



**MULTIFAMILY FLORIDA**

WINTER 2021

# CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

INDUSTRY IS MAKING STRIDES IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

**2021 FAA  
CONFERENCE  
& TRADE  
SHOW**

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**SESSION  
SPOTLIGHT:  
TRAILBLAZERS**

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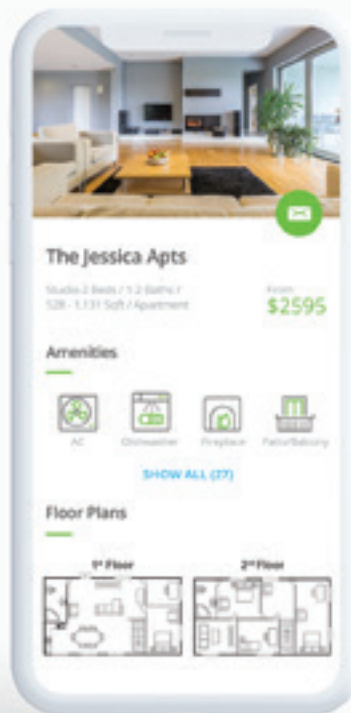
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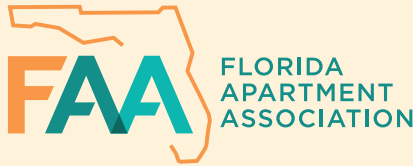
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# Ready for the Challenge

BY KRISTI NOVAK, CAM, CAPS | ALTMAN MANAGEMENT COMPANY

**AS FAA CELEBRATED ITS** 50th anniversary throughout 2021, we have all seen what an incredible organization this is. I have been reminded of the great work FAA has done over the years and the outstanding leaders who served in this role before me. I am truly grateful for this opportunity.

I am also humbled, not only because of the title that I am being honored with, but more so because of the caliber of the people I represent. This organization is comprised of professionals who do important and empowering work and who are dedicated to making a difference. This is truly what makes this honor so meaningful to me.

I would like to recognize some of those people specifically, beginning with my appreciation of our immediate past president, Kimberly Maggard, for her hard work and the commitment she has made to our organization. The association has made great strides because of her presidency.

The Executive Committee and the Board of Directors have fearlessly led our association through an interesting year and showed true grit to make this year the best it could be.

Next, a great big thank you to the FAA staff. Their talents and dedication are truly admirable, and I am so excited to see their next achievements.

Over the last 18 years I have had the of being mentored by great talent. I would like to recognize some of the individuals who have made me strong, confident, and prepared to accept this responsibility. I am one of the few people who graduated with a degree in apartment management. With that said, I began my career with a lot of book knowledge instead of on-site experience. I had no idea how much more I had to learn, until I met my very first leader, Nancy Nance. Nancy taught me how to be humble and strive for greatness. Her fierceness and dedication kept me yearning for more.

Getting involved in the local apartment association was something I learned in school that I should do, to give back to the industry that provides me with so much. That's where I met the woman who inspired me to go beyond my limits. Peggy Queen was always there, pushing and encouraging me.

While I continued on my path in the association, I got to know Chip Tatum. I did not realize how much influence Chip would have on me until I had to run a local association without an executive. I could not have gotten through that extremely challenging time without the oh-so-often phone calls, advice, and encouragement.

My Altman Companies family has been so supportive and believed in me, and I am so grateful.

I could not do all that I do without my family, especially my partner, my best friend, my husband, Donny Novak, and his patience, support, and unconditional love.

FAA has had 50 years of excellence. I do not take the responsibility of being your president lightly, as I have the responsibility to continue the successes and help the association reach new heights.

I want to be someone who gives back, someone who inspires the members to be more involved or take on more leadership roles. For those who are already leaders, I want to encourage you to mentor those who have a passion to move forward. Local membership counts are rocketing, and now is the time to give back.

Advocacy will remain a key role for our association. Throughout the pandemic, FAA has become a recognized voice for Florida's multifamily industry. And one thing is for sure: Together, that voice is louder.

Again, it is a privilege to be serving as your 2021-2022 president. I know this is not going to be an easy task, but with your support, I am ready for the challenge. **MF**

# So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye

BY JOSH GOLD, CAE, CMP | EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**WHO CAN FORGET THE** famous scene in “The Sound of Music” where the von Trapp children sing a farewell tune to their father’s party guests before heading up to their rooms for bed? The children have been strictly instructed by their father, Captain von Trapp, to leave the lavish ball, which will undoubtedly continue until the wee hours of the morning. Amid their protests and wishes to stay longer to “taste their first champagne,” among other things, the song notes that “the sun has gone to bed and so must I.” In essence, all good things must come to an end.

I find myself writing this final column on my very last day as the executive vice president of the Florida Apartment Association feeling much like Kurt, Liesl, and the other von Trapp children. I want to stay a bit longer at the party, but I know that it is time that I must go. As I’ve said to many of you in person, these past eight years at FAA have been the very best of my entire career. I’ve never before had the pleasure of working with such smart, talented, and passionate professionals – your FAA staff members are truly one-of-a-kind and the greatest asset of the association. I will greatly miss Rona, Ralph, Laureen, Amanda, Johnmichael, Camila, and Melanie, and I’m so glad to count each of them as a friend.

I will also miss you, our members. The apartment industry is a very special one – I knew that from the first time I met many of you and was greeted not by a handshake but a hug. The camaraderie and support for

one another in this membership is unique among trade associations and should be cherished. I have been truly touched by

the dedication that FAA’s volunteers have demonstrated during my tenure with the association. I could attempt to list all the

## Josh Gold Leaves FAA for NAA; AAGO’s Chip Tatum to Take FAA Helm



FAA Executive Vice President **Josh Gold** has accepted a position as senior vice president of member education, programs, and affiliate engagement for the National Apartment Association.

In his new position, Gold will be directing the staff for the NAA Education Institute and NAA’s conferences department (responsible for producing Apartmentalize and other industry meetings), as well as leading NAA’s affiliate development efforts (including managing NAA’s relationship with its 152 regional and state affiliates).



**Chip Tatum**, chief executive officer of the Apartment Association of Greater Orlando, will join FAA as executive vice president on January 3, 2022. Tatum was selected by the FAA executive committee following an extensive search.

Tatum has led AAGO since 2012, and his previous positions include vice president of government affairs at FAA and director of government affairs at AAGO.

Tatum was inducted into the FAA Hall of Fame in 2018, for his contributions to Florida’s multifamily industry and to Florida’s network of apartment associations.



leaders of FAA who've influenced and shaped me, but I would likely forget to name a handful as there have been so many. Your focus on making this organization best-in-class has resulted in the stellar national reputation that FAA enjoys today. It is not lost on me that it is this very track record of excellence that made me an attractive candidate for my new position at the National Apartment Association in the first place. Please know that I take my lessons from you and will apply them to the future challenges I will undoubtedly face.

Amid all this melancholy and reminiscing, one important idiom must not be forgotten – change is good. Organizational change encourages innovation, builds skills, and develops staff. The fresh take of a new leader should be celebrated – his or her new approach to old problems may be the linchpin that sets in motion an entire new era for the

**“I want to stay a bit longer at the party, but I know that it is time that I must go. As I’ve said to many of you in person, these past eight years at FAA have been the very best of my entire career.”**

association. New initiatives can benefit not only those we serve – our members – but the employees on the inside of the organization as well. I encourage FAA leadership and staff members to take this opportunity to challenge the framework through which they view their jobs, their roles in the association, and FAA’s approach to doing business.

I begin my new role at the NAA with the confidence gained by my successes at FAA (and maybe with just a tiny, but healthy, shred of self-doubt). My thanks go out to each one of you – it is hard to truly put my gratitude for this experience in words.

“Regretfully they tell us, but firmly they compel us, to say goodbye... to you.” **MF**

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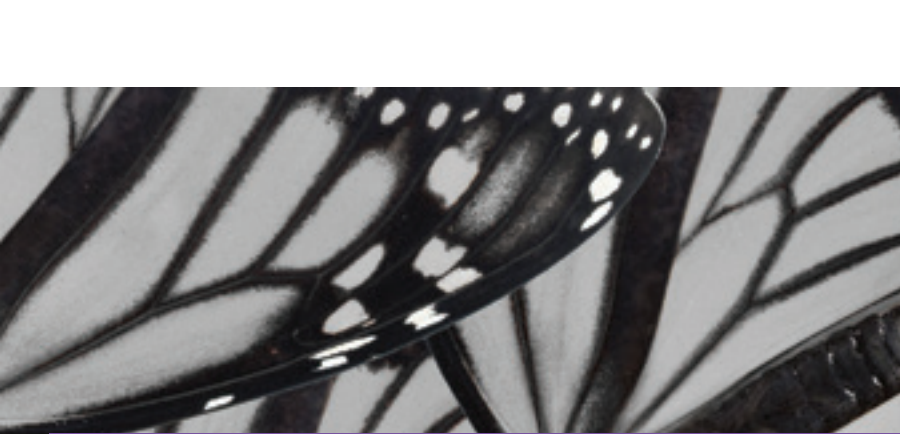


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# CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

INDUSTRY IS MAKING STRIDES IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



BY DIANE SEARS

Jessica Romero saw an email blast in her inbox inviting people to apply for a diversity leadership program. She found the invitation interesting, but she wasn't sure she was exceptional enough to be selected. "I clicked it and opened it, and then I continued about my day and my life," she said. "And then another follow-up email came, and I flagged it."

Responding to that second email turned out to be a stroke of luck, said the Miami-based strategic marketing manager for RangeWater Real Estate. She became one of only 15 people nationwide, and two in Florida, to be accepted into the new National Apartment Association program to help minority professionals grow in their careers and make a difference in the multifamily housing industry.

"I talked with my boss, our sales VP, and she told me, 'I think it's an amazing opportunity. Throw your name out there. What's the worst that can happen? They say no this year, and you can apply again next year if you're still interested.'"

The yearlong program was designed to help participants gain understanding and comfort about their own cultural backgrounds. They learned how unconscious bias can affect a person's view of others and interactions with them.

"We discussed how at times we all are unconsciously biased," said Samantha Harvey, the other Florida participant, who works as a property manager with JMG Realty in Jacksonville. "When you're a minority, or you're just different in any aspect, it's hard to get ahead in corporate America or your job or career. I believe they designed this program to show that people who are diverse or different— we are all equal. The color of my skin, or my gender, or how I identify is not going to be my downfall and is not going to be the reason why I can't be where someone else is, like in the C-suite. It helps us build our confidence."

Harvey, who is African American, said it was especially rewarding to attend the 2021 Florida Apartment Association Annual Conference & Trade Show in October and see minority women speakers as part of the program.

"When you're looking at someone who looks like you, and you're seeing the level of success that person has achieved, it gives you a different sense of your opportunity for growth," Harvey said. "You start to think, 'Maybe I can go there, too.'"

"We've been told for so long that we're not going to go there, that we're going to be sitting behind a desk as a leasing agent for another seven or eight years, and it's not true," Harvey said. "There's so much talent and opportunity out there, and as long as we advocate for minorities

and people who are different, I feel like in the future the talent is just going to be unimaginable. And it's not going to matter whether you're black, white, or indifferent. This class has taught me a lot of things about not being biased. And just knowing that anybody can go anywhere if they set their minds to it."



**"I definitely want to see this continue. There would be nothing worse than to think of this as a fad. That would be painful."**

— JESSICA ROMERO

### Florida Initiatives

The multifamily industry in Florida might actually be ahead of the curve when it comes to awareness and interest in DEI issues, according to a 2020 survey on diversity and inclusion in the multifamily housing industry. Conducted by multifamily employee feedback system Swift Bunny, the survey polled more than 2,100 apartment industry employees and 14 management companies.

The Southeast region – which includes Florida,

Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana – scored the highest of almost every region in both the perceived importance and implementation of workplace DEI efforts in all five categories: commitment to diversity, respect of differences, equal treatment, inclusive environment, and understanding.

The statement that earned both the highest level of importance and the highest level of agreement was: "My supervisor creates an inclusive work environment." On a scale

of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest or most favorable, the Southeast scored 4.60 in importance and 4.68 in agreement. The scores were comparable to those of several other regions.

On the other hand, the statement that showed where the industry needs to improve the most was: "Employees are treated equally." The overall score in importance was 4.61, but the score showing whether employees agree this is being addressed was 3.92, the lowest in the survey. By contrast, the Southeast scored 4.33 for importance and 4.69 for agreement, higher than any other region except the West, which



includes Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and Arizona

“This perception underscores the critical importance of addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our industry,” the report read. “With more than 14% disagreeing with this statement and an additional 18% unwilling to agree or disagree, only two-thirds of respondents indicated any level of agreement.”

In another good sign for Florida, in September the Apartment Association of Greater Orlando received one of only three DEI grants awarded nationwide by NAA. The \$10,000 grant will be used to partner with the Peace & Justice Institute at Valencia College to develop the AAGO DEI Leadership Academy. Plans call for the academy, which will launch in early 2022, to be offered to AAGO members at no cost and to be facilitated by preeminent experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“I’m very excited about that, and we’re looking for it to be an enduring program, using the initial funds to launch it,” said Chip Tatum, AAGO’s CEO since 2012, who has been tapped to take on the role of FAA executive vice president starting in January 2022.

AAGO also plans to use the funds to commission a research firm to conduct a survey of the membership in an effort to more thoroughly understand the diverse backgrounds of Central Florida’s multifamily workforce. The goal is to identify where AAGO can provide resources to help underrepresented constituencies within the industry and the association.

“We’re going to try to incorporate DEI into a lot of our leadership-oriented elements like board orientation and our leadership development program,” Tatum said.

AAGO has held a series of webinars called “Industry Influencers” throughout 2021 emphasizing the experiences of underrepresented groups. The first, in February, was on Black leaders and celebrated Black History Month. “It was called ‘Cultivating the Next Generation of Black Leaders.’ It was moderated by a former state representative speaking with several of our influential African American leaders, and we livestreamed it. They had some real talk about barriers and the ways they had to govern themselves differently than someone who is Caucasian.”

Another took place in March and celebrated women leaders for Women’s History Month. “We featured some of our early women leaders within the association, and they talked about how much different the industry was back then. Everyone treated them like secretaries, and it was about, ‘Why aren’t you at home raising babies?’”

AAGO marked Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from mid-September to mid-October, with a panel of Hispanic leaders, including one whose supervisor had told him to quit speaking Spanish to customers. “Our whole idea behind this is that when people hear other people’s stories, it’s a lot harder to discount the idea that they have adversity that maybe you don’t,” said

Tatum, who is white. “It’s been compelling for me. When I hear these stories, I think, ‘My path has been a lot easier.’”

### **Moving the Needle**

As a Black woman, Harvey has found it difficult to attain one of her goals: getting on the board of directors at her local apartment association. Some of the female leadership has started encouraging her to keep volunteering and work her way up the ranks.

“They’ll keep asking me to interview for the board, and I’ll keep interviewing for the board until I’m on that board of directors, because we need that diversity,” Harvey said. “We have to have it in order for the younger generation to

see that it’s a different world. We can all get along; we’re all human. We’re all the same. We’re just different colors, different heights, different genders, different ages. Talent doesn’t come in color, talent doesn’t come in nationality, sex, any of that. Talent comes in all kinds of people, and we just need to find those leaders who want all types of talent.”

One of the issues in the multifamily industry is that people at the entry level, and even up through junior management, often don’t know about educational and promotional opportunities that exist, Harvey said.

“The email comes to the property manager and the property manager doesn’t share it with the staff. So if it’s not shared with you, and if you don’t have the knowledge, then of course you can’t make the decision whether to participate or not,” she said. “We’re trying to get the word out that more of our

“**Talent doesn’t come in color, talent doesn’t come in nationality, sex, any of that. Talent comes in all kinds of people, and we just need to find those leaders who want all types of talent.**”

— SAMANTHA HARVEY

higher-level supervisors need to start speaking with their staff and letting them know that 'Hey, there's a whole new world out there of networking where you can go, and the sky's the limit.' But some people are sitting behind a desk, and they have no idea. I used to be one of those people."

Before the NAA program, Romero experienced self-doubt when she tried to picture herself getting involved in industry association leadership.

"There was one instance that resonated with me," she said. "An event I found online was talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion, but it was not a diverse panel. I saw the flyer, and I briefly logged in, and I was shocked. This group of people were probably very well intentioned, but they didn't even bother to look to the left or the right or think about the visuals. They could have called on a regional person who is Black – that would have been a great person to add to the panel."

Romero, who is of Colombian descent, said it was interesting in the NAA program to hear the perspectives of other people.

"Even myself being a person of color, being a woman, being a minority, I know my perspective and I'm super empathetic," she said. "I will even at times question my team and say, 'Let's put ourselves in that person's shoes.' But it was hearing other cohort members talk about their experiences that made me say 'Wow.' It was eye-opening. I've never been a Black woman in that instance having that happen to me."

Romero said she has seen changes in the industry since she first started, which she finds encouraging.

"I see the needle moving a bit," Romero said. "I think of where I work and the steps we're taking. I see

we're doing this, we're talking about it. And then I also know that there are other companies that have their

own DEI programs or are starting to open up positions in DEI. I think AAGO getting that grant from NAA will be great for Central Florida. I definitely want to see this continue. There would be nothing worse than to think of this as a fad. That would be painful."

### Core Values

At Royal American Management, a robust DEI program is in its second year. It started with an anonymous survey of the company's 700-plus employees to see where the company stands in its

efforts to provide an inclusive work environment. The results were mostly positive, said Lori Agudo, the company's director of training and talent development, and Sonya Knight, resident services director, who leads the 14-member DEI team.

"One of the things I felt really good about was there were not a lot of negative comments related to inclusion or discrimination," Knight said. "Probably the biggest thing the survey showed us is that we need to communicate clearly with the staff so that everyone understands the company's position regarding fairness, inclusivity, and diversity.

The survey is a great starting point to understand how staff members feel and to open paths of communication."

The company has initiated a DEI committee, a dedicated email address for DEI concerns, a DEI website, and a newsletter to share cultural observances and diversity stories. Another diversity initiative Royal American is proud of is a new four-phase program called RAMP, short for Rising Apartment Management Professionals. The program starts with



**"Our stories have power, and those stories need to be shared, and having a committee that focuses on DEI gives everybody a space to tell those stories and to share those experiences and what's important to them."**

— LORI AGUDO



online learning, transitions to a job shadow and paid internship program, and winds up with management training. One of the goals is to recruit residents of Royal American communities to consider joining the profession.

“With each phase, they get a certificate of completion to celebrate,” Agudo said. “At the end, they’ll have a transcript for our learning management system that they’re able to keep and take with them. It’s a résumé builder that they’ve done all this coursework.”

The company started the program in the U.S. Virgin Islands at its community in St. Thomas. “The participants are extremely appreciative because there isn’t another management company they’re aware of that’s doing anything like this,” Agudo said. “We are fully sponsoring this at no cost to them, and we’re making it flexible around their schedules.”

Once the seven people complete the pilot program, Royal American will roll it out in the continental U.S., Agudo said. The company also plans to add a fifth phase that will sponsor participants to obtain their Certified Apartment Manager (CAM) credential after they have passed certain milestones, including working as a property manager for a minimum of 12 months.

Agudo explained why she is so passionate about DEI initiatives and promoting from within: “I have gotten to where I am in my profession because others have opened doors for me. Now that I’ve been a volunteer for some years and I’m heading up our training

department within Royal American, that puts me in a unique space to be able to open doors for others. For

me, on a personal level, it’s about making sure everybody has a seat at the table.”

Diversity is important, but inclusion is key, Agudo said. People need to feel their differences are not just tolerated but accepted and embraced. “If we were all the same, we wouldn’t be successful as an organization,” she said. “It takes us having different vantage points from different walks of life to really have constructive conversations and dialogue and to be successful as an organization. It takes a diverse group of people

and different minds, and not all of us thinking alike.”

Like Agudo, Knight is passionate about giving back. She assists Royal American properties with developing tenant programs, and in many of those communities the people are from underserved populations.

She learned to appreciate DEI thinking early in her career when she was working in Panama City, where the company is headquartered. Knight, who is Black, volunteered for four years with the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, where Royal American’s founder was a member. “It was inspiring to see businesses and other races join the NAACP in the fight for equality,” she said.

“Something else I would say for me that really got me involved is that I’m a minority. I’m African

American. I’m a woman. I’m an older person at age



**“I didn’t see other people in the industry who looked like me. It never had an impact on my performance, and it never really bothered me, but I noticed. I would go to company events or conferences, and there were many times when I was the only African American person in the room or there were just a few of us.”**

— SHEENA GRIFFIN

56. I am in a biracial marriage, and I have biracial children. I have a neurodiverse teenage son.

"You can be personally involved in diversity and inclusion without even realizing it," Knight said. "As a parent, when I'm working with the school system to champion for my son for him to be included like the rest of the class as a special needs kid, I'm actually doing DEI work. So when this opportunity came to me to chair this committee, I felt like it was an easy transition, that it was something I felt strongly about because it was already a part of my life."

Agudo applauds Knight and others on the Royal American committee, who started their assignment by sharing their own stories with co-workers who had never heard them.

"Our stories have power, and those stories need to be shared, and having a committee that focuses on DEI gives everybody a space to tell those stories and to share those experiences and what's important to them," Agudo said. "For me, that's important. At some organizations, like ours, this has always been part of our DNA. Other organizations are just at the beginning phases of having DEI initiatives. You have to start somewhere. At least this is on the forefront

for organizations now, and you see when people are seeking employment that DEI has become important to them. They want to work for an organization that is diverse and will offer opportunity. Diversity is viewed as a strength.

"We do have a lot of work left to do, and this is something we will have to continue working on for many years," Agudo said. "This is not something that can fall off your radar. This is something that has to be part of an organization's core values. So while I think we've made some strides, I do think there's always going to be work to be done."

### Promoting and Recruiting

The key is to continue recruiting and promoting people of diverse backgrounds, said Sheena Griffin, a business manager for Lincoln Property Company in Daytona Beach. She started in the multifamily industry 15 years ago as a leasing agent in student housing.

"Just to see other students my age, 18 or 19 years old, touring apartments, it seemed like an amazing job," she said. "I moved off-campus my second year of college, and it was a great job being able to work with other college students and lease apartments. It seemed so professional.

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“But from the time that I initially started out, I didn’t see other people in the industry who looked like me. It never had an impact on my performance, and it never really bothered me, but I noticed. I would go to company events or conferences, and there were many times when I was the only African American person in the room or there were just a few of us.”

This year, Griffin became one of seven people nationwide, and the only one in Florida, to receive the Alexandra Jackiw Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship, awarded by NAA to help people progress along their career paths. Jackiw, a past chair of NAA, is also a past president of the NAA Education Institute and a lifelong learner and industry educator.

Griffin is using the scholarship to get her Certified Apartment Portfolio Supervisor certification. “Eventually I want to move into a regional role,” she said. “I think inclusion starts with promoting from within companies, and also recruiting plays a role. Where are companies going when they want to recruit people?”

It makes a difference when people have support from within their organization, Romero said. Her

manager has supported her passion for continuing education, encouraging her to block time off her calendar for it.

But not all people have embraced DEI initiatives, she said. Her project in the NAA leadership program involved a survey sent to industry employees to gauge their feelings about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and some of the responses were what she called “mean.”

“I don’t know what’s going on in that person’s personal life to where they feel attacked or victimized by our simple four- or five-question survey,” she said. “We’re not asking to take money away from anyone else. I think of myself and the statistics on what Latina women are paid versus everyone else, and we are way down there on that spectrum. I just want to do better for whatever other little Jessicas out there are graduating from high school and about to get started in leasing.

“You have to open your eyes to this because otherwise you can’t get better. If you’re living under a rock thinking, ‘I’m not racist. I never think that way,’ just peel it all away and you realize there’s work that has to get done. I really hope that more of us do it.” **MF**



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# 2021 FAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW **CELEBRATES, EDUCATES, COMMEMORATES**

BY CAMILA CAL

**MORE THAN 1,500 MULTIFAMILY** management and supplier professionals came together to celebrate FAA's "Proud Past, Promising Future" during the 2021 Annual Conference and Trade Show held October 13-15 at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort.

FAA's proud 50-year history was the central theme throughout the event, including a past presidents' wall showcasing the great presidents of FAA (and a photo opportunity in which attendees could picture themselves as a future president), as well as a timeline wall detailing major moments in FAA history from conception to the present. The celebration also featured many exciting moments, such as entertainment from Disney fairies "Ivana Dream" and "Maxine Dream," the unveiling of FAA's new logo, an on-stage reunion of several

FAA past presidents and Hall of Famers, and photo opportunities with Minnie Mouse and Mickey Mouse.

Attendee Robyn Atkins of Lincoln Property Group enjoyed the production of the opening session. The visual effects were really fun and kept the audience engaged, she said.

"It was great to see the history of all of the presidents and hearing from some of them and learning from all of the different members just how impactful the association was, especially during 2020," said Yvette Gallegos, an attendee from Dominion Management.

This year's conference offered a host of educational opportunities, from Diana Ballard's opening keynote, "Disney's Approach to Leadership Excellence," to other popular presentations from speakers Amy





Kosnikowski Dilisio, Lia Nichole Smith, Matt Easton, and others.

“Diana’s keynote was great. My favorite part was when she talked about quality and attention to detail; that’s one of the main focuses that we have in the multifamily industry. That really makes such a huge impact,” said Connie Mendez, an attendee from Lincoln Property Group.

Maintenance professionals also had the opportunity to attend sessions focused on topics including secrets of success, how to grow maintenance teams organically, and best practices for returning vacant apartments to rent-ready conditions. Nathaniel Striggles, a maintenance professional with HEF Management, said he especially looked forward to sharing the maintenance tips he learned at these sessions to improve his team as a whole.

On Wednesday, October 13, the conference kicked off with meetings of the FAA Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and Florida Suppliers Council. The annual Legislative Platform Meeting helped determine FAA’s focus for the 2022 Florida legislative session. The first day concluded with the fundraiser event “Food, Wine & Fireworks: An APAC Celebration at Epcot,” where attendees were able to enjoy desserts, drinks, and a VIP view of Epcot’s new nighttime spectacular “Harmonious.” Ticket sales plus a silent auction raised a total of \$35,896 to benefit the Apartment Political Action Committee.

After the educational sessions and trade shows concluded, on Friday, October 15, attendees gathered for the closing celebration dinner, which recognized Volunteers of the Year, APAC major contributors, and Leadership Lyceum graduates and finished with the swearing-in of the 2021-2022 FAA Executive Committee.

Members were grateful for the chance to attend the 50th anniversary conference in-person to celebrate FAA and to connect and network with their industry colleagues.

“I’ve been following FAA for years, getting the magazines, and learning what’s going on in our industry. I’ve been working in the business for almost 27 years, and I’ve never been able to attend the FAA conference, so this year was my first time,” said Trina Grady, a management professional with HEF Management.

“It’s exciting to be a part of it. I’ve learned how much FAA cares about their board, and they care about what they provide to us as members. This has made me excited to continue participating and volunteering in the industry. I definitely want to be on their board someday. They gave me excitement with this conference; they gave me a fire.”





### **“Food, Wine & Fireworks: An APAC Celebration”**

Supporters of the Apartment Political Action Committee traveled to Epcot for FAA’s fundraiser night of desserts, drinks, and celebration. Attendees sang along to classic Disney songs as they watched Epcot’s new fireworks show “Harmonious.” Tickets and proceeds from a silent auction raised nearly \$36,000.



### **Hall of Fame Award**

Bonnie Smetzer CPM, HCCP, partner/executive vice president at JMG Realty Inc., is the 2021 Hall of Fame Award recipient. Smetzer is a past president of FAA, serves on the Executive Committee for FAA, and serves as a regional vice president for NAA Region IX. She was also past president of SCAA, and an FAA and NAA Lyceum Graduate. LuAnne Acton Ross, past president of FAA and partner/executive vice president at JMG Realty Inc., presented the award.





FAA past presidents and Hall of Fame inductees are recognized onstage at the 2021 FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show, as part of the association's 50th anniversary celebration.



## Educational Sessions

The educational sessions opened with keynote speaker Diana Ballard from the Disney Institute, who shared wisdom on what it means to be a leader. Her tips on how to approach leadership included examples from Walt Disney World, a company with a reputation for leadership worldwide. Other sessions featured speakers and panelists with experience in a variety of topics, including social media, advocacy, diversity and inclusion, and affordable housing.

A Masters Session provided an opportunity for senior multifamily executives to brainstorm and network.





### Volunteers of the Year

Each affiliate selected one management member and one associate member to be recognized as Volunteer of the Year.

### Leadership Lyceum

Eighteen members of the FAA Leadership Lyceum class of 2021 received certificates for having met all of the requirements of the program.







### Executive Committee Installation

National Apartment Association President Rick Graf swore in 2021-2022 officers: Jimmy Chestnut, vice president; Ricardo Alicea, treasurer; Keri Walker Pfeifer, secretary; Kimberly Maggard, immediate past president; Lindsey McClain, Association Executives Council chair; and Jonathan Smith, associates' vice president.



FAA President Kristi Novak was sworn in for the 2021-2022 term by Peggy Queen, retired association executive of the First Coast Apartment Association and FAA Hall of Fame member.



Kristi Novak, 2021-2022 president, presented a plaque to Kimberly Maggard, immediate past president.





## Sponsors

Platinum sponsors for the 2021 Annual Conference & Trade Show were Affinity Waste Solutions, Apartments.com, HD Supply Inc., HH Staffing, House of Floors Inc., i4 Waste Valet & Recycling, Kings III Emergency Communications, Massey Services, Redi Carpet Sales of Florida Inc., RezCor, The Sherwin-Williams Co., Switch Electric, Valet Living, and Yardi Systems Inc.

## 2022 Annual Conference & Trade Show

Keri Walker Pfeifer and Jonathan Smith, co-chairs of the 2022 FAA Annual Conference, put on their overalls to announce the "Cultivate" theme for next year's conference, which will be held September 28-30, 2022, at the Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida.





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# THE 5 INNOCENT EVILS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

BY PAUL BERGERON

**AUTHENTICITY HAS NEVER BEEN** more critical for apartment marketers as they portray and promote their communities and on-site staff during these highly competitive leasing times.

Online ratings and feedback and comments from customers (78.3%) as well as input from friends, family members, and co-workers (61.7%) are dominant when residents are asked who they tend to trust as it relates to deciding to do business with an apartment community or property management company, according to Lia Nichole Smith, senior vice president of education and performance for Satisfacts Apartment Ratings.

Faith in social networking pages such as Facebook have improved each year since 2015, but in 2021 they score just 26.5% when it comes to trust. Company websites fare worse, at 10.1% in 2021, down from 35.8% in 2017, according to Satisfacts Apartment Ratings.

Smith spoke at the 2021 FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show in October and shared these and more perspectives about property management and the resident experience in the session, “The 5 Innocent Evils of Digital Marketing.”

## Consumers’ Online Dissatisfaction Is Soaring

The National Retail Federation found that the number of returns of online purchases is skyrocketing, indicative of consumers feeling that they did not receive what they

purchased online based on how it was portrayed online, Smith said.

“Consumers feel that they are getting duped by reviews that the company is posting on its own behalf, or by seeing product photos that were photoshopped,” Smith said.

Having become more suspicious, consumers instead have begun looking harder for comments posted by consumers who used the product, she said. “The ‘ask a question’ and ‘FAQ’ options on online business sites such as Amazon became very popular, and consumers more than ever are seeking video testimonies where real consumers are

holding the product in their hands while talking about what went right and what went wrong so you can see the real deal live and in action,” she said.

Imagery and videos also play a key role in how an apartment community is depicted online.

What can apartment marketers do? Must they emphasize the same ol’ standby photos of perfect blue skies in their exterior shots and swimming pools without leaves floating in them?

Marketers are realizing that by showing these types of images, they were potentially sabotaging themselves, Smith said, because when prospects arrived, the images are not a perfect match.

Resident reviews, such as critical feedback posted by renters about customer service, and how the

## SESSION SPOTLIGHT



on-site staff members respond are highly impactful for prospects looking to make decisions about where they want to live.

Smith said some apartment companies are committing five innocent sins:

## 1. Offering incentives for online reviews

“You can offer incentives or rewards points to entice residents to leave online reviews of your community and about your service, but if you are, the reviewer must convey that in the review,” Smith said. “For example, they should write, ‘I really loved the amenity options at 101 Main. And I received a gift card from the community in exchange for me posting this.’”

If the resident doesn’t mention this, the onus is on the apartment community to point out that the reviewer received an incentive, Smith said. “Not doing so is a Federal Trade Commission violation and the community can be sued or have to pay a heavy fine.”

Company employees who live on-site may post positive reviews about their rental experience, but they must disclose that they live on-site as employees of the community.

“By all means, your staff can ask residents or prospects to leave reviews, but it’s safer and much more authentic if you do so and do not offer them incentives,” Smith said.

## 2. Websites still looking like February 2020

If your website hasn’t had a thorough content refresh since before the pandemic, it is doing a disservice to apartment shoppers.

“Your site today must reflect your safety and health measures, such as mask-wearing by residents, prospects, or on-site staff,” Smith said. “Some apartment companies are now requiring that all of their employees are vaccinated. If that’s the case, it’s something that should be highlighted.”

Pre-pandemic, video tours and self-guided tours were only promoted modestly by some operators. Today, prospects expect this type of marketing and availability. “If you don’t, they will go elsewhere,” she said.

Owners “spend all this money on perfecting their digital front door, but if your site does not live up to the online hype, then ratings will suffer and those who do tour your property will tell their friends,” Smith said.



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### 3. Social media that's less than social

There's been an uptick in apartment communities that are posting move-in specials on their social media channels, but that is not ideal.

A community's residents should be the "Star of the Show" on these channels, Smith said.

"By highlighting them and their experience at the property, they are made to feel important, which can lead to better retention and online reviews and word-of-mouth advertising," she said. "It also shows prospects who visit those channels that the community cares about its residents, and those prospects who are looking will want to live at a place where they will be cared about, too."

Smith said that when communities post move-in specials on social media, it has the opposite effect. "The residents who live there will see them, wonder why they didn't get the same rate, and then feel 'not so special.'"

### 4. Not recognizing the differences that make a difference

Communities that go above and beyond when serving their residents will often see that reflected in those residents' attitudes about where they live, Smith said.

A best practice for property managers is to respond to online reviews posted by residents -- even those that are negative.

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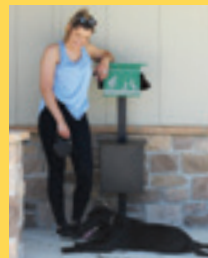
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### Key Points

**Online CONTENT** should be informative, transparent, and a true depiction of the on-site experience.

**Online MESSAGING** should reflect care and a commitment to offering a high-quality resident experience.

**Online REVIEWS** should tell a story so those people considering your community can see how residents are treated offline.

"By addressing concerns, explaining how the on-site team will 'make it right,' and then showing that the situation was remedied, it creates a positive moment," she said. "Do not simply post cut-and-paste responses that sound liked canned speak from the corporate office. Prospective residents will immediately recognize that level of insincerity reply and not take it seriously, especially if the same reply is posted to multiple reviews about a variety of customer service concerns."

"Responses to reviews should be written as if an on-site staff member is actually speaking in-person in response to the resident, addressing the specifics of the situation. Pat responses don't cut it. Renters today are picking up on these kinds of nuances more than ever."

For residents who do experience sincere, specific replies, their top-ranked responses about how that made them feel were: "They have great customer service" and "They really care about their residents."

When residents don't experience this, their top responses were: "They don't really care about their residents" and "They do not have great customer service."

### 5. Not living up to the online hype

Getting back to what type of content community websites and social media channels should post, communities should not take it personally if their community's images are gorgeous, Smith said.

"There's a place for those, too, and it's not that communities should only be posting boring or unflattering images of their property, even if they are authentic and not photoshopped," Smith said.

"Better would be to host theme-based photo contests for residents where the images are truly authentic, beautiful, and fun, and then market them. For example, have them highlight their pets. People with pets always want to see other peoples' pets. Or host "Decorate Your Door" contests. Those can be shared through the community's social media channels. **MF**





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# TRAILBLAZING

## Panelists Share How They Became Confident in Their Careers

BY DIANE SEARS

**ANTOINETTE WILLIAMS ENJOYED WORKING** in the multifamily housing industry, but she wanted to get out of her leasing position and move up to a job that would challenge her more. The tricky part was that she didn't see anyone who looked like her in higher-level roles.

Williams, who is Black, had to take control of her own career and learn how to promote herself. Today she is a regional vice president based in Dallas for the Carroll real estate investment firm. Self-promotion is not bragging, and it's not bad, she told an audience at the Florida Apartment Association's Annual Conference in October. It's important to let your boss know what you've accomplished and show you're ready for new opportunities. On the flip side, it's also important for people who are in the majority to actively seek out those in the minority to make sure they feel comfortable taking the steps to grow in their careers.

Williams was one of three panelists in a session called "Trailblazing Your Way to the Table with Confidence," moderated by Elizabeth Francisco, founder and president of Dallas-based ResMan Property Management Software. Francisco understands what it takes to become CEO of your career after starting out as a leasing agent herself.

A lack of confidence can stifle career growth, Francisco said. You might be experiencing a lack of confidence if any of these scenarios describes you:

- You find it easier to advocate for others than you do for yourself.
- Other people champion you, and this is how you've gotten promoted.
- You are frequently "voluntold," and you do well in your volunteer roles, but you don't volunteer on your own.

- You don't celebrate wins along the way because you're not confident enough to stop and take time to do that.

When you're not confident, she said, you hesitate to ask for things. You are reluctant to speak up. You might just be getting in your own way.

"Growing your skill set and becoming an expert in your domain is not your employer's responsibility," Francisco told the audience. "It's yours."

If you want to move up in your career, you have to make sacrifices to get the education you need for the

next level. That might mean investing your own time and money in learning a skill that is new to you: building Excel spreadsheets, creating profit-and-

loss statements through QuickBooks, hiring through behavioral interviewing, managing a team. If you think you don't have the time or money to invest in yourself, then advancing your career is not your priority.

"Self-confidence is a lifelong venture," panelist Sonya Rosenbach told the audience. She is the CFO for Allied Orion Group, based in Houston, but she went through a rough period in her career when she found herself living in a new city with no job and no support system. As a young woman in the industry, she was wracked with self-doubt, but she had to power ahead.

Rosenbach became her own pep squad and supplied the self-confidence she needed to get herself through. She offered these four pieces of advice:

1. Identify what is making you feel like you are not confident.
2. Focus on wins, no matter how small they are.
3. Cut yourself some slack.
4. Celebrate what is going well instead of dwelling on the negatives.

Part of building your self-confidence is that old adage of "Fake it till you make it," said panelist Jimmy

### SESSION SPOTLIGHT



Chestnut, vice president with Incore Residential in St. Petersburg. He said he found it important to identify people who could be instrumental in helping him grow in his career. You have to build your own network and support system, he said.

In today's job market, where employees are like gold, it might be easier to get the kinds of promotions you deserve, moderator Francisco told the audience. "Good talent is hard to find. Be the one they can't afford to lose. If you're not being compensated properly, take the risk and leave."

It's not healthy to develop animosity toward your employer because you're putting in the work and not being recognized, she said. Instead, you have to speak up. Your supervisor might have too full a plate to realize what is happening or not happening in your career.

Your personal brand becomes key, Rosenbach said. Companies love metrics, so make sure you keep track of yours. How many prospects have you brought in? How many leases have you signed? How many have you renewed?

Francisco shared additional tips to help you become CEO of your career:

- Set aside 1.5 hours a week to work on your skills after you put your kids to bed at night.
- Challenge yourself to get to the next level.
- Free up your time to study the skills it takes to become an executive.
- Learn "in the shadows" on your own time, rather than relying on your supervisor to send you to training, and you'll get results faster.
- Build professional relationships with people who are where you want to be. Men tend to network



two levels above their current position, while women associate with people at their own level or maybe one step above.

- Learn how to delegate. You can't deprive the people around you of doing good work that helps them grow.
- Remember to give those who work for you public credit for the work they've done.

Most of all, she said, don't be so afraid of failure that you avoid risks. Francisco quoted industrialist and business magnate Henry Ford: "Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently." **MF**

Panelists Jimmy Chestnut, Antoinette Williams, and Sonya Rosenbach share pointers about achieving career confidence.



**TEXACRAFT**  
BY BROWN JORDAN

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# Study Finds Tax Discounts are a Critical Tool for Solving Florida's Affordable Housing Crisis

*A study commissioned by the Florida Apartment Association (FAA) finds property tax discounts will increase affordable housing stock and spur economic growth across Florida.*

**FLORIDA CITIES NO LONGER** need to wait for state and federal solutions to their affordable housing needs. According to a new study released by FAA and HR&A Advisors, local tax discounts for housing providers would expand the affordable housing supply and incentivize additional housing development.

The FAA study finds a 25% tax discount for participating housing providers in the Miami area, for example, could enable an average of 1,250 affordable apartments per year for residents earning up to 60% of the area median household income, roughly \$48,840. As a result, the Miami area would see approximately 424 new jobs, \$20 million in increased earnings, and \$52 million in increased economic activity annually.

"Hardworking residents in Florida are increasingly unable to access safe and affordable housing, and tax discounts are one of the most promising solutions available to local government," said Kimberly Maggard, immediate past president of FAA and senior vice president of operations for Royal American Management. "It's as simple as closing the gap between affordable rents and the operating or development expenses of housing providers. Only then can we increase supply."

The FAA study provides additional evidence in support of state legislation to authorize these types of local tax discounts. Two bills – SB 674 (Ana Maria Rodriguez, R-39) and HB 563 (Anthony Rodriguez, R-118) – were introduced during this year's legislative session and likely will be introduced again in 2022. Tax discount legislation enjoys bipartisan support among voters, including 76% of residents in Southeast Florida and 61% of residents across the state.

The study is based on an analysis of multifamily housing development and demographic data across four metropolitan areas in Florida. For each area, HR&A estimated the initial, direct, indirect, and induced impacts of increased discretionary household



## Property Tax Discounts and Their Effect on Housing Affordability

August 2021



income through rent savings, as well as the one-time construction impacts.

FAA recently launched a public relations campaign and new website, [housingopportunityforall.com](https://housingopportunityforall.com), to host the research study and four one-page summaries that highlight the impact a property tax discount program could have in the four metropolitan areas studied (Jacksonville, Orlando, Miami, and Tampa).

FAA and its 10 local affiliates are already using this important research to have meaningful discussions with policymakers at the state and local level regarding housing affordability solutions. The data will also play a key role in FAA's 2022 advocacy efforts at the state level as the association continues to pursue the legislation to provide local governments the authority to offer property tax discounts. If you are interested in learning more about the study or have any questions about the data, please contact Amanda White, government affairs director, at [amanda@faahq.org](mailto:amanda@faahq.org). **MF**



# Housing Affordability, Fire Radio Requirements Remain Priorities

BY AMANDA WHITE

**LINGERING ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF** the COVID-19 pandemic, slow disbursement of rental assistance funds, a heightened focus on evictions, and other factors have created a challenging advocacy environment at the state and local level for the Florida apartment industry. FAA is not only prepared to face the anticipated headwinds at the state level but also has key priorities on the agenda for the 2022 legislative session.

The session formally begins on January 11. However, legislators have been meeting for weeks to discuss bills at the committee level. Soon the focus will transition to moving legislation onto the House and Senate floor and ultimately seeing which proposals will make their way to the governor's desk before the last regularly scheduled day of session on March 11.

During FAA's Annual Conference & Trade Show in October, members met to determine the association's legislative platform. FAA's key legislative priorities for 2022 include:

1. Passing legislation to provide local governments with the ability to waive or reduce property taxes for multifamily affordable or workforce housing.
2. Passing legislation to clarify fire department radio signal requirements for new and existing high-rise buildings.

Housing affordability remains top of mind for the apartment industry, policymakers, and everyday Floridians. Recent research completed by FAA and HR&A ([housingopportunityforall.com](http://housingopportunityforall.com)) confirms that a property tax discount could accelerate the construction of much-needed affordable and workforce housing while generating positive economic impacts.

During the 2021 session, FAA supported HB 563 and SB 674, which would allow, but not require, local governments to establish property tax discount programs for affordable or workforce housing. Although the bills did not advance during the 2021 session, the FAA government affairs team has continued to have positive conversations with legislators over the past several months, to encourage support for this proposal in the House and Senate in 2022.

Fire radio requirements continue to pose significant financial and logistical challenges for existing apartment communities and new developments. State law was amended in 2016 to give local governments the

ability to regulate fire radio system requirements for buildings within their jurisdictions. These changes in the code were designed to ensure that firefighters can communicate effectively using radios while inside a building in the event of an emergency.

The problem is that a building's radio frequency pass/fail status is a moving target that can be influenced by a variety of factors, including nearby construction. In addition, some local governments are trying to expand requirements to include annual inspections and fees. Last but certainly not least, local governments across the state are preventing new apartment communities from obtaining a certificate of occupancy until radio signal strength issues are resolved, which can take weeks or months depending on contractor availability.

In response to industry concerns, FAA worked to introduce HB 587 and SB 1902 during the 2021 session. This legislation would have clarified fire department radio signal requirements for new and existing apartment buildings by requiring a reasonable timeline for ongoing inspections and establishing standards for the certificate of occupancy process, among other key changes designed to protect the apartment industry.

The bills did not advance during the 2021 session, but another FAA-supported bill (HB 1209) ultimately passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis on June 16. HB 1209 extended the deadline for existing apartment buildings to apply for the appropriate permit for the installation of this technology from December 31, 2022, to January 1, 2024. This extension gives FAA the opportunity to push for the other critical reforms outlined above during the 2022 legislative session.

FAA will also be watching for and ultimately fighting against legislation that could negatively impact housing providers. In order to be successful, FAA needs your help to ensure that the industry's voice is heard in Tallahassee. If you're looking to get more involved in FAA's advocacy efforts, please consider registering for the 2022 Legislative Conference at [faahq.org](http://faahq.org). During this important annual advocacy opportunity, you will learn more about FAA's legislative priorities and have a chance to meet with state lawmakers to educate them on the issues that matter most to the apartment industry. **MF**



## Neighborhood Living at The Exchange

BY CAMILA CAL



**JUST A FEW MINUTES** from downtown Jacksonville is a historic neighborhood, San Marco. With its upscale boutiques, art galleries, and a trendy dining district that showcases some of the best restaurants in the area, San Marco is one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Jacksonville. Chance Partners, a real estate developer based in Jacksonville, recognized the demand when it

### ► Fast Facts:

- **Number of units:** 196
- **Apartment size:** ranges from 632-1,450 square feet
- **Monthly rent:** starting at \$1,600
- **Managed by:** ZRS Management





developed one of the newest communities in San Marco: The Exchange.

“Our community is very walkable to San Marco Square, which is a great mix of residential charm, parks, and green spaces. It’s convenient to retail, entertainment, and major employers,” said Carey Dougherty, regional manager with ZRS Management.

What makes The Exchange’s location unique is that it’s in a transitional area, meaning it takes advantage of federal “opportunity zone” tax benefits since it is located within the transitional census tract, she said. Chance Partners also developed a sister community, Barlow, which is right across the street from The Exchange. San Marco Promenade, another community owned by Chance Partners, is half a mile down the street.

“Barlow is right across from us so we have made a very community-based atmosphere between the two assets. And San Marco Promenade is just half a mile down; you can see it from our property. They have



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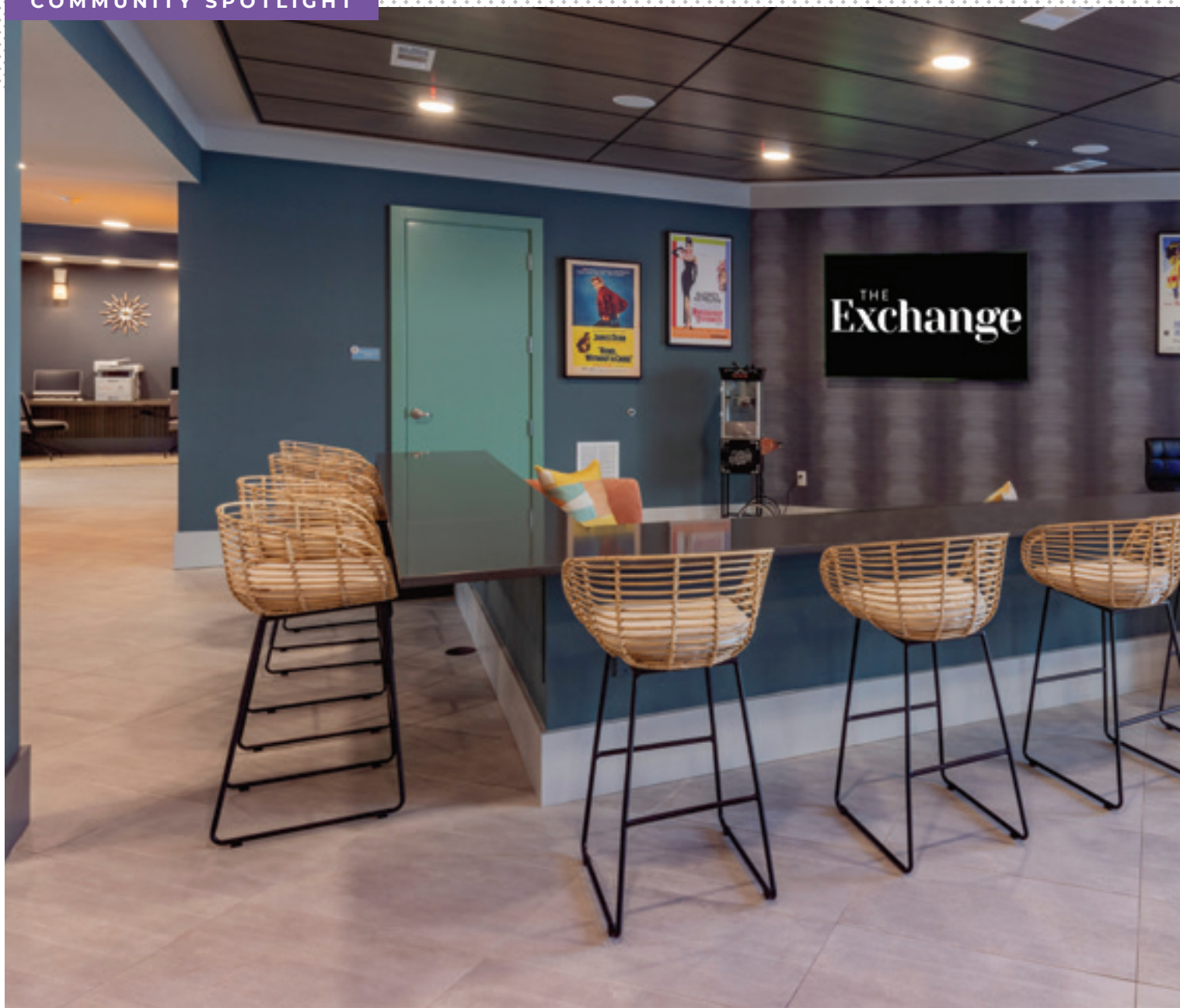
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all three of the assets in the opportunity zone, so the owners are doing a lot to transition this area into new growth,” Dougherty said.

The Exchange is a four-story wrap community with a four-story garage. It hopes to set the bar for modern apartment living – offering sleek interiors that feature the newest fixtures, finishes, and modern amenities such as integrated smart-home technology providing keyless entry, Wi-Fi thermostats, 1G high-speed internet, ButterflyMX remote access video control, and valet trash service. Prospects can choose between one- and two-bedroom units, including several two-story, two-bedroom lofts. Premium units





include balconies over the resort pool or unique two-story corner units with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and views of San Marco.

"We've tried to give it the freshness of a boutique hotel with up-to-date finishes, white cabinets, modern backsplashes, and then we also have 1G high-speed internet in every apartment, which really sets us apart," Dougherty said.

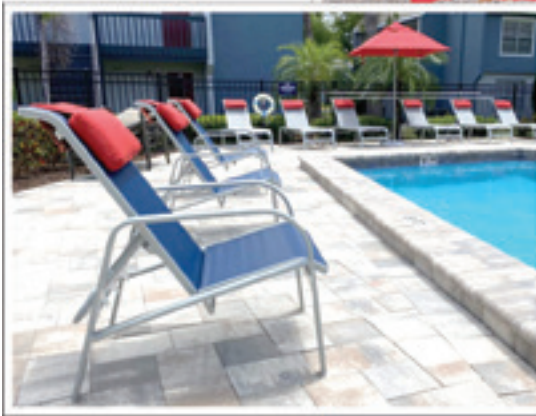
The amenities in the community are luxurious, too. The Exchange has coworking spaces, a digital lounge, indoor and outdoor social areas, a 24-hour fitness center with a separate cardio room, a pet spa, and a large dog park that it shares with Barlow. Residents



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## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



also enjoy direct street access along Bertha Street to promote a pedestrian- and bike-friendly environment. The residents' favorite amenity, Dougherty said, is the resort-inspired pool, complete with a waterfall and cabanas. The pool area also includes a fire pit, a grill, and poolside games.

Supporting the local community is important to The Exchange. Tepeyolot Cerveceria, a local restaurant, created a special menu for the community so residents can call from the pool area and have their food conveniently delivered directly to them. Additionally, a local artist, Marlee Brando, created two murals for the community, featuring a tribute to the San Marco community and bright, lively colors.

Built after the COVID-19 lockdown, The Exchange hopes to continue to hold events that bring the







community together safely. It offers fun in-person and on-the-go events such as pool parties, trivia night, bingo, and “meet your neighbor” social hours. On weekends in the summertime, a DJ will come over to play music for residents. Dougherty said the staff plans on taking residents on tours to enjoy all the Christmas lights, local shops, and dining in Jacksonville during the holiday season.

The Exchange’s relationship to its sister community also contributes to the familial feel of the events. “Anything we do Barlow is invited to, and anything Barlow does we are invited to so it creates such an atmosphere of community,” Dougherty said. “We just had a Halloween party, and residents were so excited to meet their neighbors here and at Barlow.”

“Chance Partners is all about community, enhancing areas, and making a difference for residents. It’s refreshing. We’re really building a neighborhood here,” Dougherty said. **MF**





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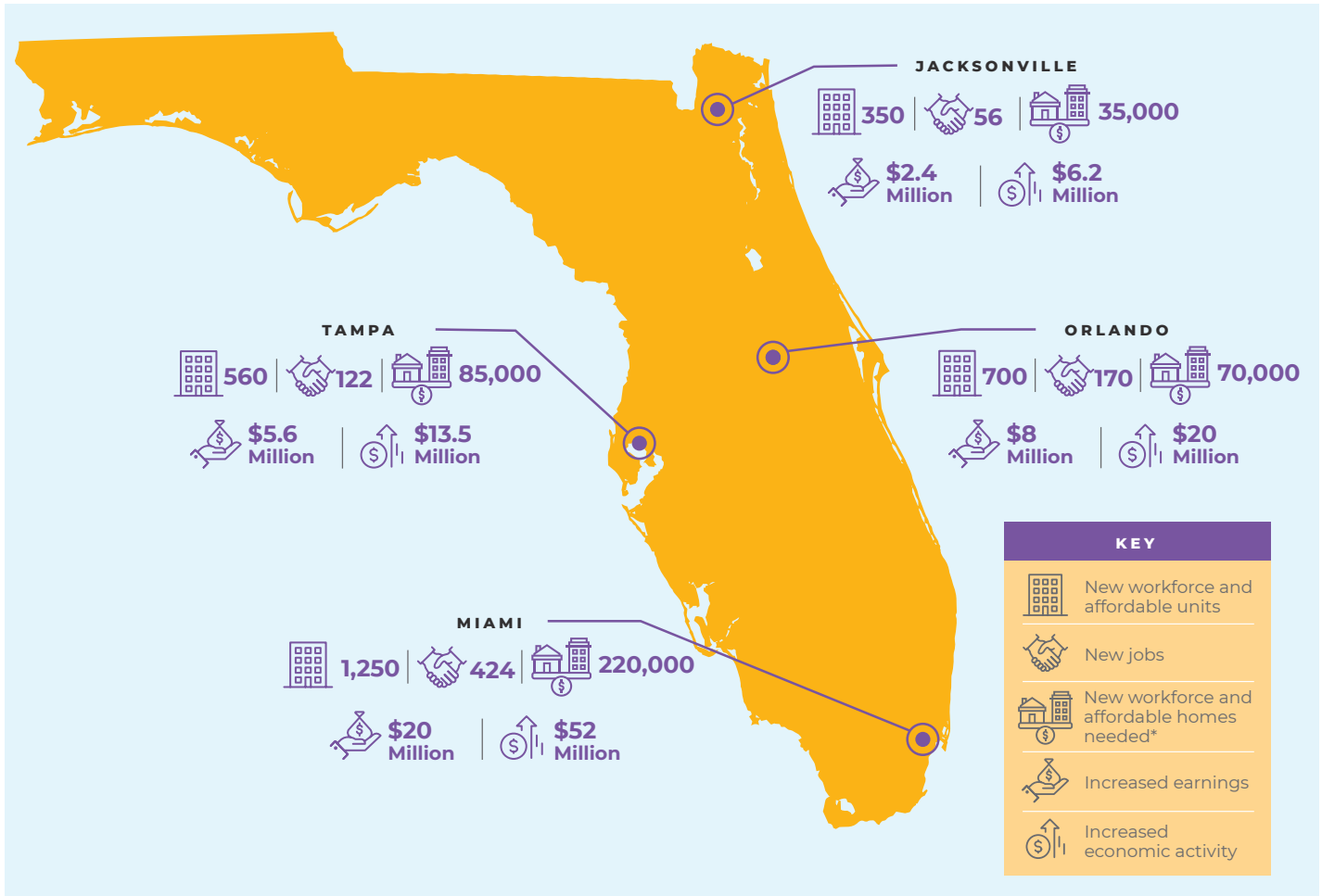


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