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Also, remember that attitudes are contagious. Liz Brown asked, “Is yours worth catching?”

Let’s be helpful, encouraging and kind to others and watch the positivity spread!

“Change your thoughts and you change your world” ~ Norman Vincent Peale

Pictured above is our outstanding group of Community Managers, Service Managers and our Conventional Management team from the October Managers’ Conference.

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Loving Your Residents

Valentine’s Day is just around the corner and that makes this the perfect time to talk about loving your residents. Of course, we don’t mean flirting, courting, and marrying residents—we’re talking about treating your residents with kindness, respect, and affinity.

If you’ve been in the business long enough, you’ve probably run across one or two communities that had a different feeling. A community where the residents really seem genuinely happy, where the staff knew the names of residents and greeted them warmly whenever they saw them, where the complaints were nonexistent and the praise flowed regularly. This is a community that loved their residents.

So how did they get to this utopia of property management? Let us give you three insights in to how this bliss can be yours.

First, the team is the most crucial part of the equation. It doesn’t matter if your community is an A+ luxury or C-; you can create a happy, caring community if the staff is right. Everyone on the team should believe that doing their absolute best is the only way to work; this is their career, not just a job. It is hard to get this level of commitment after the fact, so recruiting and hiring those with this level of commitment is crucial. The passion and commitment needs to flow from the top down. Get the manager excited about doing his/her best, and the team will often follow with pride.

Second, the team has to be empowered to do the right thing: to provide outstanding service and make decisions on the spot. Yep, the management and maintenance team hired to run the community have to be allowed to do just that. (Continued on page 3)
Magical Moments

Here are some magical moments we received this month:

- The Chestnut Lake team received this sweet email: “The floor is much better. Thanks so much for everything! I am much happier.

I am really so happy with the few improvements; it makes my house feel as my home and much more pleasant to come home to. It makes me want to do other improvements on my own and continue to stay in the townhome. I think you have done an outstanding job with the repairs and replacements. Your hard work and dedication to your residents is definitely recognized and it’s always so pleasant working together with you to improve our community and homes! Sincerely, C.”

- Cedar Ridge’s Leasing Consultant, Daymont VanPelt, volunteered recently with the Chicago South Community Development Corporation and in appreciation, received this letter: “I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to you for your active participation in the outreach program (CEDA-LIHEAP). Your hard work and positive attitude in volunteering to help the community was greatly appreciated. The Chairman and Board members have asked me to pass on their sincere appreciation for supporting this program. I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to the entire staff. I look forward to seeing you again in our next outreach program. Sincerely, E.B.”

- North Park’s team found a way to spread holiday cheer at their community—they delivered packages to grateful residents after hours. Their Assistant Manager, Blake Driver, writes: “Sometimes during the holiday season and long days at work it’s hard for our residents to get presents while the office is open. Chrissy Prescott and I took the initiative to load up her car with packages and deliver them to their doors. Not only does it show care and love, but it’s an awesome resident retention strategy. We had to make sure everyone received their gifts.” The team delivered carloads of packages on multiple days during the week leading up to Christmas. What good elves! We know your residents are so grateful to have such a great team working for them.

Please send any Magical Moments to: Annie Boehnen at ab Boehnen@benchmarkgrp.com

Benchmark’s 100% Awards

Congratulations to our outstanding team members who have scored 100% on a required GraceHill course and are welcomed into the Benchmark 100% Club!

Kely Nelms, CM at Beechwood Pines
Brandi Mason, AM at Cayo Grande Navarre
Raymond Davis, LC at Cedar Ridge
Leigh Hallam, HSKP at Cypress Cove
Santo Gargalino, SM at Fairway Trails & The Meadows
Latiff Fields, LC at Fairway Trails & The Meadows
Mark Miller, ST at The Meadows
Jessica Pierre, LC at North Park
Michaela Fitch, LC at Woodstream

February Birthdays

Happy birthday to our team members celebrating their special day this month!

2/1 Fred Back, Commercial Management at Corporate
2/2 Don Eldred, Service Technician at Fairway
2/4 Michelle Rothoff, Accounting at Corporate
2/5 Mike Loos, Service Manager at Village Green
2/10 Tom Haley, Service Manager at Huntington Place
2/11 Latiff Fields, Leasing Consultant at Fairway Trails & The Meadows
2/11 Jessy Hernandez, Community Manager at Waverley Place
2/12 Chuck Moon, Service Manager at Chestnut Lake
2/12 George Gellman, Corporate
2/13 Clarke Narins, Corporate
2/13 Kevin Zugger, Development at Corporate
2/14 Raymond Davis, Leasing Consultant at Cedar Ridge
2/17 Juan Espiritusanto, Groundskeeper at Ridgeview
2/20 Randy Shoptaugh, Painter at Village Green
2/21 Rachel Arnett, Community Manager at Huntington Place
2/27 Autumn McKeen, Leasing Consultant at The Meadows

Loving Your Residents (Continued)

If a resident’s refrigerator bites the dust and they lose several hundred dollars in food, the team has to be able to not only pay to replace the food right then and there, but to buy the resident dinner in the meantime. And when the resident does get to the store, help bring the replacement groceries into the apartment. The onsite team needs to understand that fair housing does not prevent them from going into the parking lot on an icy day to help people leaving for work scrape their windshield, nor does it prevent them from helping an elderly resident struggling with a package to her apartment. Customer service needs to be the first thing on everyone’s mind.

Third, the team needs to practice the basics at a level above all others. Tasks like keeping the community clean, maintaining amenities, and completing a nice market ready need to be done at an award-winning level. You can achieve this through great training and paying attention to the first tip we provided—hiring the right people.

The culture of service and love will come naturally once the tips above are in place. Teams will love working for their community, residents will love the team and their community, referrals will become a leading source of new rentals, and all will be right with the world. For more tips on loving your resident, check out Grace Hill’s courses on Customer Service, Resident Retention, and Customer Relationship Management.

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**Park Forest** hosted a cookie decorating party and a door decorating contest. Cute!

**The Palms at Wyndtree** team had a gift exchange and enjoyed dinner at the Flamestone Restaurant.

**Kimbrook** had a great dinner at a hibachi restaurant!

**Cypress Cove’s team** enjoyed their holiday dinner together in their Clubhouse.

**Huntington Place’**s team went to dinner and also went to see a funny show called the “Great American Trailer Park Christmas”!

**Waverley Place’**s team had an Italian feast for their holiday dinner. **Cedar Ridge’s team** spoiled their residents with a special dinner complete with gifts and decorations. Everyone enjoyed themselves!

---

**Fond Farewell**

We recognize **Ricardo Figueroa**, who during his 15 years as Service Manager at Waverley Place, has given generously of his talents and strengths. Jessy Hernandez writes: “I am grateful for his time and dedication. To say he will be missed seems like such an understatement. His efforts have helped Waverley grow into the community it is today. I would like to thank him personally for everything he’s done; it’s much appreciated and I shall miss working with him. I sincerely hope retirement is wonderful and we all wish him lots of joyous time with his family. There are no words to truly reflect how much he will be missed. Ricardo, may the next phase of your life bring you all that you seek and more.”
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Corporate Spotlight
Judy Puma

Our Corporate Spotlight this month is Judy Puma. Before Benchmark, Judy worked for Home Depot as an Assistant Manager of Operations. She joined our Corporate team in 2005 and took on the role of Residential Operations Manager.

One of her many tasks includes taking calls and handling disputes from residents (we are all familiar with “1-800-Call-Judy”). Judy says her favorite part of her job is resolving bizarre resident issues. “I lead with my heart and put myself or my mother in the situation. It makes me fight harder to get the situation resolved.”

Judy is the Director of Training and also leads the Benchmark Internal Audit Team. Her proudest accomplishment is developing and instituting the Internal Audit. “There was a real need for accountability at our communities.”

She also oversees the annual budget process, facilitates all site inspections, coordinates the file testing for our external auditors, assists with acquisitions/dispositions and coordinates the year-end investor memos. If those responsibilities were not enough, she became the “Leasing Consultant” of 770 Elmwood, a 24 unit apartment community located in Buffalo, NY, built by Benchmark’s Construction Department.

When Judy is not busy with work, she enjoys reading, singing Karaoke and spending time with her grandchildren.

Welcome to Benchmark!

Kelly Carthan, Compliance Manager at Cedar Ridge
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Recurring Service Reminder

As a reminder, please do not add or edit any of the recurring service requests in OneSite. If you would like to have a recurring service request added or feel a current request needs to be changed, please contact Chris Boehn to discuss. It is important to keep in mind that new equipment you purchase may require ongoing preventative maintenance, so be sure to thoroughly review the Owner’s Manual and contact Chris to discuss setting up the service tasks in OneSite. Thank you.

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Site Spotlight

This month we are highlighting Benchmark’s Service Manager of the Year, Derek Moore. Derek was working at Beechwood Pines and hesitantly, yet energetically, took on the job at The Bluffs at Epps Bridge. This was not an easy decision, as The Bluffs was a 294 unit, over 12 month complete rehab. Derek has worked hand in hand with BCS, Construction Managers and contractors and has overseen the exterior improvements to the buildings. Derek has been short-staffed on numerous occasions and for added fun there has been a fire, two cars driven into buildings and a flood that took out several apartments. Oh, and all the while he had a newborn at home (Cullen is now one year old!).

Derek is a great mentor and role model. He’s constantly looking to hone his already impressive technical air conditioning skills and is always willing to share his knowledge with others. In addition to Derek’s passion for HVAC, he also enjoys having the latest and greatest tools and tool kits. HVAC certainly requires a lot of specialized tools, and Derek is someone who really enjoys making sure he’s always fully equipped to complete any project. All of these tools can get heavy so Derek recently purchased a tool backpack to replace his tool bag. He says the backpack makes sense since the tools are balanced on his back rather than having so much weight on one arm when going up and down stairs to apartments. He says: “It’s perfect for an older property with stairs because you never know what you will need until you get there [in the apartment]”.

Congratulations to Derek for being so successful at The Bluffs and keep up the great work!

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