



2013 Annual Awards Entry Form
(Complete one for each entry.)

Entry Name Internal Communications Strategy

HFA Virginia Housing Development Authority

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Entry form with description, check(s), and visual aids (optional) must be received by NCSHA by **Monday, July 1, 2013**.

Use this header on the upper right corner of each page.

HFA Virginia Housing Development Authority

Entry Name Internal Communications Strategy

Communications	Homeownership	Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation
<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Report <input type="checkbox"/> Promotional Materials and Newsletters <input type="checkbox"/> Creative Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Empowering New Buyers <input type="checkbox"/> Home Improvement and Rehabilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging New Production	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Advocacy <input type="checkbox"/> State Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operations <input type="checkbox"/> Technology
Rental Housing	Special Needs Housing	Special Achievement	Are you providing visual aids?
<input type="checkbox"/> Multifamily Management <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation and Rehabilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging New Production	<input type="checkbox"/> Combating Homelessness <input type="checkbox"/> Housing for Persons with Special Needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Achievement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

Virginia Housing Development Authority Internal Communications Strategy

“The Zone” is the first place to go when you log in every morning for all things VHDA...news and noteworthy items, job openings, work ticket requests, holiday/pay day calendar, you name it – it’s like one-stop shopping for our associates!

*Barbara Layman
VHDA Administrative Services Manager*

Brief Description

Planning internal communication strategies in business is critical to ensure there is an effective dialogue between employees and employer, as well as between work colleagues. The Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) addressed this issue by combining a new intranet application that provides streamlined, real-time communications to employees, prompt e-mail notifications, and Quarterly Associates Meetings. By upgrading the intranet to real-time, employees don’t have to wait for the internal newsletter to come out – they have immediate access to information, and can respond in a timely manner.

VHDA’s internal communications strategy includes:

SharePoint – As a result of employee surveys, VHDA’s Leadership Team decided to refresh the current intranet to make it more useful for associates. This particular deployment was done rapidly and came in phases using the “agile project” methodology, using the SharePoint platform and allowing the program to be up and running in four months. The Leadership Team also wanted to have the capability for very quick content approval changes on the new Intranet. The project team came up with the name of the new intranet, *The Zone*, which is now the front page of the intranet. *The Zone* makes it easier to submit articles and give feedback on how to make the website better.

Email – While VHDA had an e-mail newsletter titled *The PRESS* for some time, the content and submittal process were neither consistent nor easy. Now, *The PRESS* email is linked to the content in *The Zone* and comes out every Wednesday, using technology that was already here at VHDA. The format of the PRESS is also different – it does not have any attachments in an effort to reduce the duplicate files located on our network.

One of the major improvements was the approval time for articles. In the past, all associates would email *The Press* and the Organizational Development and Learning (OD&L) group would review everything. This process required two employees and became very time consuming, taking 2-3 days to review, edit and create the new PRESS email every week. The project team corrected this by letting SharePoint create the PRESS e-mail for associates. Associates are able to submit their articles on *The Zone*, specify the category, how long it will run, etc. The article then gets populated into the new *PRESS* email. Now, all the OD&L staff needs to do is review and edit. A process that took about 2-3 days now takes one associate only 15 minutes.

Quarterly Associates Meetings – Four times per year, VHDA is committed to bringing associates together from our three separate offices (Headquarters, Virginia Housing Center, and Southwest Virginia Housing Center) in order to keep everyone abreast of key updates. Our goals are to inform, communicate and provide relevant education, while making the experience

fun, interesting, focused and engaged for the associates. Often, the education component is provided through guest speakers that focus on topics of relevance to VHDA.

Why/When It was Undertaken

After several associate surveys reflected a need to provide better communication and learning opportunities, VHDA proactively set key goals in order to better meet the communication needs of its associates. The main objective was to keep associates informed through many different methods as seamlessly as possible, while also eliminating as much bureaucracy as possible.

What it has accomplished

VHDA's internal communications strategy has accomplished a number of efficiency improvements. It saves time by reducing the number of hours and employees that are necessary to distribute news; it has reduced the number of resources dedicated to this process by transferring ownership to one area of the Authority instead of to several; and it has reduced the costs involved by centralizing this function. Perhaps most importantly, it has created real-time communication across the organization, providing up-to-date information for employees instead of dated material.

Why it is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Award Judging Criteria

Innovative

Tradition says organizations should have meetings, newsletters, and memos. What VHDA has done to improve this process is create communications in real-time using the SharePoint platform. The process begins when an associate submits information electronically. It is then edited for brevity, keeping the key points necessary for a reader's understanding and action. All approved information is automatically placed on the intranet (*The Zone*) – all employees have to do is refresh it to see the new information. So, when associates bring up *The Zone* every morning, they can see information that has occurred within the last 24 hours, or review the archives. In addition, they can access *The Zone* remotely if necessary.

Replicable

This strategy is easily replicable by other HFAs – all that is necessary is a platform similar to SharePoint, an IT team to design and implement the program, and consolidating the agency's information gathering function into one department to eliminate redundancy. Costs are minimal, especially if a technology platform is already in place.

Responds to a management challenge or opportunity

Previously, VHDA had issues with mass e-mails being sent from many different sources within the Authority. In addition to being hard to manage, this process also provided inconsistent messaging. The Authority's challenge from management was to communicate with consistent messaging while also getting the information out faster through a more streamlined process. This began when *The Press* – VHDA's former newsletter – transitioned into *The Zone*, which is now the home page for the Authority's intranet.

Achieves measurable improvements in agency operations

This program has achieved several measurable improvements in agency operations. First, it used to take two employees approximately 2-3 days to complete *The Press*, which was

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distributed by e-mail when it was ready. Now, *The Zone* is done in 15 minutes by one employee. Secondly, the Quarterly Associates Meetings have been streamlined and are produced with lower costs. Finally, *The Zone* has received approximately 1.5 million page views since its inception.

Provides benefits that outweigh costs

The primary benefit of this program is that VHDA associates are now getting real-time information instead of having to wait for information to trickle down from various sources. This benefit certainly outweighs the costs, which are minimal since both the SharePoint and e-mail systems were already in place.

Demonstrates effective use of resources

As mentioned previously, this process takes fewer people (one instead of two), and less time (15 minutes instead of 2-3 days). In addition, it reduces costs and resources by centralizing this function in one department instead of several. A small, “agile process” IT team built the program, reviewed it, tested it, and put it in place within a four-month time period.

Achieves strategic objectives

Internal communications should enable a shared vision, loyalty, satisfaction, commitment, empowerment and service focus. VHDA’s strategy was to meet these goals by keeping associates informed through many different methods as seamlessly as possible, while also eliminating as much bureaucracy as possible. In the past, communication was primarily handled through e-mail by different groups and multiple e-mails were sent on a daily basis; associates sometimes felt “bombarded” by the email communication channel. VHDA’s Leadership Team acknowledged that communication should be consistent, concise and offer information to the associates in a “one-stop shop” type of environment. By stopping the “pushing out” of information and changing it to “pulling” the associates to the information relevant to them, this process has been a positive and effortless experience.

Conclusion

As a result of these simple and minimal communication style changes, VHDA has achieved a more efficient and effective internal communications strategy. This strategy has resulted in the reduction of staff time – a process that once took two associates 2-3 days to complete now takes one associate only 15 minutes to complete. Moreover, this effort utilized technology that was already in place, required no additional funding, and was achieved in a four-month timeframe by VHDA’s IT department while still taking on other projects and operational initiatives. Also, *The Zone* has received approximately 1.5 million page views since its inception.

Perhaps most importantly, this strategy delivers information to employees in real-time. According to Heather Weidner, VHDA Manager of Testing and Product Assurance, “I rely on *The Zone* daily for news and information about VHDA. *The Zone* provides better communication for the Authority, and is a central place where all associates know to go to for news, updates, and activities.”

Please see attachments below.

Supporting Documentation for

Internal Communications Strategy: Quarterly Associates Meetings, SharePoint & Email
Example of the PRESS BEFORE automation took place. Keep in mind this took two associates about 2-3 days to put this PRESS email together.

Volume 2013, Issue 0409



Operational Updates

ITS Maintenance Weekend

This weekend starting at 5:00 pm Saturday, April 13 until 1:00 pm Sunday, April 14 all of VHDA's network systems will be unavailable for scheduled monthly maintenance. All systems will be offline, including access to Citrix. ITS has already posted notices on vhda.com and vhda.org. If you have any questions or concerns, contact Mark McBride.

Risk and Control Self-Assessment System

Managers responsible for maintaining the Risk and Control Self-Assessment System (a.k.a., iRisk) are required to complete all required control design assessments and tests by fiscal year end. But it's not just a year end task that can be put off until the last minute. Audit recommends as a best practice that management plan individually, or as a team with their staff, to make periodic updates to keep the system current throughout the year. Taking a few minutes to review system data quarterly to ensure processes are adequately documented, risks are identified, and controls are assessed and tested where necessary will help ensure controls are adequate throughout the year and ready for certification at fiscal year-end. You can now access the Risk and Control Self-Assessment System through *The Zone*. Click on Workplace Resources and under Tools and Applications click on VHDA Apps. The Risk and Control Self-Assessment System resides under Internal Audit. Should you need assistance in finding the application or updating the system, please contact one of the following Audit associates:

- Russ Wyatt
- Ross Strodel
- Warren George
- Kris Kruse

News You Can Use

Exterior Building Work

Waterproofing work will be conducted at the front entrance of headquarters on Saturday, April 13 (all day). The entrance will be partially blocked Saturday and one or two days next week. Watch for updates in *The Zone* and *The Press* for next week's schedule.

Useful Links at Your Fingertips

Looking for our social media sites? Want to submit a suggestion, view online pictures from VHDA events, or order from our online store? Need to visit www.vhda.com with just one click? Scroll to the bottom of the page on The Zone to find all these resources at your fingertips.

Manager's Forum Attendee Criteria

The purpose of the Manager's Forum is to bring majority of VHDA's supervisors and managers together after each Board Meeting to hear updates and engage in dialogue regarding issues facing VHDA. Now that we have finalized organizational changes announced earlier this year, we have revisited the Manager's Forum attendee criteria. Supervisors and managers of two or more staff are expected to attend the forum. The list also includes members of the Planning Team, Team Leads and OD&L staff as coordinators of the event. A few other associates such as the HRGs, Budget & Risk Management Analyst, PR Manager and Government Affairs Liaison are optional attendees because of their roles. The agenda will be posted on *The Zone* the week of the meeting. The meeting summary will also be posted the following week. If you have any questions, contact Tammy Neale.

Boiler Replacement Work Continues

On the weekend of Friday, April 26-Sunday, April 28 our boiler replacement job will enter its final stage at headquarters. There will be NO HEAT until completion of the work on Sunday. On Saturday, crane operations at the loading dock will lift in new boilers and remove old boilers, via the G level patio deck. The loading dock and patio will be closed during this equipment move. Questions should be directed to Barb Layman.

Got a Suggestion?

If you have a suggestion, drop a note in the Suggestion Box. All suggestions will be evaluated and considered for possible implementation. Click [here](#) to submit your suggestion.

Three VHDA-Financed Apartment Communities Win RAMMY Awards

We congratulate Perry Street Lofts in Petersburg, CreekpoinTE Apartments in Midlothian and Monmouth Woods in King George — each of which was recently honored with 2013 RAMMY Awards by the Central Virginia Apartment Association (CVAA). With more than 400 apartment communities in the CVAA membership, winning a RAMMY is a mark of excellence in the property management industry.

Team Talk and Community Corner

Hilliard House 6th Annual Authentic English Tea

VHDA has four tickets available for the Hilliard House 6th Annual Authentic English Tea on Sunday, April 28 from 3:00 pm-5:00 pm at the Hanover Arts & Activities Center, 500 South Center Street, Ashland. The dress is Sunday best like you would wear to church – some ladies also wear hats and gloves. All funds raised by this event go directly to Hilliard House and its mission to house homeless women and children and provide supportive services. If interested in attending, please email Debbie Griner by Monday, April 15.

Give Blood to Save Lives

On Thursday, April 18, VHDA's Volunteer Council will hold its next [blood drive](#). It will be held in Conference Room 2 on the lobby level (headquarters) from 8:00 am until 12:00 noon. Register at [Virginia Blood Services](#) to donate and help save lives.

Example of the PRESS AFTER automation took place. This cut down the time to produce the email from 2-3 days down to 15 minutes.

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The Press

HR Spot

Financial Systems and Reporting Manager

David Henderson has been promoted to Financial Systems and Reporting Manager. He will report to Melody Barackman in Accounting, Finance Division. In addition, Denise Lindsey and Brian Luck are now part of this area.

Employment Opportunity

VHDA is currently recruiting for the position of [Senior Accountant/Data Reporting Officer](#).

Holiday AWS Hours

Reminder: VHDA will pay all full-time associates 8 (eight) hours of Holiday pay for every scheduled holiday. If you are working an AWS schedule, and the holiday falls on your normally scheduled work day, you will need to submit leave for the additional time that you would normally work on that day. For example, if you are scheduled to work 10 hours on Monday, May 27, you would need to submit a leave request for 2 hours of leave for the Memorial Day holiday. See [Personnel Policy # 601](#), VHDA AWS Program."

Your May 29th Paycheck May Look Different

If you will recall, VHDA uses a 24 period payroll schedule for benefit deductions. What this means for VHDA associates is that the May 29 paycheck will look different as it will not include credits, medical, dental, life or FSA deductions. For some of you this may mean a slight increase in pay, for others it may mean a slight decrease. Contact Geraldine Mezera or your HRG for questions.

Still Motivated?

Come on you can do it—just three weeks remaining in the Spring Fitness Challenge. There are still opportunities to earn additional points on an individual and team level. Keep tracking your steps and continue to count the points for all the other healthy choices you make. Encourage yourself, your teammates, and let's finish in a strong way!

News You Can Use

Before the Storm...Save Money!

Before tropical storms arrive, you can get ready and save money too. Shop during [Virginia's Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday](#) from May 25-31, and you won't pay sales tax on many supplies for protecting your home. [View](#) a list of tax free items and get prepared for hurricane season.

Help VHDA Get, Keep and Grow the Best Employees

Do you want to help shape VHDA's Workplace for Today and Tomorrow (WTT)? Do you know of a great recruitment strategy or tool that we should implement? Or, do you want to see more opportunities to strengthen organizational culture through social activities with your awesome coworkers? Join the conversation!

What is WTT?

- One of the outputs of the Strategic Thinking Interchange was Recruiting & Retaining the Younger Generation.
- All associates were invited to an open discussion on what they think appeals to the younger generation. The discussion was organized into three categories: Get You, Keep You and Grow You.
- A decision was made to be inclusive and to reach out to all associates for the greatest benefit.
- This is a group of associates with ideas. That's all.

How can you participate?

Join a group or three. Get permission from your manager to attend the first meeting. Work with the group to provide a white paper.

- Get You: VHDA has a comprehensive approach to recruitment. Meets Tuesday, May 21 at 10:00 am in the Large HR Conference Room. Email [Tierra Sampson](#) to join.
- Keep You: VHDA provides a fun, flexible work environment. Meets Wednesday, May 29 at 11:00 am in the 3rd Floor Balcony Conference Room. Email [Brooke Scott](#) to join.
- Grow You: VHDA invests in its employees, developing the future mobilizing force of affordable housing in Virginia. Meets Wednesday, May 22 at 2 pm in the 3rd Floor Tax Credit Conference Room. Email [Rebecca Rowe](#) to join.

Ring in the New Fiscal Year

Get ready for a fun day of looking back and looking forward at our Quarterly Associates Meeting on Wednesday, June 19. Attend the meeting from 11:00 am-12:00 noon, enjoy lunch on the patio from noontime to 2:00 pm, visit the Wellness Table and VHDA Store, and participate in a Tai Chi demo. Mark your calendar to dress casual and enjoy a day of VHDA fellowship.

VHDA Offices Closed

In observance of Memorial Day, VHDA offices will be closed Monday, May 27. Everyone is reminded to update their voicemail message with holiday closing information.

Team Talk and Community Corner

VHDA Helps Give a “Head Start”

Sixteen VHDA volunteers visited Richmond Public Schools on May 7, providing story time for over 120 Head Start students. Students enjoyed the colorful and tongue-twisting tales of *Giraffes Can't Dance* and *Skippyjon Jones*, books selected by Volunteer Council members. The books were donated to each classroom along with a \$40 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble that the teacher can use for her classroom. Thanks to our volunteers for being a part of this project!

Donations for Oklahoma City Victims

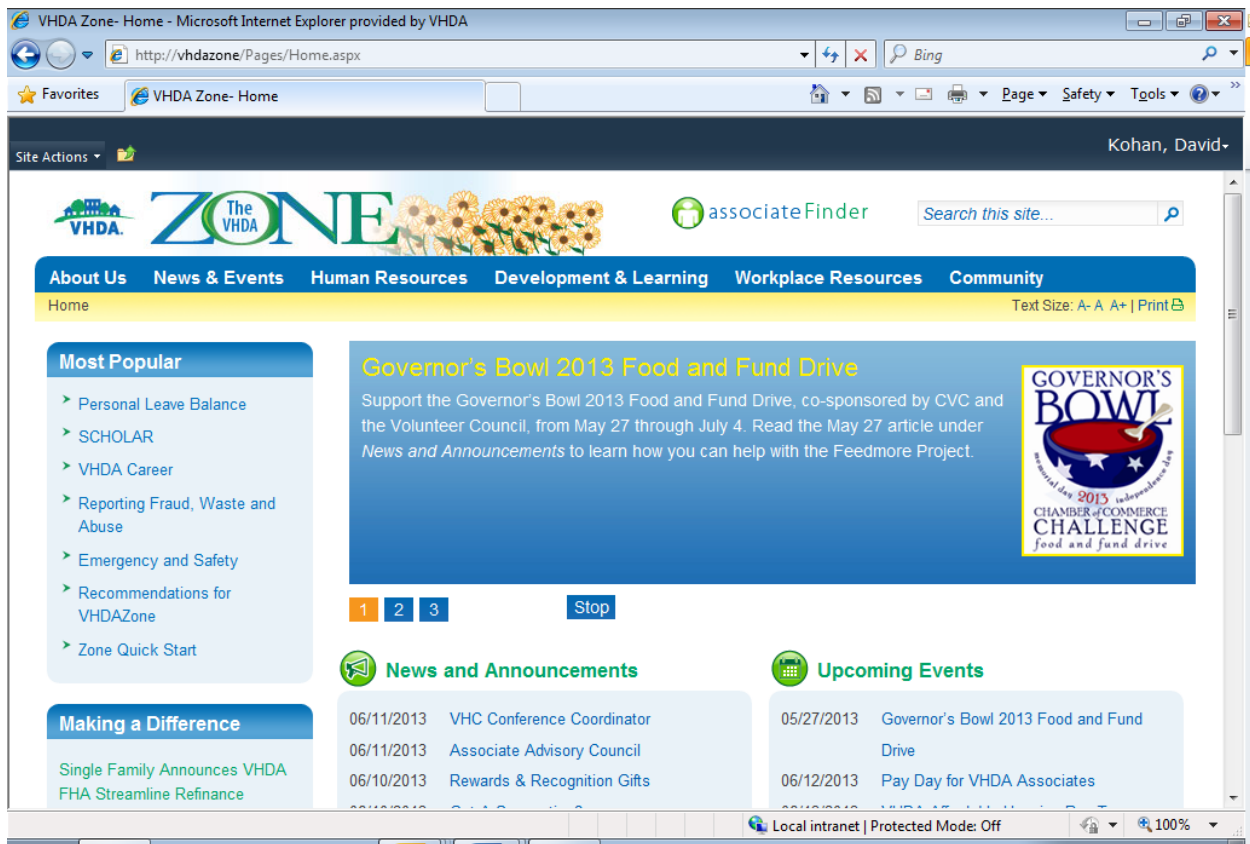
The Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign has a process for employees to donate money for victims of the devastating storms that wiped out entire neighborhoods of Moore and South Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. To participate, associates may donate via check made payable to CVC-OK Tornado Relief. You may forward your check to Monica Jefferson, the 2013 CVC Chairperson. She will forward contributions to the CVC Campaign.

If you want to donate via a credit card, go online to either redcross.org or salvationarmyusa.org to complete your donation. If you want your online donation applied to VHDA's workplace giving program, please send a copy of your confirmation to Monica Jefferson. VHDA's agency code is 002.

Kings Dominion Express is Back

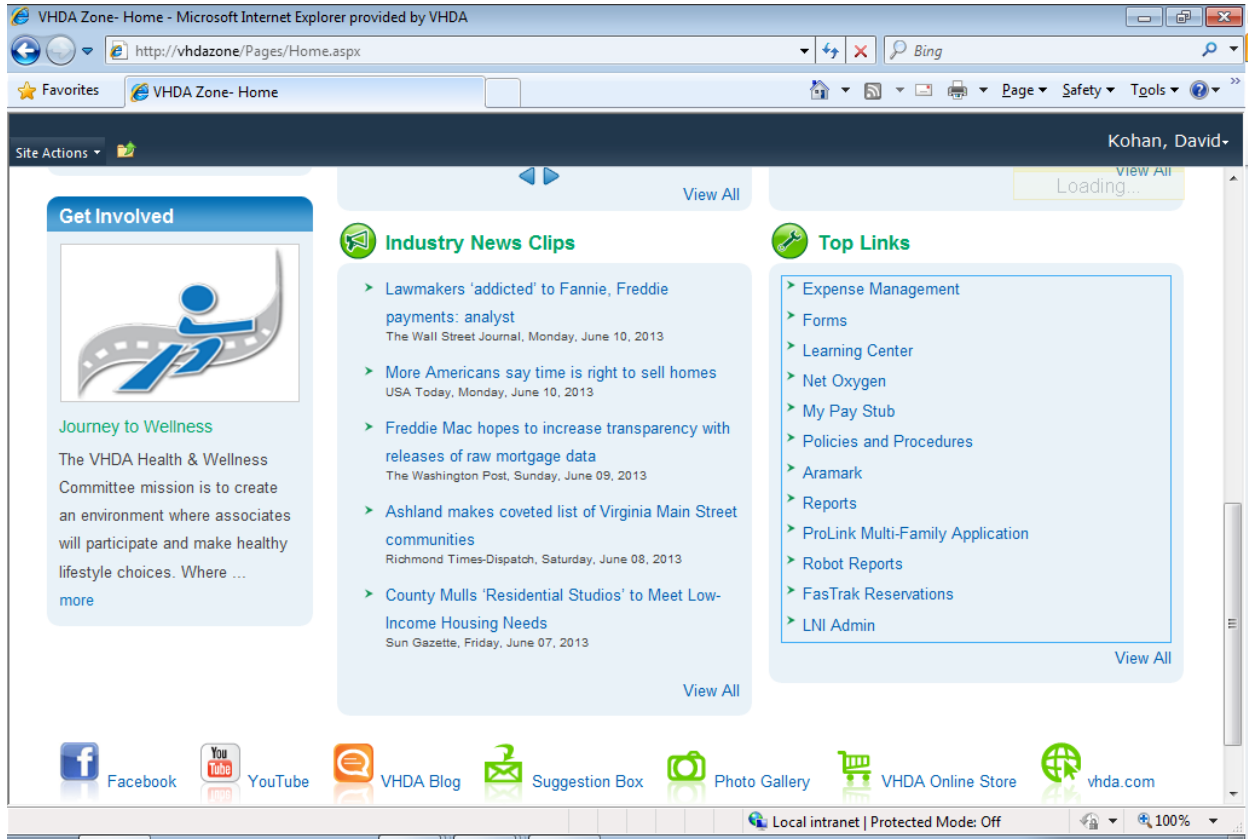
GRTC Transit System proudly announces the return of route 102x Kings Dominion Express service from downtown Richmond to Kings Dominion! Service will run seven days a week from May 24-September 2, 2013. Route 102x Kings Dominion Express route will provide Kings Dominion visitors with a relaxing alternative to fighting traffic, parking hassles and avoid the high cost of gas, for only \$5.00 per trip! Visit www.ridegrtc.com or call the GRTC Customer Service Center at 358-GRTC (4782) for more information.

The ZONE Intranet site is the “go-to source” for all information pertaining to VHDA and beyond.

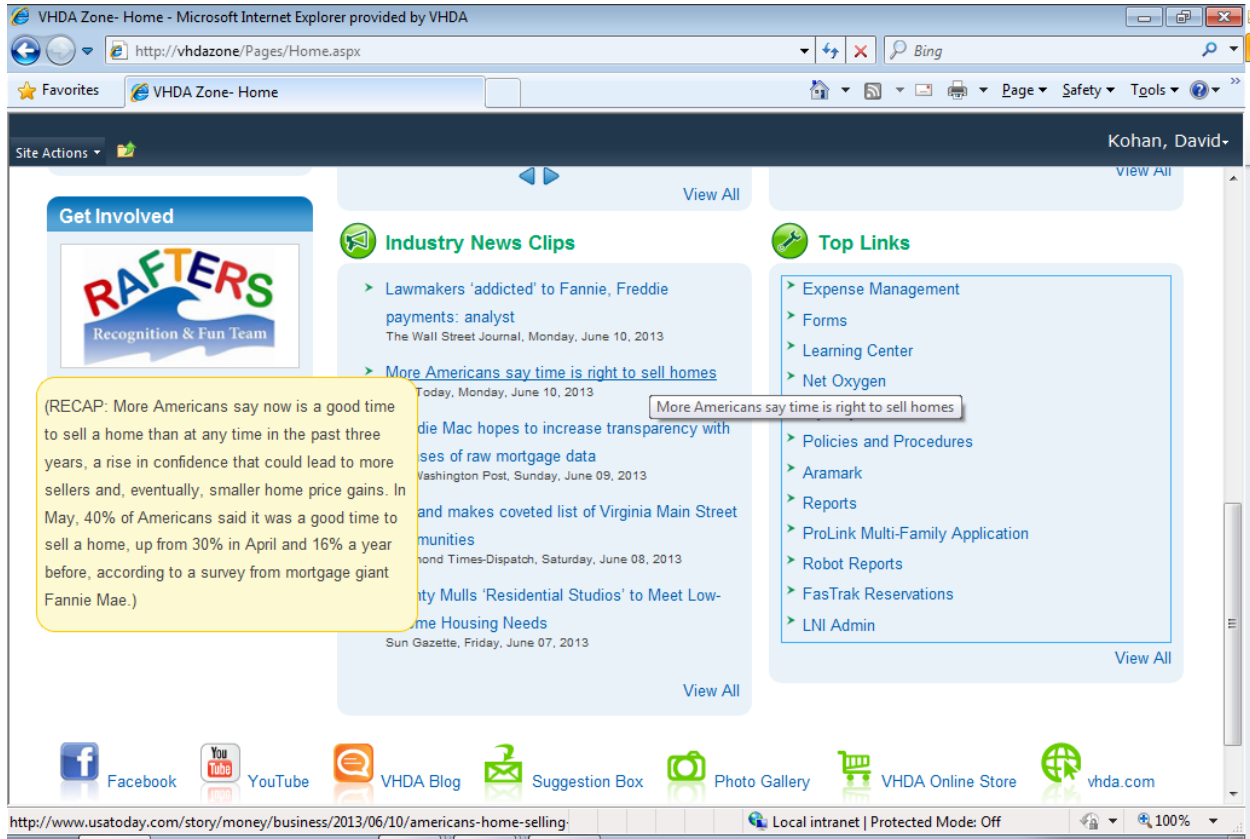


- Front page is very clean with most popular links and internal news and announcements right up front.

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- **In addition to internal news and announcements, the front page also delivers housing industry news clips so associates are up-to-date on the latest housing news.**



- **Very helpful balloon pops when you hover over any of the news clips for easy reading. The associate doesn't have to click on the link to get a preview; all they need to do is hover over the link to see if this article is interesting to them.**

Below is an example of one of VHDA's associate meetings in spring, 2013. As you can see, the information recognizes new associates and associates reaching certain milestones.



