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## Sinai's Chris Newport: Helping senior residents through the pandemic

By Alexandra Clough

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The director of a senior retirement community in Boca Raton gets creative to keep residents busy, social and safe.

Running a large retirement community is tough enough, but layer in a global pandemic and Chris Newport has a big task on his hands.

As executive director of Boca Raton's Sinai Residences in Boca Raton, a Life Plan Retirement Community, Newport has had to keep his senior residents safe.

Therefore he limited staff interactions, including frequent housekeeping checks. He didn't lay off Sinai's 300 full and part-time workers, however.

Instead, he had them perform other tasks at the resort-style complex. For instance, staff that typically interacted with residents went grocery shopping or made bank deposits for them instead. And valets idled by residents sheltering in place were charged with starting up their cars.

Newport didn't need to worry just about keeping residents safe. He also has to keep them happy.

Per state restrictions, visitors have been forbidden to visit loved ones at the facility, which features independent living, assisted living, nursing and memory care. Sinai Residences was developed by Federation CCRC Development, a subsidiary of the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County.

Typically, Sinai is a lively place filled with residents who enjoy a range of sports, activities and social interaction. Newport said one fit resident in his 90s joked he is "not old enough" to live there.

But during the pandemic, residents had to be careful to self-isolate. To help residents navigate this unusual time, Newport and his team crafted a buddy system to keep residents engaged.

Several times a week, residents volunteer to call five to seven other residents to check on them.

The result? New friendships.

Newport said these new friends now are walking together outdoors, socially distanced. Some are finding surprising shared histories, including growing up in the same neighborhoods.

“This buddy system has been an automatic connection,” Newport said.

Newport and his staff also have devised other ways of keeping residents connected with each other. There are birthday parties over Zoom and exercise classes via the in-house television station. For Father’s Day, Sinai rolled out Beers & Cheers, where staff went room to room and gave dads a cold beer and a chocolate cigar.

Despite the uncertain path of the pandemic, Sinai is thinking ahead to another threat to residents: Power loss from hurricanes. Sinai just completed installation of a generator “farm,” six custom-made generators large enough to power the 600,000-square-foot campus. The project took 18 months to complete and cost \$4.6 million.

Looking ahead, Sinai plans to build more units for residents. Some 111 additional independent units now are up for sale, and 71 already have sold to buyers ranging from locals to out of state. The starting price is \$500,000. For that price, residents can age-in-place, receive services such as dining and nursing, and then transition to nursing care if needed.

The \$160 million expansion also will include an expanded fitness and wellness center, two new dining venues, and a resort-style pool. Construction is set for completion in 2022.

**Name: Chris Newport**

**Title:** Executive Director, Toby & Leon Cooperman Sinai Residences of Boca Raton.

**Age:** 36

**Hometown:** Terre Haute, Indiana

**Education:** Undergrad, Indiana State University; Graduate, Indiana Wesleyan

**Family:** I am married to my wife, Whitney, and we have two children: Madison, 2.5 years old; and Carter, 6 months old.

**About your company:** Sinai Residences of Boca Raton is a luxury senior living retirement community managed by Life Care Services. Our community offers 234 independent living apartments, 48 assisted living apartments, with 60 Skilled Nursing (60 apartments) and Memory Care (24 apartments) areas as well. Our community is located on the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County Campus.

**First paying job and what you learned from it:** My first paying job was at 15 years old in the culinary department, waiting on tables in a Life Plan Senior Living Community, Westminster Village in Terre Haute.

**First break in the business:** Following college graduation, I was given an administrator-in-training opportunity with Life Care Services. I moved to Dallas, Oregon.

**How your business has changed:** Many new and changes to regulations. The competition in our industry has also increased dramatically, so we need to be the best in every way possible. Today's environment has required us to have the ability to adapt to ever-changing regulatory requirements ... and navigate through the current new normal of Zoom meetings and virtual marketing.

**Best business book:** "Good to Great" by Jim Collins.

**Best piece of business advice you ever received:** To inspect what you expect. Also, if you hire the right people, the business should run better when you (as the director/leader) aren't there.

**What you tell young people about your business:** Respect is not given, but respect is earned and the senior living industry is truly, taking care of people who need/wish to be taken care of.

**What do you see ahead for Palm Beach County?** Continued development in both the senior living industry and supporting services, due to the ongoing census growth in this area.

**Power lunch spot:** Pho Boca

**Where we'd find you when you're not at the office?** Walking around the community and talking with residents, families and staff.

**Favorite smartphone app:** Waze

**What is the most important trait you look for when hiring?** Sincerity of caring and a desire to help people.

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