



## HOT FLASHES

*Cathy Allen, CTRS, RCFE, CDP*

### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

I am the Executive Director at MBK Senior Living's Oakmont Gardens located in Santa Rosa, CA. We have 200 residents divided between 131 independent and 69 assisted living apartments. The community is on approximately 5½ acres of land.

#### RECAP OF OCTOBER 9, 2017 AND THE NEXT FEW DAYS

I received a phone call at 2:49 a.m. from the Director of Health Services (nurse) that works at the community. She had heard from one of our caregivers who had to evacuate her home because of a wildfire. I opened my eyes and realized that my apartment was filled with smoke. I ran to the windows to see flames around the building. I grabbed a flashlight and got dressed. I then grabbed my purse, wrapped a towel around my cat Bella, and ran down the 4½ flights of stairs.

I got into the garage and was not able to completely open my garage door. At that point, I decided I needed to just get out of there which caused some damage to the back of my car. As I started to drive away, I realized I forgot my cell phone, so I drove back and now the flames were at the front entrance of my building. I ran up the stairs, grabbed my phone, and ran back down. I was extremely scared and realized I would have to drive between the walls of flames to get out. I called my son and left a voice message telling him that there was a fire and not to worry because the cat and I were safe.

It was extremely windy, and there were flames in every direction. I drove to Oakmont Gardens and arrived there shortly after 3 a.m. When I walked in, there was no electricity; however, the generator was working. I was very proud of my Concierge as she had our disaster binder open. I started calling the other directors and managers to see if they could come in to help. Many of them could not come in as the fires were moving so quickly that they were in danger. My Concierge was on a cell phone calling the local police department every 20 minutes checking to see if we needed to evacuate our residents.

Some family members started to arrive to pick up their loved ones as they had to evacuate their homes. We kept an updated list of residents that were leaving with their families.

We continued walking up and down the halls checking the community and watching the fires outside. The wind was getting worse. Residents started to wake up. At approximately 6 a.m., we began preparing a continental breakfast for the residents.

Around 8 a.m., a Santa Rosa police officer arrived and informed us that we needed to evacuate our community now. The goal was to get everyone out within 20 to 30 minutes. I joined the eight or nine staff members as we went room to room knocking on doors to alert the residents, help them get dressed, and safely escort them out of their apartments to the lobby. Additional police officers and sheriff deputies arrived to assist us with the evacuation. We were blessed for all they did in assisting with the evacuation. Some of them had to carry residents down the stairs. One female resident said the best part of her day was getting carried down the stairs in the arms of a police officer.

The Santa Rosa Police Department arranged for school buses to take our residents to a local shelter that was set up at Elsie Allen High School. I grabbed two resident rosters and gave one to my Business Office Manager and I took the other one. She and I checked off the names of residents that were on the school buses and those who drove their own cars or families picked them up. All residents were accounted for.

I grabbed our resident emergency binder and disaster binder and brought them with me. I asked the Activity Director to load our assisted living medication cart onto the community's bus so those residents would have their medications at the shelter.



The police escorted the school buses to the high school. We were again blessed to have gone to Elsie Allen High School as this was the medical shelter housed with physicians, physician assistants, registered nurses, medications, oxygen, and reclining cots. More than 70 residents were at the shelter in the gym area. After getting our residents situated in a designated area, we started to gather supplies and cots. We also set up our medication cart in a back room where we had supplies to help our residents.

The Activity Director drove the community's bus to other shelters trying to locate other residents. Some decided to stay where they were, while others joined us at the high school. I kept an updated list of the location of all our residents. We continued to do this every day for five days. Some residents had to be placed in our sister communities or at an assisted living community that was not at risk.

MBK's corporate office located in Southern California was supportive and in contact with me every few hours while we were at the shelter. They assisted by sending out e-mails and messages on social media for families and friends of the residents and staff.

The Elsie Allen High School shelter was amazing. The Red Cross did a great job running the shelter, and the National Guard was heavily involved. The volunteer presence was one of the most touching and heartfelt things I've ever seen. Volunteers of all ages and walks of life donated their time and brought items to share with the evacuees.

Volunteers sat with my residents, talking, holding their hands, reading to them, singing, drawing, etc. There was a physical therapist that led an exercise group. Volunteers gave dance performances and sang. We all worked hard to keep our residents happy, occupied, and entertained.

### **THE REST OF THE STORY**

*From a Press Release Written by Michelle Park, MBK Senior Living*

That was just the beginning of a long 13-day period, in which Cathy and the MBK team worked nearly 24 hours a day. With phone lines down and Wi-Fi sporadic, communication with residents and families was critical. Cathy and the Oakmont Gardens team, along with regional MBK staff, were persistent in executing a comprehensive communications plan that included a hotline with regular updates, updated information on the company's website, social media posts, daily email briefs, and registering every resident with Red Cross' Safe and Well registry.

Once the evacuation order was lifted, Cathy was among the first to confirm that Oakmont Gardens had escaped the fire but sustained smoke damage. She then worked diligently with MBK to expedite the cleaning to make the community habitable – even when her own home was not.

Even before the evacuation order had been lifted, MBK had lined up an industrial hygienist and remediation team to ensure that the community could re-open as soon as possible. Once able, staff took great pride in restoring the building to pristine condition for residents.

"The professional crews along with dozens of MBK employees worked around the clock for three days to scrub and sanitize every surface in the community," said Cathy. "We received the 'all clear' from the industrial hygienist on Saturday, October 21 and welcomed residents home with balloons, champagne, and live music the very next day."

"I was very impressed with the way this bad situation was turned to good," wrote Kathy Benedetti, an Oakmont Gardens resident's daughter. "I appreciated the phone calls to see if my mother was okay. She was so excited to come back home to the Gardens and greeted with special welcomes and good care."

"Oakmont Gardens was not the only senior living community affected by the wildfires. Others faced extreme challenges, from total devastation to formal investigations by state regulators," said Cathy. "Our hearts go out to those who lost so much."



## BE PREPARED

Having to evacuate residents from a community in a disaster and temporarily relocating them to a shelter or different location can be extremely stressful and emotional for everyone involved. As Activity and Recreation Professionals, it is important to be prepared to support residents in addition to employees who will be assisting residents through providing leisure and recreational experiences.

The Activity Department should have a "life story" (i.e., leisure interest survey, diet information) for each resident placed in a binder that is accessible to grab in the case of an emergency. An option is to keep a binder near the community's emergency binder.

In the event of an evacuation, the activity department should be prepared with activity containers filled with a variety of items for the residents. I recommend purchasing a few 16- to 18-gallon or 30-gallon storage containers to keep near the front entrance for easy access. Include items that promote relaxation, provide laughter, enhance physical movement, heighten spirituality, evoke cognitive stimulation, release creative expression, and provide entertainment. Here are some suggestions of what can be included for each category:

### RELAXATION

- › Essential oils (i.e., lavender, chamomile, peppermint)
- › Calming CDs
- › Scented and non-scented lotions
- › Battery-operated diffuser with essential oils

### LAUGHTER

- › Joke books with clean, non-offensive jokes
- › Books with stories (i.e., Chicken Soup for the Soul books)
- › Clown noses
- › Comedians on CD (i.e., Jerry Lewis, Jim Gaffigan, Sinbad, Jerry Seinfeld, Brian Regan, Lucille Ball, Carol Burnett, Bob Newhart, Ellen DeGeneres, Phyllis Diller, Joan Rivers)
- › Funny pictures (i.e., children, animals)
- › Comic strips from residents' generation

### PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

- › Deflated beach balls
- › Parachute or full-size bed sheet
- › TheraBands® (latex and non-latex types - They can be purchased in a 25-yard roll so include a pair of blunted scissors to cut them. They can also be purchased pre-cut in different resistance levels.)
- › Beanbags

### SPIRITUALITY

- › Bibles with the Old and New Testament
- › Spiritual stories
- › Hymn books
- › Spiritual CDs

### COGNITIVE STIMULATION

- › Trivia books
- › Discussion questions (i.e., What heroic acts have you performed or witnessed? - to be used as a conversation starter or creative writing opportunity)
- › Trivia flashcards
- › Hidden picture books (i.e., *Lost Art: A Hidden Pictures Book for Adults* by Smarter Activity Books, available on Amazon and Ebay)
- › Pictures of famous faces, places, and landmarks
- › World, United States, and state maps
- › Games (i.e., bingo cards with markers, decks of cards, Uno® cards)



### **CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS**

- › Scissors (adult-pointed and 6" blunted types)
- › Lined paper and pens
- › Blank note cards and envelopes
- › Adult coloring books
- › Colored pencils and pencil sharpeners
- › White drawing paper
- › Ream of white copy paper
- › Simple crafts kits (Contact Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops to make craft kits that can be placed in large zipper-closing bags.)

### **ENTERTAINMENT**

- › Extension cords in 6' and 12' lengths
- › Portable CD player
- › Batteries
- › Music CDs
- › Preloaded MP3 players with headphones

### **MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS TO INCLUDE**

- › Flashlights and extra batteries
- › Cell phone chargers
- › Hot Hands® Hand and Toe Warmers
- › Emergency Mylar® thermal blankets CF