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BUILDING CONNECTIONS
A MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESIDENTIAL AND HOSPITALITY SERVICES AND AUXILIARY ENTERPRISES

“This partnerships allowed us to adapt quickly and to best serve our Spartan community throughout these difficult and often confusing times.”

This past year’s Spartan experience has been far from typical, and it has not been an easy one. We’ve experienced loss big and small – of friends, family, loved ones, jobs, vacations, proms, graduations, family dinners and more. With eligibility to receive the Pfizer vaccine now extended to everyone 12 years or older, we can clearly see hope on the horizon. But, from March 2020, throughout the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, this has been a time of uncertainty and rapid change for the Division of Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) and for all our partners throughout the university.

This issue of Serving State focuses on the partnerships RHS has developed and expanded over the last year with our campus colleagues. It looks at the ways we have approached the challenges brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Our division collaborated with MSU Police, the Office of the University Physician, and Infrastructure Planning and Facilities to ensure the health and safety of our community. We aligned with Admissions, University Communications and Undergraduate Education to continue building our Spartan community. The partnerships allowed us to adapt quickly and to best serve our Spartan community throughout these difficult and often confusing times. Much like none of us has ever experienced a global pandemic, none of us has experienced reemerging from a global pandemic. As we prepare to welcome yet another record-sized class to campus, along with a second-year class with nearly no on-campus experience, we must continue to focus on a sense of Spartan belonging, expressing empathy, patience and warmth in all we do. Through the partnerships outlined in this issue and the dedication of each and every RHS team member, we are helping build connections to each other and to the institution.

Vennie Gore
Senior Vice President for Residential and Hospitality Services and Auxiliary Enterprises

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The Breslin Student Events Center is committed to following the MSU Community Compact as well as adhering to state and local health and safety guidelines.
After the coronavirus pandemic began, many operational divisions on campus went through an intense learning period that ultimately allowed them to configure how virtual workspaces are conducted on campus today. MSU Infrastructure Planning and Facilities (IPF) was no exception.

“IPF reconfigured how we have staff meetings and operation updates because so many of our team members were working from home,” IPF Communications Manager Fred Woodhams says.

IPF sought to complete many projects including the launch of the MSU water plant, installation of COVID-19 safety signage and Plexiglas, implementation of a taxi service for symptomatic students’ use, renovations to Wilson Hall, and the installation of UV sterilization technology in campus elevators.

Fortunately, fully operating in a virtual workspace allowed IPF and RHS to partner on many of these projects by gaining the opportunity to attend virtual meetings, making cooperation efforts simpler. In essence, after much collaboration and planning, RHS was able to select and fund various campus projects, while IPF was able to oversee and make sure these changes are implemented properly and efficiently.

For instance, shortly after students were sent home last March, IPF began to assist RHS by ordering, cutting and installing Plexiglas shields in student spaces like the dining halls, Sparty’s Market and other retail locations on campus.

“RHS deals with the public a great deal, so it was very important that we understood the need to ensure the shielding was installed so RHS staff and the people they served could interact safely and efficiently,” Woodhams says.

In addition, in late August, IPF launched the MSU water plant located in the southern part of campus. “The water quality has been a longstanding complaint of people living in the residence halls, so we were pleased to bring the plant online,” added Woodhams.

This plant works to remove iron and other minerals from the campus water system that contribute to the smell and feel of the water. Although it will take roughly two years to experience the full effect of the plant, students will soon see improvements in the water quality of all neighborhoods across campus except Brody Neighborhood and 1855 Place, which are connected to the City of East Lansing water system. IPF hopes this change to campus will not only result in fewer red water events but less severe events as well.

“The water quality has been a longstanding complaint of people living in the residence halls, so we were pleased to bring the plant online.”

“The water is safe to drink, it has been safe to drink, it will continue to be safe to drink,” Woodhams explains. “Over time, the filtration plant will ensure that the iron doesn’t get into the [water] system, and it will improve the aesthetic qualities of the water.”

Lastly, when students returned to campus this past fall, IPF partnered with RHS once again to offer transportation services to symptomatic students on campus. This taxi service was created to shuttle students to and from doctor appointments, COVID quarantine housing and other related activities.

Both RHS and IPF team members devoted their time to shuttling students seven days a week demonstrating their commitment to the health and safety of the Spartan community.
The RHS partnership with MSU Police has established an environment of safety and preparedness within the MSU community. Thanks to this partnership, MSU police patrol officers have learned each neighborhood of MSU well. These officers have privileges to eat in the dining halls, where they learn more about each building as they interact with residents, resident assistants and building staff daily.

There are three different police teams divided up across campus for patrol services. The MSU Police also have a support services group for special events on campus, where they work with Residence Education and Housing Services to plan the management of traffic flow and overall safety during each event. Another key feature set up by MSU Police is the emergency management unit, which strategizes for response and recovery in case of any emergencies on campus.

The MSU Police have preparedness plans for all kinds of potential dangers on campus, including hazardous winter weather, tornadoes and pandemics. In response to COVID-19, the police’s partnership with Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) has remained quite the same due to these plans. This pandemic has been unexpectedly long; however, MSU Police work closely with RHS staff to update and progress their COVID-19 safety measures.

MSU Police also assigned a new officer to specifically work with housing to keep up with COVID-19 guidelines and to continuously develop relationships with housing services. In December, the police also added an additional partner into its emergency management group.

MSU Police continues to work with RHS to prioritize adaptability for the changing mandates from the health department, and it constantly works to keep the MSU campus safe and prepared for all kinds of emergencies.
Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) continued to fulfill its strategic partnership with MSU Admissions during the 2020-21 academic year. Executive Management Director of Admissions John Ambrose hoped to remain focused on student connections with one another as his division navigated this unprecedented time. After the majority of students were sent home in March 2020, RHS team members like those in Residence Education and Housing Services (REHS) continued to support students first-hand and to continue to offer them a safe place to live. This partnership has allowed them to do just that.

“Our ability to work with REHS is everything,” Ambrose says, “There are times in the admission and recruitment cycle when it is very critical we are in sync.”

Ambrose hopes, when it’s all said and done, his department can make data driven decisions with student success and wellbeing at the core. Working with REHS helps them do so by giving Admissions a better perspective of the wants and needs of MSU’s student population. This was the driving force behind the recent reimplementatation of a two-year live-on requirement. Studies show that students who live on campus their freshman and sophomore year not only perform better in their classes, but also have a better sense of community and are more likely to graduate on time.

Additionally, REHS representatives have traveled with Admissions to help recruit prospective students.

“We have a long-standing relationship of recruiting new students to campus, sharing with them all of the benefits that come with living on campus and what they can expect, and it has turned out to be a really big piece of our ability to be successful in recruitment,” Ambrose says.

By partnering to participate in high school visits, college fairs and admitted student programs, Admissions can yet again gain a better perspective of what students find important. During his time at MSU, Ambrose found many students valued healthier food options, and in turn, advocated for their presence in residential dining halls through collaborating with not only REHS but Culinary Services as well.

Originally, Admissions thought taking existing programming and directly transferring it to Zoom would be the best strategy to cope with the pandemic’s unforeseen circumstances. For example, if the pre-COVID plan was to host an in-person, three-and-a-half-hour, interactive, informational session with REHS, they would schedule that same length session on Zoom. Fortunately, they quickly learned that this plan was less than ideal.

“This and a half hours on Zoom seems like an eternity,” Ambrose admits.

By considering student’s, and honestly everyone else’s, attention spans, the department learned they couldn’t execute effective programming the length they previously had. Through working with REHS, Admissions was able to restructure programs to best suit the needs of prospective students.

Last but certainly not least, MSU Admissions partners with REHS by attending national conferences in order to improve operations and understand the best practices associated with successful tour guiding. Studies show that the likelihood of a prospective student enrollment skyrockets when they visit college campuses. For this reason, both departments have remained dedicated to this cause by collaborating on tour guide training, protocols and establishing beneficial tour routes.

“RHS has been an incredible partner to work with over the last 12 years I have been with the university,” Ambrose adds. “We [Admissions] are also incredibly grateful to the RHS staff who does the cleaning and maintenance, the resident assistants and the hall directors who have supported students we have recruited to MSU.”
The main purpose of the MSU Athletics Department is to create opportunities for student athletes to succeed academically, on the field and beyond. The department is made up of around 250 employees and 700 student athletes. The Athletics Department works constantly to provide opportunities for student athletes to participate in the sports that they love while giving them opportunities for future success.

The partnership between Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) and the Athletics Department is critical to the functioning of many features during athletic events. RHS is responsible for managing the Breslin Student Events Center, Forest Akers golf courses and MSU Tennis Center. RHS also runs all of the concession stands at MSU sports events. The Athletics Department and RHS work closely together to maintain these facilities and make sure they’re running smoothly for all athletic events.

In the past year, RHS and the Athletics Department have spent a lot of time to make sure student athletes can continue to have a safe sports season in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, there have been very few spectators at athletic events this year. RHS has worked hard to accommodate these guidelines while providing food services at athletic functions. For example, they have created touchless food services that still allow food to be served at these events.

RHS has also worked to develop a safe quarantining space in the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center. This program allowed student athletes to have the option of quarantining in the hotel if they had been exposed to COVID-19, where they were provided with meal services by RHS.

Throughout the 2020-21 academic year, student athletes had the option to quarantine in their homes, campus apartments or the Kellogg Center. A significant number of student athletes chose the Kellogg Center as a quarantine space where they felt safe and accommodated for while tracking any possible symptoms of COVID-19.

The partnership between RHS and the MSU Athletics Department is always working to provide the best experiences for the Spartan community. Currently, they’re hard at work planning for this coming football season, where they hope to have more fans back in the stands. This partnership is also working to develop additional amenities and mobile app technology for sporting events.
On Aug. 18, 2020, the university asked undergraduate students who planned to live in the residence halls for fall 2020 to stay home and continue their education with Michigan State University (MSU) remotely. The Division of Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) and the Residence Education and Housing Services (REHS) department have since continued to provide a safe place for the small number of students living in residence halls, particularly those students who needed to be on campus for health and safety reasons or other extraordinary, extenuating circumstances. In addition, several thousand first-year and transfer students still needed support as they transitioned to MSU.

During the fall 2020 semester, more than 9,500 incoming students joined the MSU community from around the globe. To encourage social connections and student success during their transition, MSU launched a new mentoring program: Circles of Success. REHS partnered with the Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative (NSSC) through the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (APUE) to create this new program. It employed a multitiered approach resulting in each incoming student being assigned a peer student success mentor and a professional mentor for the fall 2020 semester.

Due to the shift to remote learning, resident assistants (RAs) were tasked with serving as student success mentors, and assistant community directors (ACDs) began serving as professional mentors. The mentors worked in tandem with the already existing Student Success Teams that provide support for students trying to navigate MSU’s instructional policies, procedures and practices and work collaboratively with partners across campus to overcome barriers to student success.

All first-year students were asked to complete a survey to be grouped in a learning community and paired with mentors interested and trained in one of the five thematic areas. These included:

- **Purpose-driven Experiences:** This group focused on developing skills and characteristics as well as access to academic resources necessary to optimize the MSU experience.
- **Intercultural and Diverse Experiences:** Students in this community explored diversity in identities, backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences among individuals and groups, while also gaining a better understanding of one’s self identity.
- **Transfer and Non-traditional Student Experiences:** This community brought together students who arrived at MSU with valuable college and life experiences.
- **Local Spartans Community:** This community was designed for students currently living in the East Lansing or Greater Lansing area during the fall 2020 semester or for any student receiving a Michigan Promise scholarship.
- **High-impact Experiences for Active and Engaged Learning:** Through active and engaged out-of-classroom experiences, students learned by doing and then reflecting on the learning. This community was introduced to MSU programs offering internships, education abroad, community service, leadership experiences, research opportunities and on-campus employment, among others.

“We are focused on helping students navigate the transition to MSU by offering assistance and guidance to connect them, both academically and socially, to the university,” says Vice President for Auxiliary Enterprises Vennie Gore. “Our outreach efforts included group chats, weekly virtual office hours and success chats, bi-weekly video recordings, monthly webinars, and check-ins. We also provided an opportunity for weekly social activities, such as virtual movie nights, virtual board game nights and e-sports tournaments.”

The nearly 200 RAs and intercultural aides who served as student success mentors, lived on campus in their residence hall and received a meal plan. In making the transition to working with Circles of Success, ACDs received a comparable package to that previously offered, which includes a room, meal plan, tuition, stipend and benefits.
The Office of the University Physician oversees areas at MSU where there is a requirement or need for specific programs or policies that impact the health and safety of the people who work, learn and live at MSU.

One mission of the department is to facilitate compliance with existing state and federal statutes in occupational health and to optimize the public health environment. Specific subunits involved in carrying out this mission include Occupational Health, Food and Water Sanitarian, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Health4U Program (H4U), and the Travel Clinic.

In the past year, the partnership between Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) and the Office of the University Physician has been essential regarding COVID-19 safety precautions at Michigan State. This partnership has increased and strengthened with more opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving.

The Office of the University Physician has provided RHS with ongoing support, consultation and direction of COVID-19 health regulations, specifically in the implementation of housing and dining plans during this past year. In return, RHS was able to safely house and provide meals to thousands of students each day in this past year.

Every activity on campus must be specifically reviewed through the lens of maximizing safety for all staff and students involved. The Office of the University Physician has helped to make these safe processes by performing contact tracing for the campus environment, with daily interactions with RHS staff to notify students of a positive test for COVID-19 and assist in the effort to provide appropriate isolation and quarantine housing to those affected.

Upcoming plans and implementations within the RHS and University Physician’s partnership include further development for safe plans for all activities and housing and dining services that will be needed to provide a more normal on-campus experience in the fall of 2021.

Every activity on campus must be specifically reviewed through the lens of maximizing safety for all staff and students involved.
University Communications acts as the central communications arm of Michigan State. It’s the job of University Communications to represent the institutional message, response, campaigns and overarching brand of MSU. This department works with strategic partners, including Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS), to create effective campaigns that further the mission of MSU’s goals. The University Communications department is constantly looking for collaborative ideas on how to engage students. The partnership between the University Communications department and RHS has been paramount to informing the MSU campus population on safety protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, RHS and University Communications collectively worked to increase their reach to students about how the university is responding to the pandemic and what that means for them. Students living on or near campus receive messaging from the University Communications department regarding any changing rules regarding COVID-19. University Communications works closely with RHS in order to achieve this goal and keep the campus community well informed.

More recently, the “Together We Will” COVID-response campaign has leveraged the University Communications and RHS partnership well. This campaign reinforces safety messaging on campus in spaces like the residence and dining halls.

University Communications also works with students on a regular basis as a benefit to its partnership with RHS. The strong partnership between these two departments allows for a continued collaboration that is always growing to benefit students, faculty, staff and anyone who visits MSU to stay well informed about campus events and guidelines.

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The MSU Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (APUE) works to coordinate undergraduate education across the 16 undergraduate colleges, provides centralized advising and curriculum management to all MSU students, and serves as the central leadership for student success initiatives on campus. Associate Provost Executive Manager Mark Largent hopes his department can assist the broader Spartan community by promoting a university environment that's accessible and equitable, increasing graduation rates and eliminating opportunity gaps among students.

While the APUE has worked with Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) and Senior Vice President of Auxiliary Enterprises Vennie Gore for some time now, during the coronavirus pandemic, both departments recognized just how dependent they were on one another.

“The academic, residential life and student affair portions of the university have to work together in a really coherent single-minded way,” Largent says, “Student success is the foundation our department’s success is built on, and students are only successful if we do our jobs.”

This was the driving force behind APUE’s decision to hire the hundreds of resident assistants (RAs) who were displaced when the decision to not fully open campus for the fall 2020 semester was announced.

APUE’s Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative (NSSC) hired students previously hired to fulfill RA positions for the 2020-21 academic year as student success mentors (SSM) in order to ensure displaced students were able to retain their room and board while continuing to give back to the Spartan community.

Likewise, Largent explains that his department continues to remain dedicated to building a strong sense of community on campus because it’s found that largely students do not enjoy their time at MSU because their academic culture or grades are superior, but because they feel a sense of belonging and support and that their presence matters to the university. These sentiments were much of the inspiration behind the recently reinstated two-year live-on requirement that will directly impact the 2021-22 incoming class and all others going forward.

Additionally, the APUE found undergraduate students who live on campus for two years or more have an almost 94% graduation rate, which is mainly attributed to the benefit of being able to be physically on campus and interacting with one another.

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“We all [Spartans] long to walk with all the other community members on a busy spring day; the bells of the tower behind us as we cross a walking bridge over the Red Cedar River, with the stadium looming in front of you,” Largent says. “We all miss that.”