

## A Success Story *Affordable Housing Management, Inc.*

*“Despite the naysayers, we have huge waiting lists and haven’t heard the first negative comments. Our residents have said, ‘I love that you don’t allow smoking in the parking lot – I hate the litter,’ ‘keep smoking well away from the play areas – I don’t want anyone smoking around my child.’ We always get comments about how nice the landscaping looks. We have not lost a single resident due to smoking policy.”*

**Sherry Beeson, AHMI**

### **Title:** Sometimes Slow and Steady Wins the Race

**Summary:** Sometimes decision making can take time, and maintaining relationships across that time can be the key to success.

**Challenge:** One of the first housing companies in North Carolina to show willingness to consider a smoke-free policy was Affordable Housing Management Inc, (AHMI) based in Greensboro, NC. Almost four years ago, Executive Director David Levy sat down with the local tobacco prevention coordinator and listened in earnest to concerns over the health risks of secondhand smoke. AHMI staff members, including Assistant to the Executive Director, Sherry Beeson, attended several local “lunch and learn” events and were eager to learn more about smoke-free policy implementation, but were hesitant to take action.

“Our perception was that we would lose residents,” Beeson said. “We had to evaluate what would happen and how we would absorb it. We were worried about evictions and the expense of implementation.” *(continued)*



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# SMOKE FREE | MULTI-UNIT HOUSING NORTH CAROLINA

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**Sherry Beeson, AHMI**



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**Solution:** Patience, and helping other property management companies tell the stories of their success was the solution that prevailed. Staff from AHMI showed interest over time, while proceeding carefully, always with fairness and the health and welfare of their residents as the top priority. In the meantime, the N.C. Alliance for Health approached the N.C. Housing Finance Agency requesting they make smoke-free policies a requirement, which they did. This created a tax advantage for new and renovated properties, so long as they met the requirements.

**Results:** In 2015-16 AHMI transitioned the newly renovated, 44-unit Berryman Square Development to smoke-free, and they report that these units rent out very quickly.

“We had a lot of smoking residents before we started rehab, but I don’t know of any who we have lost,” Beeson said. “We have only had one smoking incident and we handled it well. I have not heard any negative comments. Non-smoking is a no brainer, accepted by the residents and they abide by it and appreciate it. It is the easiest policy that we have written.”

In January 2016 AHMI held a ribbon cutting for Hope Court, their first newly constructed smoke-free property. The company plans to take the rest of its properties non-smoking as the result of renovations and rehab work. They plan a graduated schedule over the next two-three years, with a new 72 unit property starting in June.

**Lessons Learned:** Persistence is the key, along with maintaining continued contact on this issue. Even though AHMI was “sold” on the idea, they were not sold initially on whether it could be successfully implemented. The Tobacco Control Manager didn’t give up on them, but continued to reach out with new data, new stories and updates. The N.C. Housing Finance Agency smoke-free guidelines were also a factor.