

APPA's Membership Value During These Trying Times

By Patty Smith

From me to you, “Happy Summer.” I hope that as you are reading this article, we are closer to emerging from the pandemic associated with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). “Emerging” is an appropriate description of leaving the virus behind and looking forward. However, as we look forward, we must take a good, hard look at the lessons we learned in light of our recent experiences. How did APPA assist members to help weather the COVID-19 storm? As summer takes hold and we take a look back, we need to ask ourselves how we performed. What might our new norms be? I want to share my personal experience and convey the absolute value of APPA membership.

APPA MEMBERSHIP VALUE DURING THESE TRYING TIMES

Cabrini University is a small Catholic college in Radnor, Pennsylvania, and is located in Montgomery County. Within days of COVID-19's entry into Pennsylvania, Montgomery County quickly became the epicenter of the virus. On March 6, 2020, the Cabrini University administration established a COVID-19

task force. That was the first and last day of meeting in person for any discussion on the topic of the virus.

On that day, our familiar daily routines began to change. I hesitate to say that it was the beginning of a new norm; however, changes occurred that certainly altered the landscape for our campus community. Work order processing, summer planning, quarterly reports, budget preparation, and more, took a backseat to preparation for virtual learning, while plans began for transitioning our students home with an unknown return time frame, along with attempts to purchase every personal protective equipment (PPE) item, every ounce of disinfectant, and every square inch of toilet paper we could. As campus leaders looked me square in the eye to learn how prepared facilities was to meet the challenge of “mitigating the transfer of the virus,” I was ready.

Prior to the meeting, I considered contacting some of my colleagues in the Delaware Valley for advice, but time did not permit this. Instead, I logged into the APPA website and knew that answers to my most pressing questions would be right there. APPA did not disappoint.

THE GATHERING PLACE FOR INFORMATION IMPORTANT TO YOU

The APPA leadership wasted no time in establishing a COVID-19 resource center. That was my first stop in preparing for my initial Cabrini COVID-19 task force meeting. The Recently Asked Questions (RAQs) were valuable and provided clear information that allowed me to answer my own questions. As a proud APPA member, I shared information with my campus task force as to what actions were being taken by our university colleagues.

APPA's COVID-19 resource center was a valuable source of information, and empowered me to share about the clear, concise, and definitive measures taken by APPA members. Ultimately, Cabrini made decisions that protected the integrity of the university's learning, social, and athletic experiences. The



campus closed to all but essential personnel on Monday, March 16, 2020. The university did not have a single community COVID-19 transmission, yet Radnor Township and Montgomery County were quickly struck with cases that seemed to double on a daily basis. It was a smart move by Cabrini's president, Donald Taylor, to close the campus on March 16.

What happened next? APPA staff immediately engaged other collegiate professionals to contribute their knowledge to educating our campus facilities leaders. As an association, they updated their webpage with current information containing appropriate links from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American College Health Association (ACHA), and pertinent guidelines to local health organizations on how to deal with the virus. With a few keystrokes, we could find the current number of cases in the world, the country, and our own states. Town Hall Meetings were held. A survey tool was also included, just in case the many resources I have listed did not address a known concern. APPA rose to the occasion just when we needed it the most, fulfilling its goal of enabling lifelong and continuous learning, and keeping us, the facilities leaders, armed with the knowledge we were looking for in a one-stop-shop mode.

LOOKING FORWARD—THE KEY TO OUR PERSEVERANCE

So where are we now? Here are some of the questions we might ask ourselves as we look forward to the not-so-lazy days of summer 2020:

- How did the pandemic affect your campus?
- Are you planning to update your campus emergency manual?
- As a campus community, how well did you do in keeping your students engaged?
- Did your facilities department perform as expected?
- Did you keep the safety of your employees at the forefront as they supported campus operations?
- Did you take care of yourselves and keep mentally on track to handle virus mitigation while reducing budgets, postponing construction projects, and enduring the loss of summer revenue?

And there is one more question we can and should ask ourselves: What are the new “norms” for college campus activities? I hope that our classrooms will not turn into teaching studios, and that students tuning in from their homes will not become the new standard. Likewise, the prospect of esports replacing traditional competitions is disconcerting.

Fear not. More than likely, we will have much to learn from APPA as it debriefs the membership and captures the activities, practices, and events that enveloped us as we battled the virus. Whitepapers are forthcoming, emergency preparedness manuals are already being updated, and the sharing content at the annual Regional Conferences is being developed. In the aftermath of COVID-19, there will be renewed emphasis on planning, cleaning, and managing risks. As facilities leaders, we will contribute to the renewed effort to practice what many of us told our employees—“stay safe, stay well”—and we will emerge stronger having lived through this. Happy summer! ☺

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