Not only does the district offer restored buildings, eclectic landscaping, public art, and a wide selection of shopping and dining, but it also features luxury apartment communities such as 930 Central Flats.

“As a member of the EDGE District, we’re pretty involved in the community. We have a lot of local businesses, restaurants, shops – all within walking distance of the community. As a matter of fact, they’re





all right across the street!” said Jennifer Torres, property manager at 930 Central Flats. “One of the things that the EDGE District really promotes is keeping that unique character about it. There are not a lot of chains, mostly local businesses.”

Within the apartment building, there are two retail spaces that are currently occupied by Blo Blow Dry Bar and My Choice RX Pharmacy and Marketplace. Crossing the street, residents can find No Vacancy, a popular Florida vacation-inspired bar; Buya Ramen, a Japanese-style gastropub featured on the Food Network; Bavaro’s Pizza, an Italian restaurant “pastaria”; and other local eats. There are also shopping options such as Ashe Couture, a women’s boutique; and Atlas Body & Home, a men’s apparel

► **Fast Facts:**

- **Location:** St. Petersburg
- **Size:** 2.03 acres
- **Floor plans:** studio, one-, and two-bedroom apartments
- **Number of units:** 218
- **Managed by:** Bainbridge Companies

and lifestyle boutique. Outdoor and waterfront areas are nearby, too; within a mile of the community, residents can explore St. Pete Pier and Vinoy Park.

The community also contributes to the lively aesthetic of the district because of its art-centric style.



“The building is modeled after a boutique-style hotel. We have a lot of bright, cheerful colors with contemporary artwork and furnishings throughout. Bainbridge did a great job of really having thoughtful use of the spaces and the amenities in the community,” Torres said.

Inside the units, each apartment home features contemporary chef-inspired kitchens, sleek gray cabinets and quartz countertops, stainless steel sinks and appliances, hardwood-style flooring, and oversized walk-in closets with built-in storage.

“Many of our apartments offer large windows and 10-foot ceilings so there’s lots of sunlight. Select homes offer extended terraces, and most of the floor plans have

a patio or balcony. Our two-bedrooms have double vanities and double showers, which are a really big hit.

“All the floor plans are really unique. Forty-five percent of our property is made up of studios, and they are some of the largest in the sub-market here. And then we also have large terraces that are not matched by any other community in the market,” she said.

In June, 930 Central Flats will be adding a smart tech package to each apartment home that includes SmartRent electronic locks, Nest thermostats, and a smart switch for kitchen lights so that residents can control their homes right from their mobile device.

Because of the diversity downtown, 930 Central Flats ensured that the community would have amenities that



fit every resident's needs. Residents can use the community's club room and private dining area that boasts a kitchenette, seating area, lounge area, and pool table.

"Our lobby is two stories so we have a mezzanine area that's on the second floor. There are lots of windows so it's very bright and overlooks Central Avenue. It has a juice bar as well as a workspace for residents," she said. "The way that the building was designed with the hotel style in mind means that residents can work and socialize outside of their home."

The community has a two-story fitness center with a yoga studio, cycling studio, and Fitness On Demand. Other amenities include a South Beach-style infinity pool with a surrounding sundeck, outdoor social

spaces with a fire pit, a pet spa, on-site bike storage, and a sixth-floor activity deck overlooking Central Avenue.

"I definitely would say that the pool is the residents' favorite amenity. It's really beautiful and gets really great sunlight. It's kind of breezy so it has a serene feel to it. The fitness center is the runner-up. It's state-of-the-art and it has all equipment, including rowing machines, stair steppers, free weights, and kettlebells so there's really no need for a gym membership," Torres said. She mentioned that residents enjoy the private dining room because it can double as a conference room if they are working from home.

As far as events, 930 Central Flats focuses on health-conscious, community-oriented socialization.



For example, there is a monthly yoga class with cocktails afterward. The community has also teamed up with One Blood for a blood drive every other month. And because it's located across the street from Tropicana Field, 930 Central Flats hosted a tailgate party for the Tampa Bay Rays opening game. The EDGE District is involved, too, with events ranging from community cleanups to business nights where local businesses can showcase their products to residents.

In line with a focus on continuing to improve the local community, 930 Central Flats is in the process of applying for the Fitwel Certification, a green-building certification system that provides guidelines on how

to operate healthier buildings in order to enhance residents' well-being.

"There are some things that we want to implement like adding more water bottle stations versus handing out plastic bottles, promoting the use of stairs versus taking the elevator, providing the residents with farmers market information so they can buy fruits and vegetables locally, things like that. It's all wrapped into supporting local while promoting a healthy lifestyle as well," she said.

"We try to offer a variety of things for residents so they can get to know the community. We really try to incorporate that as much as possible so we can support local business and keep the EDGE District thriving." **MF**



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