

The RHA IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2021

MAY



HUD AWARDS \$2,300,000
MILLION DOLLARS TO HELP
ROCKFORD HOUSING
AUTHORITY'S PUBLIC HOUSING
RESIDENTS SECURE EMPLOYMENT
AND HIGHER-PAYING JOBS

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 5

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The new RHA Jobs Plus Initiative will develop locally-based, job-driven approaches to increase earnings and advance employment outcomes through work readiness, employer linkages, job placement, educational advancement, skills development, and financial literacy for our public housing residents. "This place-based program supports economic resilience for our residents by incentivizing and enabling employment through 'income disregards' for working families, benefitting the entire community, and supporting a culture of work," observes Odessa Walker, Director of Human Services.

Over 71% of RHA residents have earned incomes that qualify as very low income. The Rockford Housing Authority, RHA Jobs Plus Initiative, will incorporate strategies to develop a culture of work for the residents living in the targeted public housing community. "The grant, along with our vital partners, which has specific assignments, creates the stage to attack poverty on so many levels and change the quality of life for families. This is the hand-up approach RHA embraces for all families we serve. Empowerment is our middle name," states Odessa Walker. Collaborating with the Workforce Development Board, The Rockford Workforce Connection, and other key strategic partners will help to overcome several barriers to gainful employment for our residents. Currently, over 50% of the RHA residents at the target sites have no earned income.

[Continued on pages 2 and 3](#)

AN INFOCUS LOOK AT THE JOBS-PLUS INITIATIVE-

The Jobs-Plus Initiative involves a multidimensional approach to helping public housing residents work and earn more money. The Jobs Plus Initiative is targeted at all working-age, nondisabled residents of the housing developments where the program operates. The Rockford Housing Authority, through the grant program, will seek to engage all working-age residents in the housing developments of; Blackhawk Courts, North Main Manor, Fairgrounds, Olesen, Park Terrace, and Scatteres Sites.



The RHA Jobs Plus Initiative combines three core elements:

- 1. ON-SITE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES-** These are ongoing activities and referrals to help our residents secure and retain work, including job-search assistance, education, and training. These support services may include childcare and transportation assistance.
- 2. RENT-BASED WORK INCENTIVES-** Changes in rent rules that make work pay by allowing working residents to keep more of their earnings.
- 3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR WORK-** This is the “social capital” part of Jobs Plus aimed to take advantage of the program to promote circulation of information about employment and to encourage support for work within the Rockford Housing Authority’s Developments.

“The comprehensive nature of the Rockford Housing Authority’s Jobs Plus Grant program has established partnerships with key social service agencies within the Rockford community. With over fifty-three strategic community partnerships, RHA will strengthen program planning and implementation and streamline access to services for RHA resident participants. RHA plays a unique and pivotal role in supporting, developing, and expanding workforce education and employment opportunities through the Lifeforce Development Institute.

“Through the Jobs Plus grant, we will create an equitable future for our residents that will allow employers and our community to thrive,” states Laura Snyder, CEO.

The RHA “Launch My Future,” Human Services Website- To support our residents as they achieve these steps toward economic self-sufficiency, we will provide them with opportunities for educational advancement, work readiness programs, employer linkages, technology skills training, and financial incentives through the RHA “Launch My Future,” Human Services Website. [<https://launchmyfuture.com/>]

“Launch Your Future with the Lifeforce Development Institute” and “Creative Thinking for Creative Change” are the Unique Marketing Propositions used to identify and clarify the LDI program’s positioning. “Providing resources so that public housing residents can achieve economic and housing stability is an important part of HUD’s mission,” said HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge. “HUD is committed to empowering and working with our local partners to help residents reach their goals and uplift their families.”

The Job Plus Program grant will help support the Lifeforce Development Institute Initiative. RHA created the LDI training opportunity for individuals with multiple barriers to employment. The initiative is targeted at individuals who have not yet received a diploma or GED, the unemployed, and the underemployed. Residents who may have a background and other social issues that hinder an individual from landing gainful employment.

All the participants of LDI have one commonality: improving their financial stability through education, training, and the end goal being employment.

The LDI program partners with employers to ensure that the academic preparation, skills training, and other provided services are relevant to local industries and employment opportunities. The Jobs Plus program will offer a volume of additional workshops that target hard and soft skills for finding employment and financial independence. RHA residents can bolster their educational credentials by accessing classes on-site to obtain their GED, financial literacy, and counseling. The digital literacy and computer classes include certification for residents.

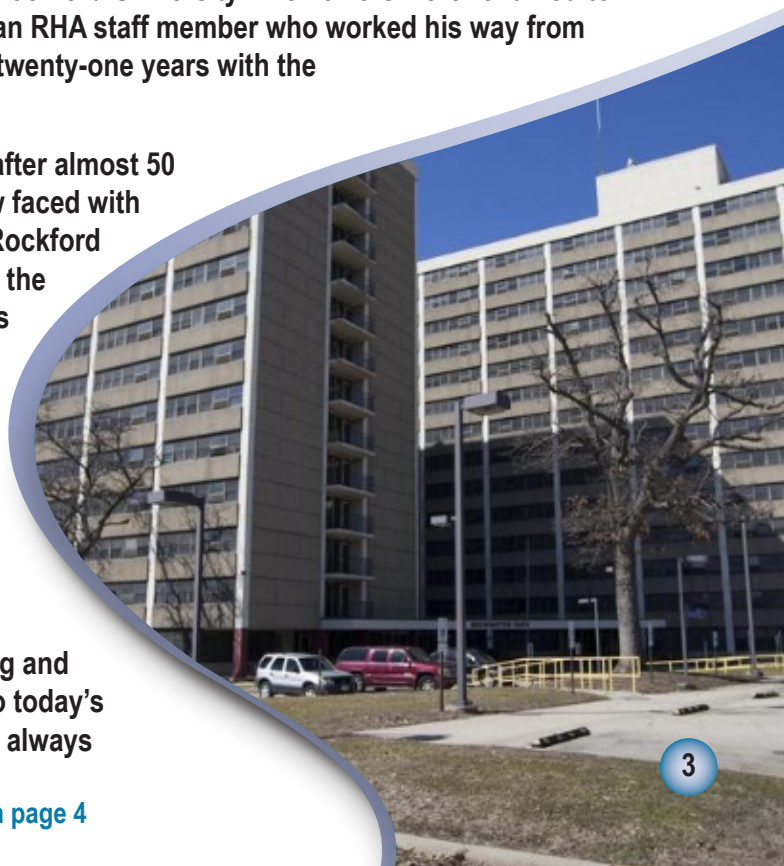
The S. C. Industry Council surveyed the “Workforce Profile,” which found “an across-the-board unanimous profile of skills, to make a good employee.” The people most likely to be hired for available jobs have what employers call “soft skills.” Soft skills are the basis of the curriculum and the syllabus for the LIFE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (LDI.) Soft skills are one of the most challenging things to teach. And the most common reason for not hiring, not promoting, and poor performance evaluation. In conjunction with the new Jobs Plus, the LDI Curriculum addresses the workforce’s foundational skill gap with a 12-week, hands-on learning program covering Job, and Career Readiness Skills, targeting the community’s workforce goals. Through the Jobs Plus Grant, the RHA objective and vision are to meet human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention and remediation of resident’s issues and maintaining a commitment to improving our residents’ overall quality of life.



BREWINGTON OAKS DEMOLITION

Brewington Oaks housing development opened in 1969 in the city’s ORCHiD neighborhood, to provide housing for senior citizens and the disabled. The buildings were originally called Campus Towers because they were located close to the original site of Rockford College, which is now Rockford University. The Towers were renamed to Brewington Oaks Apartments after Al Brewington, to honor an RHA staff member who worked his way from maintenance to the RHA Assistant Executive Director in his twenty-one years with the Rockford Housing Authority.

While even though the outer structure is made of concrete, after almost 50 years of continuous use, the RHA Leadership Team was now faced with the two buildings on the brink of infrastructure failure. The Rockford Housing Authority first announced the intention to demolish the property in 2018. At the time, occupancy at the buildings was at 42% and 90 of the 418 units were deemed uninhabitable. This was due to functional and technical obsolescence. The building’s mechanical, electrical and conveyance systems (elevators) performed poorly in compared to modern standards, where energy-inefficient, and moving into the future may have become unreliable and unsafe. Such issues as roofing and original internal construction materials were deteriorating beyond repair. The annual maintenance, repair and replacement costs were accelerating and increasingly unaffordable. Bringing the aging structure up to today’s building codes to ensure the best for the RHA residents was always



top-of-mind for the RHA Facilities Managers.

Buildings such as these, can have damaging effects on residents, including the elderly and vulnerable seniors. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved tenant vouchers for the residents. To address the move of these occupants, RHA used a variety of financial tools to replace, relocate, and find quality affordable homes for the residents of Brewington Oaks. The RHA Resident Team also provided the Brewington Oaks residents ongoing counseling and help to secure and find a new place to call home. “We always work with our residents to make sure that it’s affordable, safe, that it meets standards,” said Owen Carter, RHA Director of Housing operations. “We worked with other housing authorities, wherever they choose. We were in contact with them through our resident services department. They worked together to make sure it’s an appropriate placement.”



These new units were also affordable for these folks with extremely low incomes and all secured locations. The projected expense of saving and renovating Brewington Oaks whose poor physical condition, and most importantly, the long-term operational costs of maintaining the outdated space of this aging building, became cost prohibitive. The RHA leadership team had to make tough decisions about whether to build, renovate, or demolish these aging buildings and its infrastructure. Working with HUD and many sectors of the Rockford community, the final decision was made and approved for a Section 18 application. “They’re going to continue to deteriorate the longer that they’re there, we have to keep all the utilities on so that way we can continue to maintain it. Water breaks, fire suppression systems failures, could cost us millions of dollars into a building that’s vacant,” said Rockford Housing Authority’s CEO, Laura Snyder.

RHA Commissioners awarded a \$1,544,400 demolition contract to N-TRAK Group of Loves Park to raze the twin 14-story towers at 505 and 515 Seminary Street. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development gave RHA permission to demolish the towers in 2018 but we have asked developers last year to submit requests for qualifications to possibly redevelop the site. The site contains 5.35 acres. In total, the two buildings contain 233,281 square feet.

“I feel we’ve done our due diligence in exploring other options,” RHA Board Chairperson Karen Hoffman said. “The issue has been before the board since February of 2020 and during this time it’s been the responsibility of RHA to physically and financially maintain this property.”

“Five developers responded, two of whom proposed to renovate the existing towers, while three proposed demolition” Laura Snyder, RHA CEO said.

Haight Village Neighborhood Association President Lisa Jimenez spoke in favor of the demolition with some conditions. “We’d like to see what the plans are going to be and what they will include,” Jimenez said. “Our hope is that we’ll have more community engagement that’s a little more organized as well as the future development having some sort of greenspace and riverfront access and a component of market-rate housing.”

RHA is pleased to have come to this important decision about Brewington Oaks. This is the correct conclusion for the community of Rockford, this is the right choice for the future of our residents.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

This May, the Rockford Housing Authority would like to share the importance of mental health treatment, support, and services to the millions of people, families, caregivers, and loved ones affected by mental illness. In the United States, 1 in 5 (46.6 million) adults experience a mental health condition in a given year, and 1 in 25 (11.2 million) adults experience a serious mental illness in a given year. Many people can find it difficult to start treatment due to the cost of mental health care or transportation. However, people experiencing mental health conditions can often face rejection, bullying, and even discrimination that can make their journey to recovery longer and more complex.

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, chooses a theme every May. The 2021 Mental Health Awareness Month message is “You Are Not Alone.” NAMI wants to take this time to “focus on the healing value of connecting in safe ways, prioritizing mental health and acknowledging that it’s okay not to be okay.” The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of all people. This May, it is critical to reducing the stigma around the mental health of people of all ages.

According to the CDC, “Overall, 40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health condition, including symptoms of anxiety disorder or depressive disorder (30.9%), symptoms of a trauma- and stressor-related disorder (TSRD) related to the pandemic† (26.3%), and having started or increased substance use to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19 (13.3%).” The pandemic has caused a wave of confusion, anxiety, and stress all over the world. The reduced contact with friends and family members can make people feel lonely and isolated. Learning to cope with these feelings is an integral part of a healthy life. The CDC recommends these tips for dealing with stress:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. Take care of your body.
- Take time to unwind.
- Connect with others; video chats or phone calls

If you or someone you know has a mental illness, it is essential to remember that there are ways to get help. Below we have provided these resources to find help for you, a friend, or a family member in need of support.

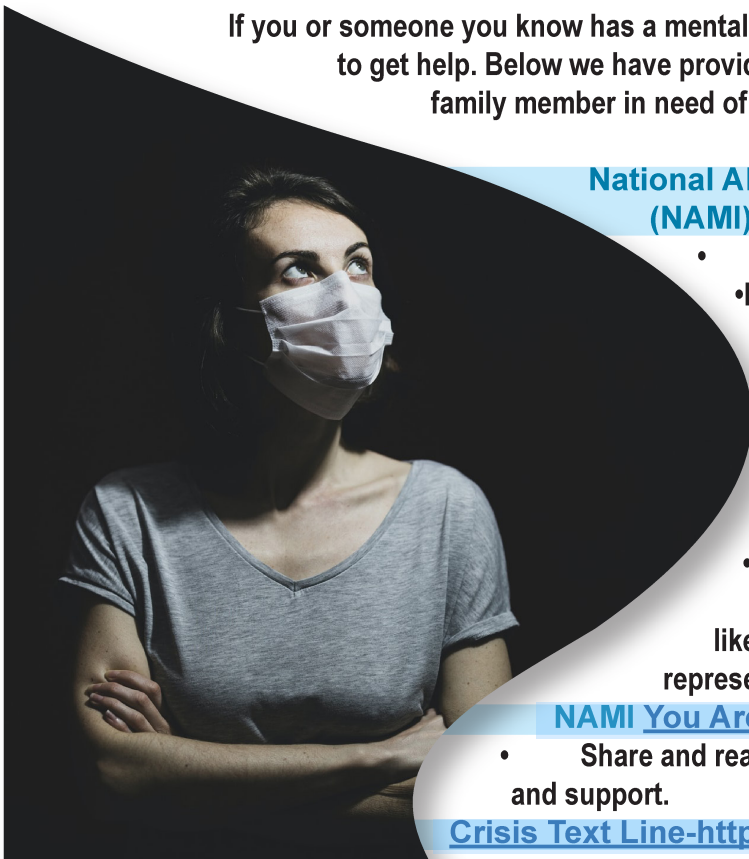
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) HelpLine

- Monday- Friday, 10 am–6 pm ET: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
- HelpLine staff and volunteers are prepared to answer your questions about mental health issues including: Symptoms of mental health conditions, Treatment options, Local support groups and services, Education programs, helping family members get treatment, Programs to help find jobs.
- We are unable to provide counseling or therapy, cannot provide specific recommendations for things like treatment or do individual casework, legal representations or other individual advocacy.

NAMI You Are Not Alone- <https://notalone.nami.org/>

- Share and read personal stories about mental health care and support.

Crisis Text Line-<https://www.crisistextline.org/>





- Text NAMI to 741-741
- Connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive free, 24/7 crisis support via text message.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

- If you or someone you know is in crisis—whether they are considering suicide or not—please call the toll-free Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) to speak with a trained crisis counselor 24/7. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline connects you with a crisis center in the Lifeline network closest to your location.
- Your call will be answered by a trained crisis worker who will listen empathetically and without judgment. The crisis worker will work to ensure that you feel safe and help identify options and information about mental health services in your area. Your call is confidential and free.

• **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)-Resources on [Help for mental illness- https://www.nimh.nih.gov/](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/)**

- **The National Domestic Violence Hotline- <https://www.thehotline.org/>** provides 24/7 crisis intervention, safety planning and information on domestic violence. Phone: 1-800-799-7233

- **The Suicide Prevention Lifeline- <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>** connects callers to trained crisis counselors 24/7. They also provide a chat function on their website. Phone: 1-800-273-8255

- **Psychology Today- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>** offers a national directory of therapists, psychiatrists, therapy groups and treatment facility options.

- For helpful links visit RHA COVID-19 Page here: <https://rockfordha.org/covid-19-resources/>



MOTHER'S DAY

Mother's Day is a holiday celebrating motherhood, created in 1908 and designated as an official US holiday in 1914. Celebrations of Mother's Day and motherhood can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans who has festivals in honor of the mother goddesses Rhea and Cybele. Mother's Day is observed differently throughout the world, traditions vary depending on the country. In Thailand the holiday is in August on the birthday of the current Queen, in Ethiopia, families gather each fall to sing songs and eat a huge feast as a part of Antrosht, a multiple-day celebration of motherhood. For us in the United States, Mother's Day is celebrated by giving mothers and other women caregivers flowers and gifts. Mother's Day has become one of the biggest holidays for consumer spending and shopping, making sure that the special women in our lives feel appreciated. Some families celebrate not by spending money, but by giving mothers "the day off" from chores they usually do every day. The word Mom means something different to every individual and every Mother or Mother figure's journey is different.

THE JOURNEY TO LEARNING WITH LIFEFORCE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



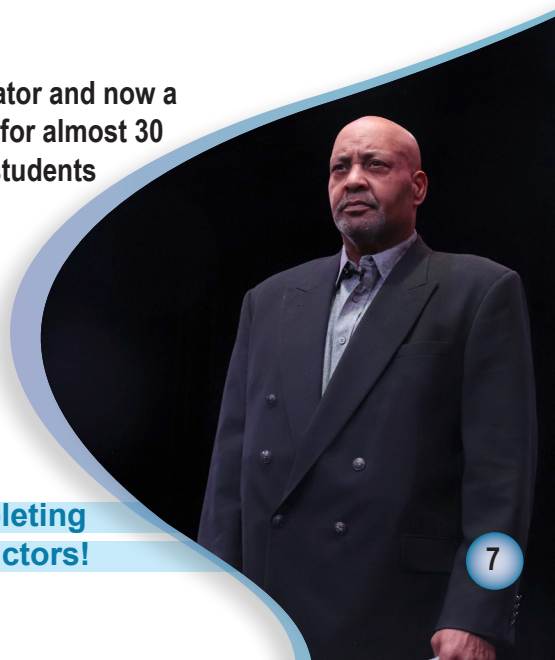
MICHAELA HARRIS - INSIGHT: I participated in the LDI class as both a first-time instructor and student. As the Section 3 Manager, bridging the gap between being unemployed and employed often means education. LDI offers just that. It provides foundational skills for our residents and covers topics vital to the success of a new employee. In this class, we dive into attitudes and behavior, accountability, time management, and interview skills.

Even as a 15-year customer service veteran, this class taught me awareness and insight into my own role. It inspired my mind and helped me become an even better "me." It engages and empowers its students for self-awareness and cordevelopment. Even though the course focuses on assisting individuals in developing soft skills to gain employment, it is still immensely valuable to the long-term company veteran. Regardless of time, tenure, or experience LDI will re-engage your mind, your goals, and your career.

RAY WILLIAMS - INSIGHT: Ray Williams, RHA Ross Service Coordinator and now a first-time Lifeforce Development Institute Instructor, has worked in housing for almost 30 years. Last LDI semester, he was in charge of the transportation offered to students to pick them up and drop them off for classes.

This year Ray decided to sit in on the program and become an instructor. He stated that "It was an excellent program to be involved in. The program gives you an opportunity to look at things from a different point of view; I got a lot out of it." Ray Williams completed the full 12 weeks and was surprised with a diploma of completion at the graduation.

Congratulations to Michaela Harris and Ray Williams for completing Lifeforce Development Institute and becoming first-time instructors!



HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE EDUCATION MONTH

May marks High Blood Pressure Education Month! This is a time for understanding the causes, prevention and treatment for high blood pressure. This month marks the 47th year. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute launched the first month back in May of 1974. Throughout these past years over 300 national organizations have joined in the educational and awareness month. According to the CDC "In the United States, nearly one in four adults has hypertension, but only about half (27%) of those have it under control." Hypertension is another word for high blood pressure; if the blood pushes against your arteries too hard for too long, serious health problems can develop. High blood pressure has no symptoms but there are some things you can reduce your risk of high blood pressure or bring it back to normal.

1. Skip the Sodium 2. Eat more fruits and vegetables 3. Stay active

Heart.org offers some tips on how to measure your blood pressure. If you have a blood pressure machine at home here are some directions on what to do. Be still; don't smoke, drink caffeine, or exercise within 30 minutes before measuring your blood pressure. Sit correctly; sit with your back straight and supported with your feet flat on the floor. Your arm should be supported on a flat surface too. Measure at the same time every day and Don't take the measurements over clothes. After you take your blood pressure it's important to know your numbers. Here's a break down:

- If the upper number is less than 120 and the lower number is less than 80 you have normal blood pressure.
- If the upper number is 120-129 and the lower number is less than 80 your blood pressure is elevated.
- If the upper number is 130-139 or the lower number is 80-89 you have stage one high blood pressure.

If you get a high blood pressure reading; a single high reading is not a cause for alarm. If your blood pressure exceeds 180/120 mm hg, wait 5 minutes and test again. If it is still the same, contact your doctor immediately. When choosing a home blood pressure monitor The American Heart Association recommends an automatic, cuff-style, bicep (upper-arm) monitor and keep a journal of your daily pressure.

You can find more information here: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure>

Easy places to get your blood pressure checked:



Pharmacy



Doctor's office



At home with a home monitoring device



The Correct Way to Measure Blood Pressure

- No talking
- Arm resting at chest height
- Cuff against bare skin
- Back is supported
- Sit with feet flat on floor



Visit [cdc.gov/bloodpressure](https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure) for tips and resources.



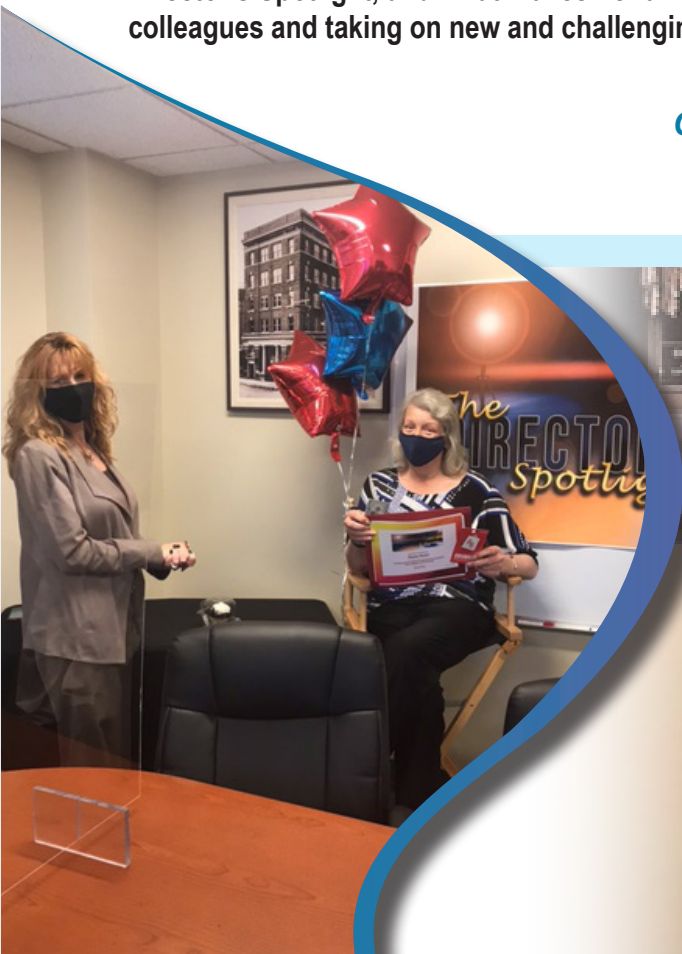
DIRECTORS SPOTLIGHT

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR APRIL 2021, DIRECTOR'S SPOTLIGHT WINNER, MRS. DIANE ROSIN!

Throughout her 4 years at RHA, Diane has worn many different hats within the finance department. From Accounts Payable to Tenant Accounts Receivable and back to Accounts Payable where she took the lead in the implementation of AvidExchange software that helps the agency automate our payables. No matter what her responsibilities, she has been very reliable and dedicated to her roll.

Her detail-oriented skills has saved the agency thousands of dollars but what contributed to her winning the Director's Spotlight, and what makes her a valuable asset to the agency is her willingness to assist her fellow colleagues and taking on new and challenging projects. We are very proud to have her part of our RHA team!

CONGRATULATIONS DIANE!





MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day, celebrated on the last Monday of May honors the men and women who died while serving in the U.S military. Memorial Day was observed as “Decoration Day” and it originated years after the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. The Civil War took more lives than any war in U.S history and when it ended in the spring of 1865 Americans in towns and cities had held springtime tributes to the fallen soldiers by decorating graves and reciting prayers.

The Poppy flower is the symbol of Memorial Day because, in the war battlefields of Europe, the red field poppy was one of the first plants to reappear. Its seeds scattered in the wind and sat in the ground only sprouting when the ground was disturbed. The wearing of the poppy was traditionally done on Memorial Day in the US, but the symbolism has evolved into honoring all veterans; living and deceased. Today poppies are not only a symbol of the loss of life, but also for recovery and new life. Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries and holding family gatherings and each year on Memorial Day a national moment of remembrance takes place at 3:00 pm local time. Memorial Day also tends to mark the unofficial start of summer.

Thank you from RHA

RHA would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to those men and women who lost their lives in the line of duty. We will always remember the sacrifices of our nation's heroes. We also want to recognize the loved ones of fallen soldier's families and friends.

*We hope everyone has a safe
Memorial Day weekend.*

MAY 4, 2021: GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES PLAN FOR NEXT PHASE

Coronavirus restrictions in Illinois could be loosened next week as the latest surge in COVID-19 hospitalization drops.

Currently, Illinois is in a modified Phase 4 of the state's reopening plan, which allows bars and restaurants to operate at slightly higher capacity and vaccinated people to gather in small groups.

Illinois is currently in Phase 4 of its reopening plan and must first enter what's known as the Bridge Phase before a full reopening in the final Phase 5, which would see all sectors of the economy fully reopened and no capacity limits, among other changes.

A bridge phase would consist of slightly fewer restrictions than Illinois has now and will precede the full reopening planned for Phase 5. Businesses like theaters, offices, gyms and other retailers could open at 60 percent capacity under the new rules.

"It looks to me, if you look at all the hospital admissions data, like we're in decent shape and moving exactly as I would hope we would for the bridge phase," Pritzker said.

One of the main concerns for states reopening is the spread of coronavirus variants, especially the first seen in the United Kingdom. On Sunday, Illinois reported 438 cases of the U.K. variant out of a total of 2,507 cases. Officials also reported smaller numbers of variant cases first seen in Brazil, California and South Africa.

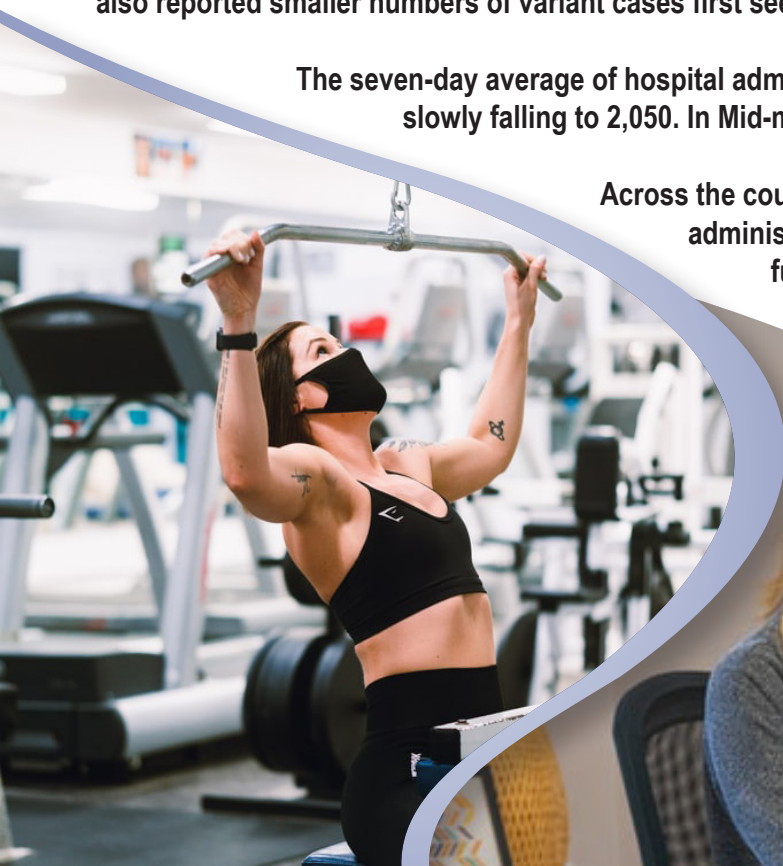
The seven-day average of hospital admissions in Illinois peaked at over 2,150 in late April before slowly falling to 2,050. In Mid-march, the average was 1,125 — before the recent surge.

Across the country, over nine million the vaccine doses have been administered. About 32 percent of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated.

"I've been amazed all along," he said, "at people's willingness to follow the mitigations, to do the right thing. This is about doing what's best for your own family, for yourself and for your community and I think most people in Illinois have stepped up to the plate."

A Bridge To Phase 5

Protecting our progress while allowing us to reopen the economy faster





Rockford Housing Authority
223 S Winnebago Street
Rockford, IL 61102

DID YOU KNOW: THERE ARE AFFORDABLE APARTMENTS AVAILABLE CURRENTLY IN OUR HIGH RISES?



North Main Manor: 187 units
505 N. Main St. Rockford, IL 61103

North Main Manor is located in the downtown area surrounded by Parks and near the scenic Rock River; convenient to Rockford Public Library, churches, banks, and downtown activities. The building has a diverse selection of amenities, including cable service, on-site laundry facilities, private off-street resident parking, and a video intercom entry system. Heat, water, and gas are provided.

For additional information contact management at (815) 489-8670.



Park Terrace: 183 units
1000 Chamberlain Rockford, IL 61107

Park Terrace is centrally located near Rockford's downtown area with convenient access to the Eastside business district. With its spacious apartments and other amenities, Park Terrace offers the enjoyment of beautiful park-like surroundings with friendly people. Enjoy active, independent living.

Appliances are furnished for each apartment. Private off-street resident parking. On-site laundry facilities. Located on the RMTD bus line. Apartments are cable-ready and water and gas are furnished.

For additional information contact management at (815) 489-8663.



Olesen Plaza - 511 N. Church St. Rockford, IL 61103 151 units - Olesen Plaza is centrally located near Rockford's downtown area surrounded by parks with convenient access to cultural centers, an art museum, and the main branch of the public library. There are also several financial institutions within easy walking distance of the building.

Each apartment is furnished with appliances and an air conditioner sleeve. Convenient parking for residents is provided on the grounds. Olesen Plaza is located on the City bus line. Apartments are cable-ready and there is a coin-operated laundry on the premises. Olesen Plaza offers one and two-bedroom apartments that are uniquely designed.

For additional information contact management at (815) 489-8680