

NAAEI Designations Help Reduce Turnover



BY RACHEL F. GOLDBERG

For Colonial Properties, combining NAAEI course work with in-house training creates a fully trained staff.

Mark Cukro, Director of Service Team Development, Colonial Properties Trust, developed a training program for his staff to teach them how to perform more efficiently, get better results and reduce expenses.

The combination of National Apartment Association Education Institute (NAAEI) designation courses and an in-house training element have helped Colonial Properties reach those goals.

“NAAEI designations give industry specific knowledge,” he said, while the in-house segments impart company-specific knowledge. Colonial Properties encourages employees to take designation courses through local apartment associations, Cukro said of his company, which has 140 communities across the Sunbelt.

Cukro himself has earned several NAAEI designations—Certified Apartment Property Supervisor (CAPS) and Certified Apartment Maintenance Technician (CAMT I and CAMT II)—and teaches those designation courses at the NAA affiliate in Charlotte, N.C., where he is based. Eighteen other Colonial Properties employees who have earned designations also teach courses at their local apartment associations.

“Teaching is an opportunity to give back and sharpen platform skills,” said Cukro, who encourages his staff to teach.

In addition to helping staff reach goals, “the training has had a significant impact on employee retention,” Cukro said. “The buzz has begun” among staff, and Cukro noted that staff is more interested in com-

pleting training, and those who have completed the program have increased confidence in their performance, which directly affects the bottom line.

The CAMT program taught industry standards, rules, regulations and codes, said Bruce Kutujian, Maintenance Supervisor for Colonial Properties’ Heatherwood Apartments, Charlotte, N.C., who has been at Colonial Properties for four years. “I was skeptical about coming into the apartment industry,” said the former industrial technician. But the CAMT designation, earned in winter 2004-2005 through the Charlotte Apartment Association, helped him get up to speed quickly. “I took a class and now it’s no problem.”

More Than a Lecture

Cukro, who originally developed the training program for service staff at Cornerstone Properties before it merged with Colonial Properties in April 2005, said that turnover decreased from approximately 70 percent to 30 percent during the four years of running the program.

At Birmingham, Ala.-based Colonial Properties, the goal is to have all employees complete the appropriate NAAEI designations and the in-house portion of their training. To date, approximately 18 percent of Colonial Properties’ 1,200 employees have earned NAAEI designations.

The in-house training modules comprise four-hour lectures accompanied by four-hour hands-on or role-playing sessions, covering topics including EPA certifi-

cations, nationally certified pool operators and other company-specific subjects. In those modules, maintenance technicians are taught to eliminate guesswork in problem solving and to choose correct replacement parts, thus saving time and money. Sales professionals are taught to leave prospects with good impressions, increase and capture traffic and increase leases.

Cukro and his company encourage sales professionals to attend maintenance classes and sales specific training. Maintenance staff is encouraged to attend sales courses. That allows employees to better understand each other, Cukro said. “People arrive as skeptics and leave as believers,” he said.

For the in-house program, Cukro used Web-based software and CDs for training, which has allowed more people to cover more material. By using an interactive program, staff learns in small groups instead of individually, creating a collaborative environment and enabling joint problem solving. In 2005, about 1,100 seats were filled for in-house modules, and this year, Cukro expects 2,200 seats to be filled, which means that employees are taking more than one course.

When more staff members complete NAAEI designations and in-house training, the company would like to have one service trainer and one management trainer in each region. Currently, there are trainers in 13 of the company’s 25 regions. ■

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