

## Greater Charlotte Apartment Association Sends out “Smoke-Free” Signals with Certification

*“Our Association has been very pleased with the initiation and implementation of our Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing Certification Program. Our members are enthusiastic about what they have learned about the benefits of Smoke-Free Housing; the renting public comes away with the sense that their housing providers truly care about healthy indoor living environments; and public officials and the media have taken notice that our industry trade association is fully-engaged, forward-thinking, and community-minded in what we do.” Ken Szymanski, AICP, Executive Director, Greater Charlotte Apartment Association*

### Summary

In the summer of 2017, The Greater Charlotte Apartment Association (GCAA) partnered with Mecklenburg County Public Health (MCPH) and other local partners – Healthy Charlotte of the Charlotte Chamber, Tobacco-Free Meck, Region 4 Tobacco-Free Alliance and York County Tobacco-Free Coalition – to create healthier apartment living in the region by launching a Smoke-free Multi-Unit Housing Certification program. With only a few initiatives like this in the nation, the certification reflects an industry trend to meet increased demand for smoke-free housing, while addressing a public health priority to eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Just three months after the certification launched, the market saw a one percent increase in available smoke-free housing in the region.

**"CLEAN AIR IS  
AN AMENITY  
TO BRAG  
ABOUT!"  
GCAA**

### Challenge

Identifying smoke-free apartment communities has been challenge for public health in North Carolina, where calls from residents seeking smoke-free living are frequently received. There have been few resources available to share with the growing number of apartment-dwellers who seek healthy smoke-free living environments.

### Solution

GCAA’s 700-member apartment communities are both urban and rural and are spread across Charlotte (Mecklenburg County), eight surrounding counties in N.C. and York, S.C. GCAA leadership took the initiative to strongly support public health smoke-free housing efforts by not only hosting a smoke-free housing lunch-and-learn but by working to ensure that a smoke-free units



question was added on the bi-annual Charlotte area apartment industry survey (Real Data) to help assess smoke-free communities, educating its members on the benefits of smoke-free housing, creating a smoke-free certification, continuing its advocacy efforts in a year-in year-out campaign, and creating a lasting partnership with public health.

## Results

After the Smoke-free Housing Certification Initiative was unveiled, 37 properties became Smoke-Free Certified Charter Members, resulting in 8,569 smoke-free units impacting approximately 21,423 residents. Within a month following the certification rollout, MCPH provided technical assistance for policy adoption to three companies representing market rate and affordable housing properties. A public GCAA webpage to educate around smoke-free and recognize smoke-free properties was also launched and promoted. By early 2018, 41 properties had obtained certification, inspiring other apartment communities to work toward obtaining certification and recognition. GCAA and partners set a goal to double the number of smoke-free certified communities by January 2019. The certification has served to amplify community dialogue about the importance of smoke-free housing. In just six months, certification outcomes showed a one percent increase in available smoke-free housing in the Greater Charlotte area.

## Lessons Learned

Successful collaborations are key to create and sustain healthy communities. A significant outcome of this project has been the strong relationships formed among non-traditional partners within the apartment industry, public health, community advocates and businesses, indicating that sometimes it only takes an ask.



Smoke-Free Housing Lunch-and-Learn: Front row, L to R: Kim Bayha, MCPH; Maryam Zeledón, GCAA Board Member, Regional Property Manager SL Nusbaum Realty; Carleen Crawford, MCPH; Anna Stein, NC Division of Public Health; Ned Fowler, Executive Director, Northwestern Regional Housing Authority. Back row, L to R: Ken Szymanski, Executive Director, Greater Charlotte Housing Authority; Shannon Bodnar, Charlotte Housing Authority; Scott Alderman, President, The Landura Companies; and D. Scott Wilkerson, Chief Investment Officer, Ginkgo Residential.



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