

# The RHA IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2020

DECEMBER



## MAKING THE MOST OF THE HOLIDAYS



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The winter is now before us, and the holiday surge of COVID-19 cases is happening as projected. Since our earliest memories, the winter holidays are all about gathering with family and friends that we can only see occasionally see. The season brings laughter, talking, and giggling over our family-style shared meal.

How can we all make the most of the upcoming holidays while taking on the CDC public health sanctions to avoid spreading coronavirus?

Keep your gathering small. Having a small dinner with only people who live in your household. Having a virtual dinner and sharing recipes with family and friends can open a whole new way to communicate. Consider brief outdoor gatherings with family and friends, going for a walk, decorating a tree or bush in your lawn, building a snowman. No snow? Use your creativity by stuffing white trash bags of varying sizes to make a snowman that won't melt.

The holiday season will be memorable, with the restrictions created by the pandemic. Search the internet to find other fun, clever and inexpensive craft ideas for the whole family to participate in, using simple household items of paper, glue, cotton balls, markers - and your imagination! Date and save these

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'family masterpieces' for reflection in the future to this most unique year. Create new traditions that your family will treasure.

The CDC recommends us to limit the number of guests you have over and only host people who live in your household if possible, they also offer these safety precautions if you plan to gather with people from outside your immediate family. Consider asking all your invited guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering with you.

While this may take some good old fashion ingenuity, host your event outdoors if possible or if it is too cold, find a large, well-ventilated area like your garage, while wearing masks and social distancing. Instead of a potluck, encourage guests to bring food and drinks for themselves and their own household members only, using disposable plates, cups and utensils.

Check for guidance from the Winnebago Health Department, and the Illinois State Health Department is an excellent resource. Wear your mask and always avoid touching your face. We are a loving, caring society, yet just for now, forget the handshakes and the hugs. Greet people with a wave and an air kiss. May you and your family have a safe, joyous holiday!

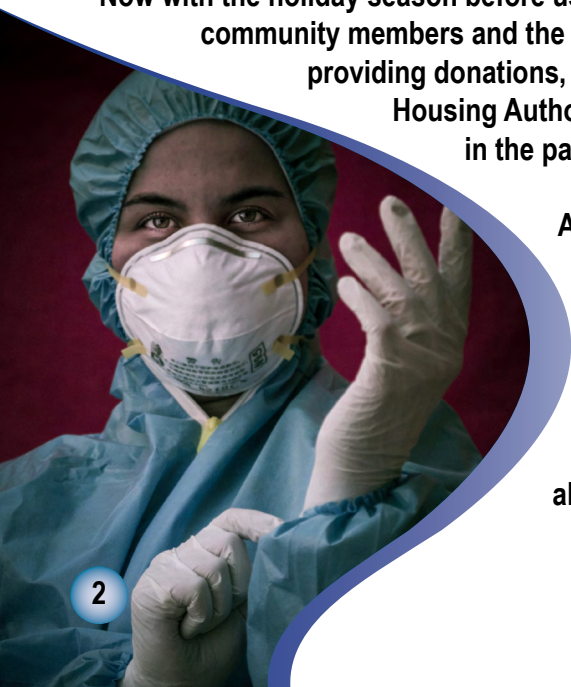
## THANK YOU TO THE HOMETOWN HEROES

RHA would like to take this opportunity and say thank you to all the frontline workers in our community. These frontline workers during this pandemic are our doctors, nurses, firefighters, EMTs, and police. We also want to send our appreciation and heartfelt thanks to another courageous group we call our silent heroes. These are individuals who work tirelessly. In our community we know them as janitors, maintenance staff, grocery staff, and teachers, to name a few. With all the changes and continuous fluctuations this year, adjusting to our new normal, these folks are working to keep us all from harm's way. These silent heroes work every day to protect our health as this virus progressively has impacted our community.

In these times, it is hard to stay strong. We are a community, and we can be strong together. By following the CDC COVID-19 guidelines, we help protect our loved ones and the individuals on the front lines. The CDC protocols and procedures need to be our highest priority. This group of dedicated workers continue to work every day to support the whole community. During this stressful time for all of us, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation.

Now with the holiday season before us, as you know our community is still battling COVID-19 head-on. Our community members and the RHA partners are helping to make a difference by assisting at food drives, providing donations, and volunteering in numerous capacities. All of us here at the Rockford Housing Authority appreciate you for not only the dedicated hard work that you have done in the past, but even more so in these perplexing times.

As we come to the close of the year 2020, our thoughts are with those who have lost a family member or a friend during this tumultuous year. As a community, we have been on a bewildering path. As the New Year rings in, once again, we are reminded that there is much power in hope and faith in the face of adversity. The fate of us all lies in all of our hands. Many of our community members live with challenges and are vulnerable even at the best of times. By supporting these individuals with our highest, best good always in the forefront, as a community, "Together we can, Together we will."





## NEW YEAR'S 2021

2020 has been one of the most unprecedented years. To find new meaning in this chaotic year, it is also important to pause, reflect, and perhaps be thankful for the lessons we have learned and how we have grown.

With all the natural disasters, a worldwide pandemic, remote learning/working, masks, an election, and many folks out of jobs, everyone is eager to see what 2021 has to offer and be thankful that we have persevered and endured. The list of natural disasters is long, wildfires consuming thousands of acres, over a thousand strong and destructive tornados. The Atlantic hurricane season was the most active and the seventh costliest hurricane season on record, with total damage over 43 billion dollars. If there is anything substantial to be learned by natural disasters, it is that life is precious, and disasters are unpredictable. One of the most famous books of psychology, and spirituality, M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*, begins with the pithy and powerful sentence: "Life is difficult," his mindset was simple but powerful; adversity becomes a challenge to be conquered.

We have learned to overcome these challenges. These natural disasters and the pandemic have encouraged social cohesion and have built better relationships for many of us. We are thankful that you have persevered through this and together we have learned so much this past year. Whether it be learning a new hobby in lockdown, new ways to communicate with friends and family, being more observant, or just learning to be content when the world operates under 'the new normal.'

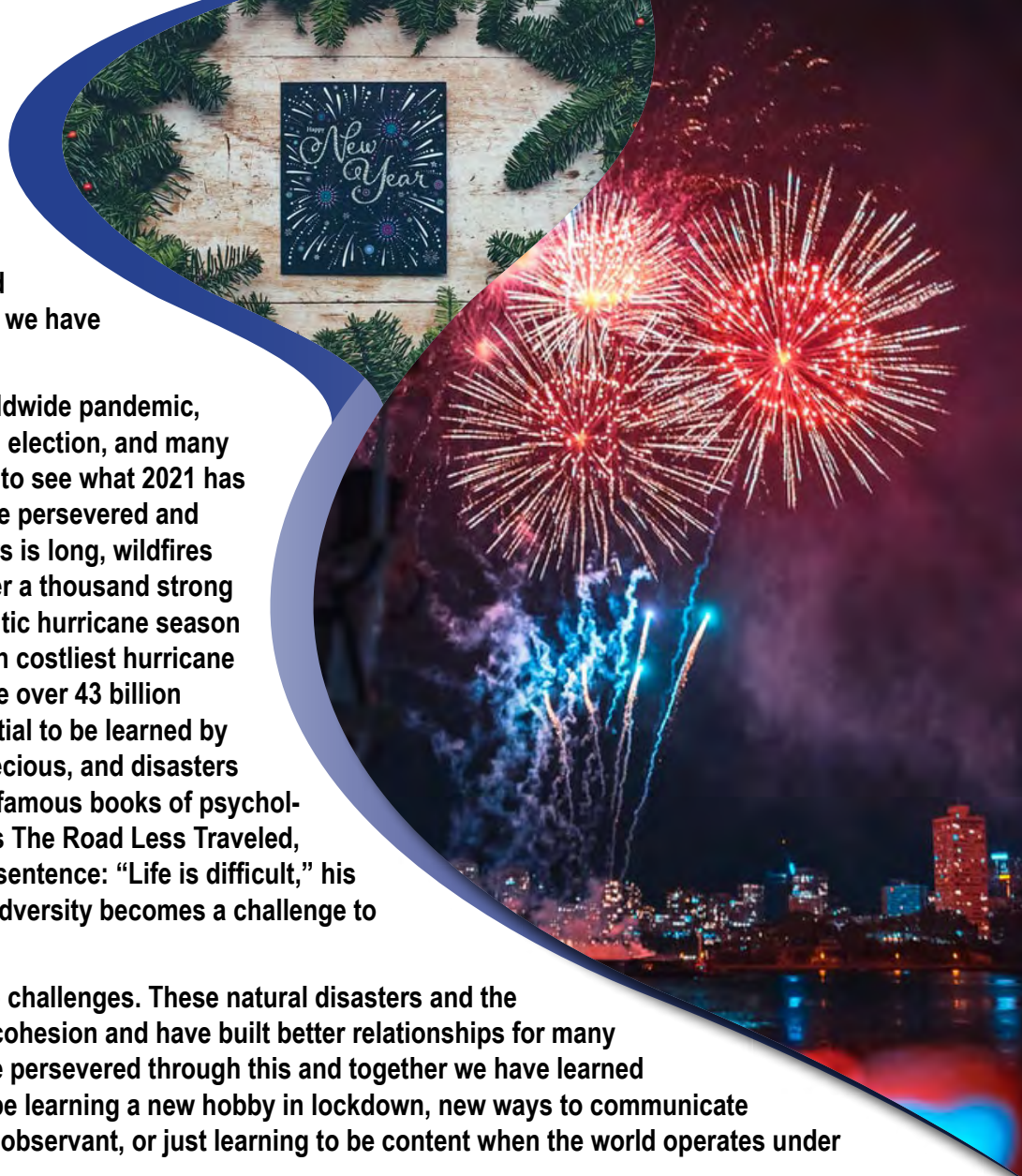
We all deserve a fresh new year; let us make 2021 the best one yet. **Happy New Year, Everyone!**

## LAUNCHING THE NEW RHA DIGITAL TELEVISION CHANNEL

With people working remotely from home or working on the frontlines of this pandemic, the way the world communicates has evolved. From virtual meetings, phone calls to social media being the forefront of information, RHA has implemented a new way to communicate with the Rockford community, our residents, stakeholders and staff.

This solution is the RHA Digital Television Channel and is incorporated into digital signage. They are installed at high-rises, low-rises, the central office, and provide an evolved way of communicating. We are very excited that the new signage will include such topics as; RHA programs, events and world news. Other programming consists of local news, COVID-19 updates, and local weather which will be continuously updated and streamed to the signage at all locations. The importance of implementing digital signage to RHA is providing each one of our residents a new way to get the most up to date information, even if they cannot leave their homes.

While the digital signage is located at RHA locations, you will be able to watch the TV Channel live on the RHA website. We will be implementing a new page for viewing, by simply signing up for access to the page. You will then be able to see daily news updates, informative video presentations and RHA specific resident-oriented content. Please stay tuned as the channel 'goes live'. We will update you as this initiative progresses.



# ARE YOU READY TO LAUNCH YOUR FUTURE?

The Rockford Housing Authority has a myriad of Resident Services, one being the Lifeforce Development Institute. LDI is a 12-week hands-on learning program which due to Covid-19 will be 100% remote, it covers Job/Career Readiness Skills and meeting the community's workforce goals. LDI includes:

- All Materials used in the Classroom
- Section 3 Self Certification
- Professional Development Mentor
- Guaranteed enrollment in the RHA Financial Wellness Institute
- Finding Resources to help with barriers such as:
  - o Child care
  - o Criminal Record
  - o No high school diploma or GED
  - o No transportation
  - o Gaps in employment
  - o Housing or Homeless issues
  - o Long-term welfare recipient
  - o Job search skills
  - o Domestic violence
  - o Drug and/or alcohol abuse

The expected outcome of the LDI graduates includes employment, certificate of Workforce readiness, professional development mentor, and continuous educational training. The enrollment process is simple; apply, interview for the program, and sign a participation agreement. The LDI schedule is 12 weeks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 9 AM to Noon. Registration is now open, and the program will commence virtually from January 19th, 2021, through April 8th, 2021. Apply at: <https://launchmyfuture.com/registration/>

## FAQ

- **Why should I participate?** - The LDI Program provides employability skills training and participants will be more equipped to secure and maintain employment. LDI Graduates will earn a certificate, the LDI Workforce Readiness Certificate. This certificate is recognized by local employers and can give you an advantage in being hired or promoted.
- **Am I guaranteed a job?** - LDI will work closely with you throughout the program to ensure you have available employment opportunities that match your career goals.
- **What will the Individual LDI Scholarships Provide to you?**  
The program is 100% scholarship based, and it includes Job/Career Readiness-based training curriculum. Currently, the Rockford Housing Authority offers \$499.00 in individual scholarships for the Lifeforce Development Institute's Pre-employment-based training program to RHA Clients and Rockford Residents.

## LDI Testimonials

**Damita Taylor Dryden-** "LDI information in this class is very useful for someone who is trying to get in the workforce. Highlights for me was the resume building and job fairs along with resources to start you off in preparing for a job."







**Calvin Redmond**- “Before LDI, I was pretty much at a standstill. Coming to class has allowed my mind to shift from running a household to getting back into the workforce with people in the professional fields.”

**Cheri Frykholm**- “I was a part-time home caregiver. Coming to LDI, I have learned skills which will carry over to a job or possibly a career. With LDI I have developed more confidence in myself.”

**Sammie Carter**- “I was very happy with retirement but all of a sudden I found myself doing nothing! Mr. Marcus convinced me to try out LDI which would lead me to part-time employment. I feel empowered because I’m being educated, and wouldn’t you know. I went to a job fair and got a call to work again!”

To learn more about RHA and Launch My Future’s resident services and LDI, please visit the Launch My Future website: <https://launchmyfuture.com/>.

### ConnectHome

LDI is a great way to get back on track with life skills and job readiness. The 2020 year has forced a lot of people to work/learn remotely, including RHA. LDI will be remote learning, and with the help of HUD’s ConnectHome and our partner, Comcast providing Internet Essentials, students that do not have a computer/laptop will have the chance to receive one. To receive a device, there will be a series of 3 hour socially distanced courses at Blackhawk Courts on January 12th, 13th, and 14th, providing computer literacy training. When the term is completed, students will receive a computer/laptop to utilize during the LDI classes. Participants will be able to keep the device only if they meet the full 12-week LDI curriculum. For more information on the class and how to receive a device, please contact the LDI Dean, Marcus Hill, through his email [mhill@rockfordha.org](mailto:mhill@rockfordha.org).

### About Internet Essentials

Internet Essentials from Comcast is the nation’s largest and most comprehensive high-speed Internet adoption program. It provides low-cost, high-speed Internet service for \$9.95 a month plus tax; the option to purchase an Internet-ready computer for under \$150; and multiple options to access free digital literacy training in print, online and in-person.

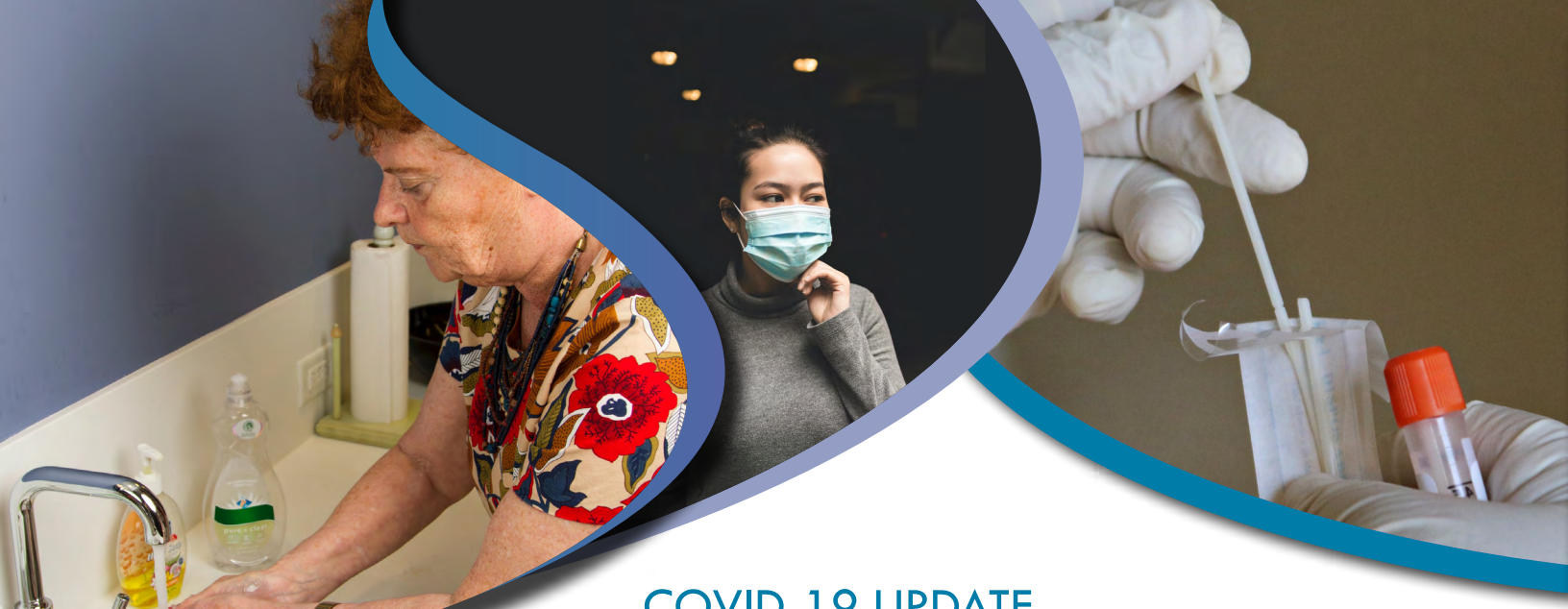
### Other RHA Resident Services

Launch My Future’s website is full of resident opportunities to help reach self-sufficiency. The other programs RHA and Launch my Future offer are: Family Self-Sufficiency Program that helps resident families achieve economic independence.

Resident Opportunities Self-Sufficiency Program helps make progress toward financial independence, reduce or eliminate the need for welfare assistance, and increase earned income. Last but not least is the Section 3 program.

The purpose of Section 3 is to ensure that employment and other economic opportunities generated by HUD financial assistance shall be directed to low and very low-income persons. All of the RHA resident services are here to help, especially during these unprecedented times.





## COVID-19 UPDATE

Due to the increase in COVID-19 cases, Winnebago County Board Chairman Frank Haney issues a Disaster Proclamation in Winnebago County on November 13th, 2020. If local resources are diminished, this would allow the Winnebago County to receive funds and support from the federal government.

Starting on November 20th, 2020, all 11 of Illinois's regions moved back into Tier 3 for mitigation requirements. Restaurants and bars are not permitted to have indoor service, businesses cannot operate at more than 25% capacity, all indoor recreation centers are closed, manufacturing employees need additional COVID-19 training, and any employee who can work remotely should work remotely.

Rockford Housing Authority's biggest priority is to ensure the health and safety of its residents, employees, and community. To help prevent the spread of disease, there are a number of protocols put in place that follow government and CDC guidelines. RHA is continuing Tier 1 mitigations even though the state of Illinois is working in Tier 3. As a result of the Tier 1 mitigations, RHA staff works 100% remotely and all meetings are held virtually.

As we trench through these unprecedented times, we will continue to make all resources and services available to you in hopes of getting you through these challenging times.

RHA wishes you a safe and joyous holiday season! No matter how you celebrate the holidays, give thanks, and reflect on 2020 as we head into a New Year. While we all wish we could be with close friends and family during the holiday season, if you choose to see people, we encourage you to follow the CDC guidelines: get tested beforehand, wear a mask when you are with people outside your household, wash your hands frequently, and social distance.

### COVID-19 INFORMATION UPDATE



#### ATTENTION:

Due to COVID-19, our store is closed to the public.

#### HOWEVER

Phone orders with curbside pickups available

Click here for more RHA and COVID-19 Updates <https://rockfordha.org/covid-19-resources/>





## A GROWING NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY

### AN IMPORTANT FOCUS OF ALL

As the end of the year, 2020, draws to an end, we focus our attention to an exceptional group in our community. These are our low and moderate-income older adults who are very vulnerable for many reasons, which we will explore in this Newsletter. The most important focus of all is their available resources so that even the smallest reduction in income or their benefits can be devastating to them.

### PROVIDING QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

More than 77 million baby boomers are turning 65 in the U.S. today, which happens at a rate of 10,000 people per day. This ongoing senior growth asks us to think differently and more broadly about their needs in our community. First and foremost is providing quality affordable housing. In the community of Rockford, older adults struggle with health care bills, inadequate nutrition, lack of access to transportation, diminished savings, and even part-time job loss. Other needs this group has, for example, are social services, cultural offerings, health care, and wellness programs. One major adverse life event can change their reality entirely. As individuals and as a community, are we ready to address the challenges of our aging population?

### U.S. SENIORS AGED 60 AND OLDER ARE CONSIDERED TO BE OF LOW OR MODERATE-INCOME

To put this in perspective currently for you, the reader, and to accurately calculate this moment in time, the following RHA data serves to clearly illustrate the need for housing assistance for this sector of the population: The Rockford Housing Authority's senior and disabled households live on an average income of only \$12,312 per year. And according to the U.S. Census, 40 percent of all U.S. seniors aged 60 and older are considered to be of low or moderate-income. Approximately 72 percent of these seniors reported by UnitedHealthcare have a chronic health condition.

The deduction of out-of-pocket medical expenses from income is significant for seniors ages 65 and older, who spend a larger share of their household budgets on health care costs. One-third of all senior households in this category have no money left over each month or are in debt after meeting essential monthly expenses, which is calculated by the Institute on Assets and Social Policy. Today in the U.S., half of all older adults have less than \$25,601 in yearly income from all sources, which is over 26.25 million people.

### THE COST OF TRYING TO STAY ALIVE

The reality is, that a considerable proportion of our rapidly aging population in our communities are not going to have the financial resources to live out their lives in independent comfort and security. Affordable housing opportunities for our community's older adults need to be a concern for all of us. While the cost of living is a



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factor, it is the cost of trying to stay alive. Items such as the cost of food, housing, heat, and simple day-to-day necessities contribute to their fiscal hardship. Resources for supporting our aging population are scarce in relation to the scope of the growing problem.

#### WHAT IS RELIABLE AND AFFORDABLE

For our aging and disabled adults, we all need to look at what is reliable and affordable. We will need to redesign our current care arrangements, housing, food supports, and community transportation. This issue is developing long into the future, and the numbers will be overwhelming within less than a dozen years without community planning and action now.

#### DID YOU KNOW? SOMEONE WHO IS A SENIOR OR DISABLED

Many of the Rockford Housing Authority residents have a disability and/or are elderly which represents 46.9% of RHA Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher residents combined: Heads of Household only (Primary leaseholder or Voucher holder) = 2964, and of those 1392 are elderly (62 and over) and/or disabled.

The disparity in the poverty rate between people with and without disabilities grows with age. The need for affordable housing by baby boomers is increasing exponentially.

We have made a continued commitment to developing affordable housing for persons with special needs. If you know someone who is a senior and/or disabled and need information about how we serve our community members, please look at the FAQ Page at

<https://rockfordha.org/about/about-faq/>

