

The RHA IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2021

JANUARY



REFLECTING ON THE PAST, ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

Laura Snyder, RHA, CEO

AN UNPRECEDENTED TIME

Our organization consists of a diverse group of people, each bringing a unique skill set. Combined, these skill sets work together, to create an array of services to our clients and the community we service. Without these folks, the Rockford Housing Authority's overall success, would not be what it is today.

This year has been challenging for all of us, unprecedented and unpredictable. From the beginning, we have been vigilant this past year in our indoor spaces at all the RHA locations. We have been mindful of this threat. Our behavior and actions included masks, installation of sanitation stations throughout our buildings, construction of independent meeting rooms, enhanced cleaning, on-going sanitation and safety protocols. Staff and visitor temperatures, along with a health screen questionnaire are required upon entering a given location. While there has been a shift in the workspace's operations, work from home, and remote work has taken over. However, I believe our staff is the most adaptable, motivated, and a resident minded group that I have had the pleasure of working alongside. Never allowing ever changing restrictions to stand in the way of servicing our clients. Especially, during this, unprecedented time we are all living with, there has never been a time in my career that I have been surrounded by more incredible talent than I am today! As I look back on the last year, a period of political and economic change, it is remarkable how much we have accomplished. In terms of financial performance and our dedication to helping our residents grow and



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succeed. We strive to use our resources and partnerships to improve the quality of life for residents while providing affordable housing, making a positive impact within our neighborhood's and our community.

PERSON-TO-PERSON CARE

On-going communication is our main focus. With the absence of physical presence, it has been challenging to convey person-to-person interaction and connectivity that is part of our core values. With these turbulent times, we have been very mindful of this. It has become even more critical to our employees to make sure that our residents are heard and understood. There is no better tool to guide us to successful programming, than the view point of our residents. These are the first-hand stories they tell us. We feel enormously honored to be a part of their journey. Each one is remarkable and reaffirms for us that we are on the right path. As RHA Resident Niagra Kinard reflects, "The help that I received from the FSS, which included food boxes and employment information, helped my children and me by worrying less. I am very grateful for this program because it also helps me save money, and I know when I need direction, I can make one phone call and receive valuable resources. Thank you to all involved in the program. I can see a major difference in my ability to remain stable." The pandemic has been hard for all of us, and it is difficult when we lose a loved one. Recently a resident lost his sister to the virus. Both were RHA residents. As you can imagine, he had a hard time coping with her death. He reached out to our Human Services Department, and we provided him resources to help with his grief. He called every day for the next two weeks just to talk to a Human Services team member because he felt 'it was simply therapeutic' for him.

OUTLINING OUR PATH TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

The RHA Leadership Team has been focused on learning from our past and outlining our path to accomplishment. Along the way, there have been bumps and diversions, but we found our approach. We have emerged with a solid tactical plan. Fundamental to our strategy are our continued core values. These values drive our actions so that we will meet our on-going goals and objectives. Despite all that has happened, over the coming year, RHA will continue to develop and deliver many high-quality self-sufficiency initiatives to launch the future. These initiatives include HUD's HCV Family Self-Sufficiency program, ROSS Public Housing Family Self-Sufficiency program, ROSS Service Coordinator program, and the LifeForce Development Institute (LDI) program. We currently have a Jobs Plus and Moving To Work application pending for HUD review.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

We have been very cognizant of the global events that have impacted our mission, understand its influence, and have responded to it. We are continually needful to understand and respect inclusion and diversity. These changes in circumstances have brought subsequent issues. Being adaptable and authentic is just one paradox that our Leadership Team has faced and embraced. They have been continually faced with competing, yet equally valid, demands. Visualizing these events as ripples on a pond has helped all of us expect the unexpected and, as a result, be more prepared to seize opportunities. As we move forward into 2021, there are more questions than answers, but there is a glimmer of hope. With the vaccinations now occurring in our community and across the country, health officials are enthusiastic, and some are even optimistic. While the outbreak has the potential to be controlled, it will not be over, but it is providing hope for the future. Serena Smith may have said it best, "hope is the light at the end of the tunnel guiding the way."



**AN RHA SHINING STAR
RETIRES AFTER
33 YEARS**

Vien Sati, Foremen for Rockford Housing Authority, began his career at RHA in December of 1987. He has risen through the maintenance ranks starting as a janitor and was promoted in April of 2018 to Foreman of overall day to day operations for RHA. Vien, after 33 years of tireless service at RHA, is now retiring.

A virtual Zoom party was held to celebrate Vien and his services to RHA, the community, and the residents. Laura Snyder, RHA CEO, states, "I can't begin to tell you how much heartfelt gratitude there is from the residents toward you, Vien, for always showing them exactly how much you care for them and the environment in which they live. I don't think that there is a person out there that would not applaud you and your efforts." Vien was very dedicated to the RHA Mission to partner with the community, and responsible residents, to transform houses into homes while guiding families to self-sufficiency. He is grateful for the opportunity to be of service to RHA and the community.

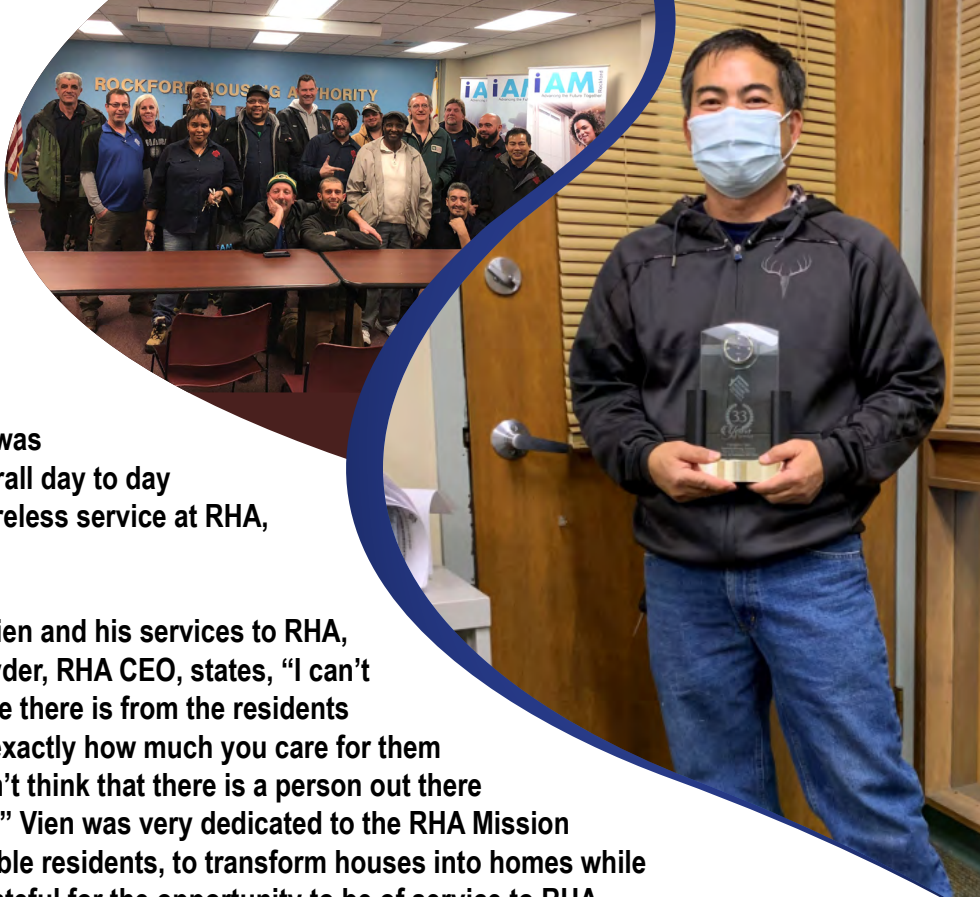
"Thank you, RHA, for the good memories and friendships; it'll be in my heart forever. Thank you!" – Vien Sati

Viens Coworkers had expressed their gratitude for all of Viens's hard work in the meeting.

"It's been a privilege to know you and now an honor helping you celebrate your retirement, congratulations to you!" – Taip Asani

"You are going to be greatly missed, thank you for the years of dedication to this agency, the residents, as well as this community" – Odessa Walker

"I want to thank you for your service and your dedication. Not only to RHA but to our residents and the community as a whole. For one, I am greatly appreciative, I believe I speak for everyone in the operations department when I say you will be missed and we wish you only good things to you and your family. Have fun, be safe, we'll see you soon, thank you" – Owen Carter





RHA DIRECTORS SPOTLIGHT GRAND PRIZE WINNERS 2020

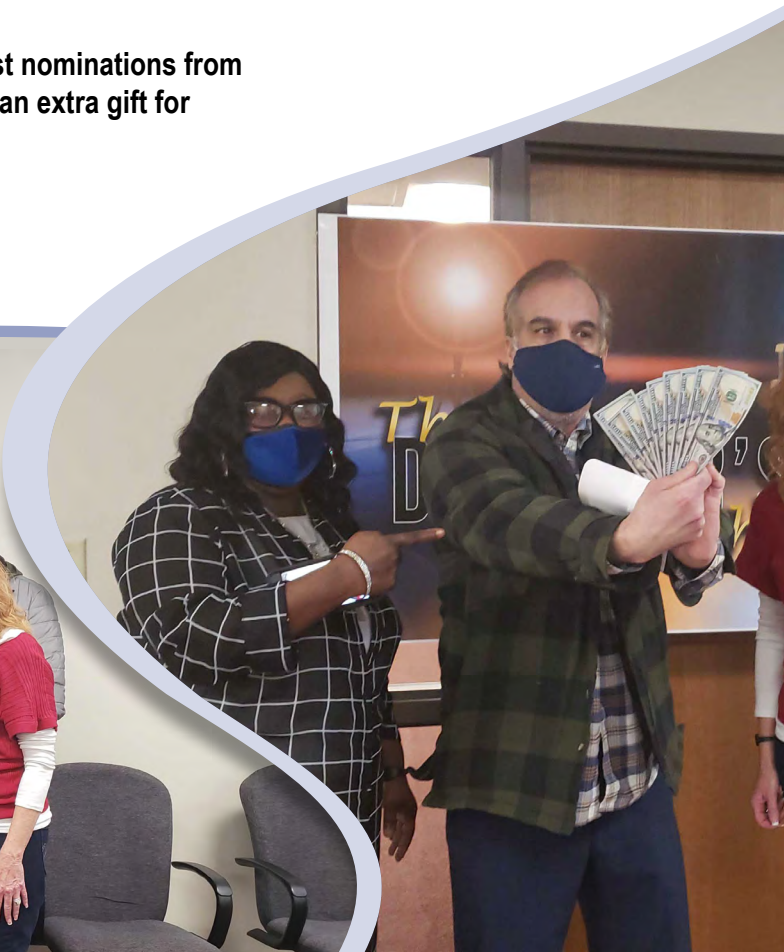
RHA celebrated at their annual employee holiday party, virtually via zoom. During the party, the results for the Directors Spotlight Grand Prize Winners were announced. These awards are the objective of the Directors spotlight, that was introduced in 2020, for the participation of all employees throughout the year, to recognize fellow workers going above and beyond their duties, exhibiting a willingness to help out, not only with coworkers, but residents, and the community they serve. Each month, the employees are asked to nominate their fellow workers for acts observed throughout the month.

During this inauguration year, there was a 7-way tie for first place on receiving the most nominations! Due to the overwhelming circumstances and challenges that 2020 has brought to our team, the executive team felt that it was fitting to award each first place nominee with the grand prize of \$1,000 instead of dividing it! Congratulations to: Eunice Green, Lisa Olson, Stephanie Penix, Chuck Doyle, Troy Hadie, Marcus Hill, and Justin Espinoza.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the recognition and nominee submission from fellow coworkers. Congrats to Lynn Feirn, who won for submitting the most nominations during the year and received a \$500 prize!

And a special prize went to Marcus Hill for receiving the most nominations from staff on the day of the party for being the most deserving of an extra gift for their efforts. Marcus received \$100!

January will start a new year of nominations for one person each month to be acknowledged, with awards provided at the end of 2021.



RHA DIRECTORS SPOTLIGHT DECEMBER

As our December recipient of the Director's Spotlight award, Mike Murray is the epitome of a kind and caring leader. Throughout his more than 35 years with the Rockford Housing Authority, Mike has shown true compassion to his fellow workers and the clients we serve.

Mike is a self-motivated and dedicated individual who's resourcefulness and leadership have benefited our residents, agency and community. Always willing to help where help is needed, his overall maintenance knowledge and proficiency has set a standard for all who follow in his footsteps. He has served our residents well, as can be seen in his efforts to provide the best quality unit for our residents.

As stated in his nomination, "Mike makes it a point to provide the residents a safe and sanitary home, he would live in himself". "He has a vast knowledge of the job he does and treats the residents with respect." Mike's dedication, knowledge, and leadership demonstrates why Mike Murray is deserving of the Director's Spotlight Award for December 2020.

CONGRATULATIONS MIKE!



COMMUNITY PARTNERS HELPING IN THE WINTER MONTHS

Community organizations touches the lives of individuals. They serve our RHA residents as well as the community as a whole. The critical role and value that these human services provide is undeniable. There are over 1.5 million nonprofits in the U.S. and 330 million potential volunteers. We in the Rock River Valley have been and are extremely fortunate to have so many organizations and volunteers to serve constituents in our own back yard.

An organization that has contributed to the Rockford communities' less fortunate with food, clothing, and resources is Miss Carly's. They open their doors to more than 200 people three days a week for food drives, clothing and hygiene drives, and training. During the winter season, they have offered hand warmers, winter coats, blankets, and gloves. Christmas can be a challenging time, especially with COVID-19 affecting so many jobs; it can be hard to make ends meet and still get presents for your loved ones. Miss Carly's had a toy donation drive and all holiday season handed out toys and household items for children and adults, all while still feeding the people who needed it most.

The importance of the RHA strategic partners over the past 65 plus years of the Rockford Housing Authorities Service to the community:

"caring for our residents has always been a part of the RHA corporate culture, and our mission, it is a continuing practice for creating conditions that provides solutions for our clients that our RHA staff is committed to and live this philosophy every day. RHA not only cares about providing safe and affordable homes, but we also care about building a safe and sustainable community. Rockford Housing Authority has promoted numerous events and resources for the betterment of the community and will continue to do so with strategic community partners, states Laura Snyder, RHA CEO."

Today more than ever folks are challenged on many fronts such as economic, health, and family support. This culture of service is what makes justice and democracy possible. These group organizations help our community function. Some work directly with individuals, conducting needs assessments and making referrals to other resources in the community.

Rockford Rescue Mission is an organization that continues to serve homelessness and addiction in Rockford. Last year, they opened their doors to an average of 133 men, women, and children each day for shelter, food, necessities, and counseling. Rockford Rescue Mission offers long term life recovery programs, Christ-centered help and hope for men and women struggling with addiction, domestic violence and other desperate circumstances. During the winter season, they are at full capacity for men's crisis centers and expected to be the same on the women's side. Covid-19 proved to be a challenge for Rockford Rescue Mission as social distancing guidelines called for more overnight guests. Many staff and volunteers have gone above and beyond to accommodate more overnight guests in their Great Room and continue to do so through prayer, financial and volunteer support. Other organizations assess needs on a larger human scale. They may plan and administer programs. Crusader Community Health is an integrated one-stop-shop for affordable, high quality

medical, dental, behavioral, and other specialty care for all people in need, regardless of their ability to pay. With a total of 8 locations in the nearby proximity of Rockford; CrusaderNOW, an extension of Crusader Community Health, offers two locations for walk-in or immediate care clinic for kids and adults on Broadway and Alpine. Crusader is not a free clinic. If you do not have insurance, you may qualify for reduced fees based on your income. They are a not-for-profit pharmacy system, extending a generic discount program for uninsured patients. Crusader offers school-based preventive dental exams that started in 2011, with follow up restorative dental care, located at Auburn High School and South Beloit Junior and Senior High School. ESL (English as a Second Language) and Baby Basics classes are also available and held at the Broadway location. Baby Basics classes are also held at West State Street and Loves Park Locations. There will be a new Crusader Clinic coming in January 2021, located on West State Street, Rockford.

Some organizations target the fulfillment of human needs, through an equal commitment to working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being; working to achieve social justice through social development and social change; community social services, and human resource partners. https://www.rockvalleycollege.edu/StudentServices/Advising_Counseling/upload/Social-Services-Resource-Book.pdf

These community organizations help address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. "They can build a sense of dignity, restore people's sense of significance, relevance and provide a way to self-sufficiency.

NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR AWARENESS MONTH

Along with all the great community partners in the area, another great way to help others in the community is donating blood. January is Blood Donor Awareness Month, and more than ever, donations are needed. Not only to help the local hospitals but also for COVID-19. American Red Cross is taking precautions for COVID-19 as they are teasing all blood, platelet, and plasma donations for antibodies. Winter is one of the most challenging times for blood donation; with the holidays, COVID-19, and the weather, it is less likely for people to donate or think they still can donate. You still can! There are some local donation centers, Rock River Valley Blood Center, American Red Cross of Northwest Illinois, and both offer blood drives around Rockford at churches and hospitals. You can find drive here at this link: <https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?order=-DATE&range=10&zipSponsor=61107>

National Blood Awareness Month has been recognized since 1970. According to Health Prep, there are benefits of donating blood, including:

- Free blood tests – contributed blood is tested, and the donor can ask to be informed if any irregularities are found.
- Calorie burn – The blood donation process burns 650 calories – about the same as an average spin class!
- Reduced risk of heart disease – helps eliminate the excess build up of iron in the blood
- Reduced risk of cancer – also due to the reduction of excess iron buildup in the blood

Please schedule an appointment online at Rock River Valley Blood Center or American Red Cross at their website.





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DID YOU KNOW?

THE ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY'S ECONOMIC IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

RHA through the Housing Choice offers affordable housing choices for low-income households by allowing families to select from privately owned residences that are being made available for rent by their owner. Rockford Housing Authority generally pays the landlord the difference between 30 percent of household income and the PHA determined payment standard, which is approximately 80 to 100 percent of the fair market rent (FMR). The individual family that is participating in the program has the ability to research and select from the available rentals that best suit their specific needs.

RHA PAYMENTS MADE TO PRIVATE LANDLORDS

Families are selected from a waiting list and are determined eligible according to income limits and eligibility requirements established by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A participating household may choose to remain in the unit they are currently living in or move to a unit anywhere in the city of Rockford.

RHA vouchers currently in the community, are based on the last available report which is 1,693 Housing Choice Vouchers.

The RHA currently assists these 1693 families, with over 1,106 units who are families with children.

Of the remaining units, most are elderly or disabled families. 96 vouchers are designated for veterans and veteran families. Over 52 % of our non-disabled, non-elderly families work.

