

Celebrating 50 Years of B'nai B'rith Senior Housing

CHEERS TO 50 YEARS!



B'nai B'rith
Senior Housing
Network

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SENIORITY REPORT

WINTER 2021

Inform

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INTERNATIONAL**
CENTER FOR SENIOR SERVICES

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EDITOR: Gracie Cohen

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B'nai B'rith Apartments in Allentown, Pennsylvania: Staff and Board Insight with Neil Forgosh, Bob Sipos and Barbra Butz

By: Gracie Cohen



Chronicle photo/DON UHRICH

Greeting Edna Gurskey, Jeanette Cohen and Goldie Gleekel (left to right) — the first tenants of the B'nai B'rith House, 16th and Liberty streets, Allentown — this morning were the apartment house administrators, Jack Singer, Robert Sipos and Neil Forgosh.

Editor's note: This interview has been edited and condensed. The full video interview will be available for viewing on the B'nai B'rith website in May.

Mark Olshan, associate executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International and director of the B'nai B'rith International Center for Senior Services, chatted with Neil Forgosh, Bob Sipos and Barbra

Butz, all connected through their service at B'nai B'rith Apartments in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The interview captures the essence of the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing spirit:

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those who are in the network (sometimes even spanning a generation or two, as you'll learn from Barbra Butz) genuinely commit to the well-being of senior residents and their housing needs. Neil Forgosh, an original board member and subsequent president of the board, shares his experience on how he became involved with the residence. Bob Sipos is the longest original serving property manager in the B'nai B'rith network, with over 40 years! He shares what keeps him going day in and day out. And Barbra Butz highlights her experience with B'nai B'rith Apartments, starting at just 10 years old, when her father was the original board president. She now serves as the current board president.

Mark: Neil and Bob, this photo might jog your memory. What do you remember about it? What was it like when those tenants moved into the building?

Neil Forgosh: That is Jack Singer on the far left, one of the people who went to the meeting and told me about the housing project.

Bob Sipos: They were thrilled to be there. Because it was a brand-new building, they had their pick of apartments. They were the first people in the building for a few days ... and when I left at night, I felt so bad leaving them. I gave them my home phone number and pager, and said, "If you need anything let me know." They were fine the next morning, they were happy ... but I was really concerned about them.

Mark: Neil, you have been involved with the building since before it even opened. As one of the driving forces behind the property, can you explain that process?

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Clockwise from top left: Bob Sipos, Mark Olshan, Neil Forgosh, and Barbra Butz share their lifetime involvement with B'nai B'rith Apartments in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

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Neil Forgosh: Abe Cramer and Jack Singer had went to a board meeting, where the concept was brought up. Arnold Tannenbaum was the president at the time, who was a fraternity brother of mine. He asked me what I thought of it and I said, "It sounds interesting!" The reality of it, if it wasn't for Abe, it wouldn't have happened. We had been talking about a piece of property that was for sale in a lumber yard. I saw on the news one day there was a fire at the lumber yard ... and knew we got it. I called Abe, told him we had the property. From that point on, it rolled right through. We interviewed Bob Sipos for that [property manager] job.

Both buildings have been 100% occupied since day one. Bob and the people they've hired have been phenomenal. I am duly impressed with the new manager.... They have controlled the coronavirus within the building ... and have been very, very good at keeping the building healthy.

Mark: Bob, can you talk to us how you got involved?

Bob Sipos: I had been a schoolteacher prior but had heard about HUD senior housing development.

The board selected me to help run the property. ... The board has always been supportive of me. I have a great staff; I was very happy. The board always took good care of me and also took good care of the building. ... I've had the opportunity of being able to come into my job for 40-plus years, where I look forward to coming in every day.

Giving people housing that make their lives much easier and much more affordable is the real pay-back, and just helping them spend the rest of their lives in a comfortable, secure setting.

Mark: Barbra, you are the current president of the board. Can you talk about how you got involved? And how have you found your role of president?

Barbra Butz: My dad was Arnold Tannenbaum, and I remember when he was building the apartments, I was 10 years old. It was a big deal in my house! We would go and see the construction site—my dad was very proud of it. My dad did pass away in 1983, right when the second building was finished. Not too long after, my mother joined the board. ... She was also president for a 15-year period. I joined the board in 1999, and she was

president at that time. Soon after I joined the board, I started to teach craft classes each month. I really got to know the residents. One of them was Bob's mother, who was lovely. I got to know the women really well. They would share how they felt about living in the building. Some of them had hard, difficult lives with a lot of trauma. More than one of them had said to me this was by far the best place they had ever lived. And they were so grateful. It really stays with me in every decision we make around the board room, in knowing that we're helping someone in their twilight years, when you just want to relax and feel safe and secure.

Check out the full interview in May, where you'll hear more from Neil, Bob and Barbra on their experiences at B'nai B'rith Apartments

Stay tuned for upcoming interviews with original staff and board members as part of CSS' 50th Anniversary campaign this year.

Cheers to 50 years!

Correction: March 22, 2021
An earlier version of this story misspelled Barbra Butz's first name as Barbara.

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Happy 50th Birthday B'nai B'rith Senior Housing!

By Evan Carmen

This is an exciting year for the Center for Senior Services (CSS), celebrating our 50th anniversary! B'nai B'rith sponsors Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) affordable housing across the country and currently our network comprises 38 buildings and serves about 5,000 people, making us the largest national Jewish sponsor of subsidized housing in the United States. B'nai B'rith's housing footprint is across the country with buildings from New York to California, down to Florida and everywhere in between. We began providing HUD-assisted senior housing in 1971, when we opened our first sponsored building B'nai B'rith Apartments in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Not bad for fifty years!

Our housing network isn't just about ribbon cutting ceremonies; it's so much more. Mark D. Olshan, associate executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International and director of the B'nai B'rith International Center for Senior Services, was responsible for expanding our annual Conference on Senior Housing and starting our onsite staff training for management professionals. These trainings are a great opportunity for the B'nai B'rith housing community to come together, network with each other, and hear from experts in the field on how to make our individual buildings the best they can be for our residents.

Mark is also responsible for starting the bi-annual Resident Leadership Retreat, operating since 1987. This retreat not only connects fellow resident leaders throughout the B'nai B'rith housing network but provides many tools to strengthen their communities back home. Residents participate in intensive, day-long workshops regarding resident councils and by-laws, address language and culture barriers, communicate with



management, publish a newsletter, spend time with campers doing intergenerational programing and more.

Since these programs' inception, Janel Doughten, associate director of the Center for Senior Services, has taken over coordinating them, adding to the content and therefore value to the participants. Under Janel and our late co-worker Gene Fogel's leadership, the annual staff training was expanded from just the managers to additional onsite staff including assistant managers, activity coordinators and service coordinators and is now called the B'nai B'rith Managers and Service Coordinators Training. The retreat was also expanded from three days to seven. These changes have provided for significantly more programing and training for additional staff and residents to bring back to their buildings. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all training has moved to a virtual platform and has expanded to include a weekly Zoom meeting with the onsite building staff. Sharing ideas and best practices—especially during a nationwide emergency—is one of the main benefits of being part of our housing network.

During the year CSS will be highlighting our housing community through our media platforms. Expect video conversations between B'nai B'rith staff and volunteers discussing our organization's rich history with affordable housing and the Resident Leadership Retreat. We intend on spotlighting our sponsored properties with fun facts and pictures, and interviews of our building's board members and staff. Some of our staff and volunteers have been with the buildings since their creation. Also, it's possible current B'nai B'rith residents could make an appearance to say hello and share their experiences.

Clearly there is lots to talk about and we are excited to share!

I have been privileged working at B'nai B'rith for the past four years, however my colleagues Mark and Janel have worked at the organization for 37 and 28 years, respectively. They rightfully talk about our senior housing program with pride. I hope during CSS' 100th anniversary we will be able to highlight even more accomplishments in the name of affordable senior housing.

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A Note From The Chair

By Marvin Siflinger

Hello friends,

As we begin 2021, the B'nai B'rith Housing Network is excited to celebrate our 50th anniversary. With people practicing social distancing, the Center for Senior Services (CSS) will be highlighting our housing program through our internet platforms. We are eager to share all the great moments over the past 50 years. Everyone's hard work has contributed to B'nai B'rith being the largest national Jewish sponsor of low-income housing for seniors in the United States.

I suspect each of us can remember how we got involved and are thankful for the opportunity to serve the senior housing community. My relationship with our network started in 1979. At the time, I was director for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) office in New England, in charge of programming. A group of B'nai B'rith volunteers approached HUD about building a property in Boston, which today is Irving B. Matross Covenant House. As you can see (above/below, etc location of picture) by the picture, they were a large group, and I was happy to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony. In 1982 the building opened to residents, with 150 units.

In 1996, after leaving public service, I became a member of my local B'nai B'rith housing organization. Fast forward a few years later, and I was a founding board member and president of B'nai B'rith Housing of New England (B'nai B'rith Housing), a nonprofit housing developer committed to providing affordable housing in the Boston metropolitan community under the auspices of B'nai B'rith. Working with B'nai B'rith Housing has allowed me to participate in the expansion of Covenant House and the creation of additional affordable housing properties throughout the Boston area. Today, I am a member of B'nai B'rith International's executive committee, grateful for the opportunity to work under this organization's banner and excited about what the future holds.

On a different note, both annual CSS training conferences were held virtually in 2020 because of the pandemic. Due to the popularity of these trainings, CSS will host an additional virtual training this coming Sunday and Monday, March 1th and March 15th. The two-day training will include interactive sessions, as well as training for the onsite building staff and board of directors of the housing network. Looking to the future after the pandemic, the two annual trainings will resume as in-person training. However, this additional early spring training will remain as a virtual meeting for years to come.

Looking forward to seeing everyone on Sunday and celebrating B'nai B'rith Senior Housing throughout the year.

Best,
Marvin

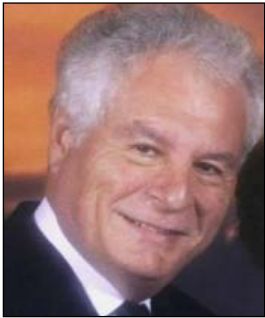


Marvin Siflinger (far left) and B'nai B'rith volunteers pose at the Irving B. Matross Covenant House groundbreaking ceremony in Brighton, Massachusetts.

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A Note from the Co-Chair

By Dennis Rice

This issue, Center for Senior Services commemorates and celebrates 50 years of senior housing. B'nai B'rith's first senior housing facility was established in 1971 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, paving the way for many more buildings B'nai B'rith would co-sponsor. In this special note, here is a little bit of my background and how I became involved in the Center for Senior Services:

I began my association with B'nai B'rith 56 years ago, seven years before the Center for Senior Services was formed. In 1970 I became the executive director of the Michigan and Metropolitan Detroit councils, representing 35 lodges and units.

Once the first building came under the auspices of B'nai B'rith, the lodges and state associations looked to join the bandwagon. We now have a senior housing network of 38 buildings across the United States, serving approximately 5,000 residents. B'nai B'rith also sponsors senior residences in Canada, Israel, Australia and New Zealand, each funded and governed by programs in the host country.

In Deerfield Beach, Florida, where I serve as president of the board, our first apartment building opened in 1987. The second building opened in 1994 and the third building opened in 2008. The last two buildings opened under Arthur Fentin, who served as the Deerfield Beach Apartments' president for over 20 years. In 2007, I was asked by Arthur to join the board. The next year I was elected vice president, and in 2019 I was elected president when Arthur moved to Philadelphia to be with his family. I had made a deal with Arthur that I would take over as president on his 100th birthday. He however made me take over six years early, when he was 94. I deem it an honor to serve the Deerfield board and B'nai B'rith, which has been a part of my life for over three-quarters of my existence, if you include AZA. I was privileged to chair the 2011 and 2017 B'nai B'rith Annual Housing Conferences in South Florida, where I learned so much about senior housing.

I get such satisfaction when I walk around our buildings and see such happy and content faces. The residents walk around with their heads up high and feel blessed that this is their beautiful home. I understand that if it wasn't for facilities like the ones B'nai B'rith sponsors, most our residents would be living under much more challenging, less quality circumstances. Looking ahead, we recently refinanced one of our buildings and received a considerable amount of money with which we are hopefully going to build a fourth building on our campus.

May the Center for Senior Services go from strength to strength and may our numbers grow significantly so we can bring more seniors under the umbrella of B'nai B'rith Housing.

Cheers to 50 years and more!

Thanks,
Dennis

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ON THE HILL



By Evan Carmen

Congress Finishes FY 2021 as B'nai B'rith looks ahead to FY 2022 and additional COVID-19 Relief. This fall and winter, our congressional outreach saw us tout the critical role affordable housing plays in the lives of seniors, in particular in light of the pandemic. As always, we teamed with the American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) and advocated strongly regarding additional COVID-19 stimulus legislation and the FY 2021 budget. As of March 1st, we met with staff members from the following offices including senior staff to the House Appropriations Committee:

Senate

Josh Hawley (R-Mo.)
Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Robert Menendez (D-N.J.)
Ben Cardin (D-Md.)Rick Scott (R-Fla.)
Bob Casey (D-Pa.)
Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.)
Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.)
Roy Blunt (R-MO)
Richard Shelby (R-Ala)

Congress

Barry Moore (R-Ala.)
Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.)
Steve Womack (R-Ark.)
Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.)
Mike Quigley (D-Ill.)

Congressional Legislation a Mixed Bag for Senior Housing

In December, Congress reached a bipartisan compromise to fund the government through FY 2021 and provide for additional COVID-19 stimulus. To us, the results of this legislation for the senior housing community were a mixed bag.

The good news: B'nai B'rith was pleased that Congress appropriated financial resources to fund senior housing in FY 2021. This allocation will fund operating and service coordinator expenses for the program across the country. In addition, we welcome Congress' allocation of \$52

million for the creation of additional senior housing units. There is a severe dearth of affordable housing in the country, and these funds are a good start to fill that gap! We are also encouraged by Congress allocating \$30 million for additional service coordinators. B'nai B'rith showed its approval for this legislation with a [Facebook post](#) on Dec. 22, 2020.

Unfortunately, separate from FY 2021, we were disappointed that there were no provisions made for low-income senior housing *in response to the pandemic*. We would have appreciated the additional funds for more supplies, staffing, service

coordinators and Wi-Fi accessibility. We expressed our disappointment in the lack of funding for senior housing regarding the pandemic on Dec. 21, 2020, with a [press release](#).

We hope Congress in future legislation will continue to provide support for families impacted by the pandemic and that future legislation will also include relief for affordable senior housing. While we turn the page to 2021, rest assured that our advocacy efforts are continuing as we passionately make the case for the maximum funding possible for affordable housing for seniors.

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B'nai B'rith Reaches out to Congressional Offices for COVID-19 Resources

As referenced above, B'nai B'rith continuously advocates with your congressional offices. These meetings serve the additional benefit of establishing relationships for the purposes of constituent services. Upon

request from several of our network members, we have reached out to congressional offices to inquire about community resources providing the COVID-19 vaccine. As always, we are at the ready to assist any building in our housing network.

New Administration

B'nai B'rith looks forward to learning about the new administration's plans for affordable senior housing. We will be reaching out to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's office of Multifamily Housing to introduce ourselves to the new appointees.

SPECIAL EDITION

Original Resident: Carol Trombino

By Gracie Cohen

This issue, we are featuring a resident who has lived in a B'nai B'rith Senior Housing building since its grand opening. We're deeming this resident an *original resident*. In this special edition Seniority Report, meet Carol Trombino and her chihuahua Petina Weena of Gerd & Inge Strauss B'nai B'rith Manor on Pantano in Tucson, Arizona. Carol, who is 80, moved into the building with Petina Weena in September of 2006. We chatted on the phone and she also wrote a letter about her experience. Get to know more about Carol below:

When Carol first moved in, the people she met were very friendly and even willing to help her rearrange her furniture. Carol's experience living at Strauss Manor shines light on the quality of B'nai B'rith's senior housing as a whole.

"I would like people to know, *where else could they go and live the way they live here, where everything is taken care of?* It's not just the affordable rent, but I feel so safe and secure. I was one of the first people to live in the building, and I've never had a problem staff couldn't resolve," she said.

What does she like most about living at Strauss Manor? Her list includes: how well the building is kept, how the staff are great and pay attention to you, and how friendly the residents are.



Carol Trombino and Petina Weena, original residents of B'nai B'rith Strauss Manor since September 2006.

Read her letter for more of her insight into living at B'nai B'rith Strauss Manor:

Dear B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network, My chihuahua Petina and I have been living at B'nai B'rith Strauss Manor for 14-plus years, with pleasure, and hope for another 50!

Petina and I were the first residents to receive an apartment in September 2006, when the building opened its doors.

Our building is so well kept by Jose Servin, our maintenance technician, and Theresa Beaty, our manager, who both care very much about its upkeep.

Luz Servin, our service coordinator, will help you with any problem that may come your way.

I thank God that I am able to live with the caring and pleasant people who work at Strauss Manor.

Since COVID-19 safety precautions have limited much of the in-person activities, the building has not been the same. It's too quiet! I truly can't wait to see the residents talking, doing activities together and having fun at Strauss Manor—my lovely home—again.

Thank you,
Carol Trombino

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Take a Trip Down Memory Lane

By Gracie Cohen

Did you know you can access neat photos of all 38 buildings in the B'nai B'rith Senior Network Housing Timeline? Did you know you can take a glimpse into the founding history of each building as well? While the housing timeline was launched on our website in the spring of 2020, the photos and historical context range from 1971 to the present. View a snapshot of a few buildings from each decade of the timeline in this special edition newsletter and be sure to check out the timeline in its entirety [here](#).

B'NAI B'RITH HOMECREST HOUSE, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

B'nai B'rith Homecrest House opens in 1979. Harry Moskowitz and Len Stein were the main forces behind the buildings. Homecrest II opened in 1985 and Homecrest III opened in 1990.



1970s

THE MARTIN D. POPKY B'NAI B'RITH APARTMENTS, WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA

The residence opens in 1971. It was the first affordable housing building B'nai B'rith operated for seniors. The 236-unit building was also the first to receive a fund reservation and is named after Marty Popky, the original president of the building.



Residents at Homecrest House dance at a social.



1980s

B'NAI B'RITH APARTMENTS, DEERFIELD BEACH, FLORIDA

B'nai B'rith Apartments opens in 1987. The second phase opened in 1994 and the third phase opened in 2008



NATHAN I. NAGLER QUEENS B'NAI B'RITH HOUSE, QUEENS, NEW YORK (NOW B'NAI B'RITH QUEENS)

Opens in 1983. Burt Wanitek and Nathan I. Nagler both became chairmen of the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing committee and both previously served as board presidents of the building.



Art Fentin, originally on the board of B'nai B'rith House in Claymont, Delaware, moved to Florida and subsequently became the president of the board of B'nai B'rith Apartments in Deerfield Beach.



1990s

ADELSTEIN FAMILY PROJECT H.O.P.E. B'NAI B'RITH HOUSE, BRONX, NEW YORK

Project H.O.P.E opens in 1993. Originally, Bernie Adelstein was the driving force behind the property. Adelstein's children—Marty, Allan and Shery—still serve on the board of directors.



ELMWOOD HOUSE, MARLTON, NEW JERSEY

The residence opens in 1997. Bernie Platt was president of the Southern New Jersey Council B'nai B'rith and the first president of Elmwood House. Platt was a major factor behind the acquisition of land for and construction of Elmwood House. The building later expanded in 2004.



The building was recently recapitalized in 2019 for the benefit of current and future residents. Residents celebrate the building renovations and upgrades at the ribbon cutting ceremony.



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The Coronavirus Pandemic: A Reflection on the Strength of the Network

By Janel Doughten

It has been a year since the coronavirus pandemic caused a national emergency, with most states shutting down. CSS staff have worked to keep the housing network connected, and facilitated solutions to keep the housing network staff informed and able to continue ensuring the health and safety of residents and staff through an unprecedented global pandemic.

As the rest of the country shut down and non-essential staff who could transitioned to work at home— including most of the federal government—our buildings' staff knew that their designation as essential workers meant they would still have to come to work in the building. However, with little direction from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or other federal and state agencies, each property management company was left to navigate how that would work in their building on their own. This left the staff and boards of the housing network wrestling with decisions of what exactly a shutdown would mean for the residents and staff. They needed answers to questions such as:

- Should staff limit visitors? Or ban them altogether?
- Should the buildings shut down community rooms, activities and the computer rooms?
- How would they protect the residents and staff?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local and state health departments were quick to address these issues in nursing homes, but independent living buildings were largely left to navigate the pandemic on their own in the first few months of the national shutdown.

CSS staff quickly realized a solution

to help the building staff negotiate the lack of direction: tapping the strength of the network itself. We knew the network had the power to unlock and share their resources and knowledge to figure it all out together.

In mid-March, CSS began holding a weekly Zoom meeting for all building staff to share their issues and work out solutions with their peers. Eventually, these meetings also became a forum for CSS staff to share information from meetings with Congressional staff and federal agencies, as well as material from webinars and industry meetings. Zoom meetings with the building staff on a weekly basis gave CSS staff the ability to find out the current issues and get answers from federal agencies quickly.

Additionally, CSS continued with our annual training conferences, although in a virtual format, and continued to advocate for funding for the Section 202 program and other federal programs that support our residents, and added COVID-19 relief to the Congressional advocacy.

CSS Network Benefit: B'nai B'rith Center for Community Action and the Disaster Relief Fund

Another major benefit of being part of CSS is a connection to the greater B'nai B'rith organization, which includes the B'nai B'rith Center for Community Action (CCA) and the Disaster Relief Fund. This relationship became a lifeline to the residents of the Queens B'nai B'rith House during the spring of 2020. Many residents were left without access to food when their local grocery store temporarily shut down, coupled with the suspension of a city delivered meals program for seniors. CCA worked with the MetCouncil, a local nonprofit, to get

food delivered for residents to use until the grocery store was able to reopen. At the time, many grocery stores would close for days when a staff member tested positive for the coronavirus.

In February 2021, extremely cold weather, ice and snow hit the Fort Worth area of Texas, causing multiple days of power outages, lack of heat and water, and grocery store closings. CCA and CSS staff were able to contact another nonprofit, the World Central Kitchen, to facilitate delivery of freshly prepared food for residents of the Mollie & Max Barnett Apartments and the Tarrant County B'nai B'rith Apartments.

Looking Ahead

As we moved into the vaccination phase of the pandemic, most of the buildings were able to host vaccination clinics for the residents and staff through a partnership with the CDC and local pharmacies. The building staff Zoom meetings became a way for on-site staff to share what to expect and how to prepare for the clinics to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Useful tips included ways to set up for the vaccination site, such as organizing appointments to help physically distance residents, and preparing timers and properly distanced chairs for vaccine recipients. Another method included administering the vaccine to residents door-to-door in order to maximize safety and physical distance from others.

Looking forward, the CDC recommends the continuation of COVID-19 mitigation practices such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distance. The network will continue to share best practices to ensure the health and safety of all residents during the worst of times and the best of times.