

Hosting A Grand Opening COVID-19 Style

Kentucky Housing Corporation

Communications: Special Event Marketing

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After three years of being homeless, Jana Pollard could not wait to ring the doorbell at her new apartment. It was a luxury she had not and one that signified to her that she was now independent and in control of her life.

For years, Jana struggled with financial setbacks. They consumed her life. Though she continued to work, she used her free time to look for resources and ways to resolve her debt. Defeated and depressed, she eventually turned to the Daniel Pitino Shelter in Owensboro, Kentucky, where her luck began to change.

The shelter gave her a place to sleep, a steady source of food, a part-time job as an office assistant and the guidance and support she needed to move forward. And in 2020, they selected Jana as part of the inaugural class of residents at the Nicky Hayden Memorial Apartments, a 12-unit development that provided permanent housing to homeless individuals. Partially funded by the Nicky Hayden Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit that honored the legacy of motorcycle racing champion and Owensboro native Nicky Hayden, who died in a crash, the project was special to everyone involved, and they did not want COVID-19 to dampen their celebration.

In July 2020, the developer, Clayton Watkins Construction, reached out to Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) to see if there was a way to commemorate the occasion. Typically, KHC does not organize ribbon-cuttings or groundbreakings, but we pride ourselves on innovation. Meeting the diverse needs of our varied clientele takes collaboration, imagination and flexibility, and creating a virtual celebration was a unique challenge that we embraced, though not without complications:

- Kentucky was under strict guidance to socially distance as COVID cases rose
- Partners were spread throughout the state in neighboring states
- Members of the Hayden family wanted to attend in person and tour the facility
- Owensboro is three and a half hours from Frankfort, where KHC is located, and we could not film the virtual tour and tenant interview on the day of the event if we also had to set up and orchestrate the event

Engage Target Audiences

Like most ribbon-cuttings, many entities contributed to the final product. The Pitino Shelter was providing the reference list and supporting the new tenants in moving in. The City of Owensboro had donated land to the project. KHC, Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati and Field and Main Bank provided funding, and the Nicky Hayden Memorial Foundation also was a major supporter and the namesake for the building.

The best way to involve all of the partners, to let them give remarks and to participate in the ribbon-cutting, was to host the event on Zoom. It gave KHC the flexibility to allow multiple entities to speak and to live-stream the event on YouTube and Facebook, which the partners could then share to their individual pages.

We began by coordinating with all of the entities, seeing who they would like to involve in the event and what they wanted to accomplish at the ceremony. Most simply wanted to take part and engage with the other partners, as they would at an in-person ceremony. The event was held at the end of July, and by then, most of the participants had been quarantined for four months. This gave them a chance to have personal interaction in a safe way.

To ensure that we had a smooth flow from speaker to speaker, we knew that we would have to pre-film some elements, namely the virtual tour and the tenant interview. We wanted to sure that both were included so that people who normally would tour the new development could see what they helped fund and how it was impacting tenants' lives. Pre-filming gave us the ability to edit the footage, to add title cards or text and to make the whole day look cohesive.

We also needed to test the stream and camera equipment. Having never woven so many components together while live, we wanted to see what equipment we would need and ensure the equipment worked so that there were no glitches on the day of the ribbon cutting.

The pre-visit served us well. It gave us time to delve into the tenant's story, so that she felt comfortable sharing with us. We could take pictures and walk through the units multiple times to get the best possible angles. Upon arrival, we also discovered there was no electrical source outside the building, where everyone thought the event would take place. We also could not connect to the Internet in that area, which would have prevented us from streaming the event live and including all of the partners. Luckily, with a nearly all remote staff, our Technology Services division had purchased several hotspots for staff without Internet connection, which we were able to take on-site and use for the event.

On the day of the event, as we set up and got everyone in place, the people on the call chatted as they would at a physical event. They discussed upcoming projects, asked each other questions, exchanged COVID stories and were able to connect as well as to wish the new tenants well. We mailed each participant a section of blue ribbon, the same type that we had at the physical event, so that everyone involved could cut the ribbon together, allowing them to feel more a part of the day. The special detail touched many of the funders and partners, because they said they felt a sense of satisfaction as they cut the ribbon. Like a physical event would, it represented the close to another successful project.

Achieving Measurable Results and Strategic Objectives

Beyond engaging our partners and celebrating our tenant's new homes, the event helped publicize KHC and our partners. Streaming the event live garnered more attention than a regular ribbon-cutting would. National magazines and local media shared our story, and some followed up with the Pitino Center for additional information.

The video on YouTube received 80 views, and the event on Facebook had more than 1,400 views, which was a greater response than we could have expected, which is one of the main goals of KHC's communication and marketing efforts. We not only want to serve with purpose and provide holistic housing solutions, but we want to spread our message so we can educate the public about the products and programs we can provide, connect to more partners and ensure all Kentuckians have access to affordable housing solutions. By having such a tremendous response, we gained more followers and

more engaged viewers who have since interacted with our page and have helped us spread the message about funding opportunities and programs include the Healthy at Home Eviction Relief Fund.

Small Cost, Big Results

Beyond the cost of travel and purchasing the ribbon, the event was more labor-intensive than costly. The time spent coordinating, filming, assembling the video and orchestrating the event from multiple locations far outweighed the cost. It was an easily replicable event, even with a small staff, and served as the basis for future virtual events we have had through the corporation.

Though not the most polished, it was at the beginning of the pandemic when we were still new to many of these tools. We have since refined our work, but we remain proud of all that we were able to accomplish in such a short timeframe.

KHC used existing resources to film and stream the event

- **ManyCam** – a streaming software that is both mobile-friendly and a desktop application. A free application, ManyCam allowed us to simultaneously stream to YouTube and Facebook, integrate existing elements, including video frames, pictures, pre-recorded videos and music. Since the virtual ribbon cutting, KHC has used ManyCam to stream other events, including our Lender Awards, which was a completely virtual event this year and had similar results, skyrocketing the views and awareness of our partners and their success.
- **Logitech BCC950 ConferenceCam** – a conference camera that we bought for one of the Kentucky Affordable Housing Conferences, it was a \$246 investment at the time that we have used multiple times since. It has a built-in microphone and covers a large section. We connected it to our computer so that we did not manually have to control the camera. Instead, we could focus on how the video looked and sounded and switch the view from the in-person presentation to the online speakers.
- **Verizon JetPack** – a mobile hotspot that provided us unlimited Internet service in a remote area. It was no additional cost to the corporation because we already had several available to lend to remote workers experiencing difficulties with their Internet connection.
- **Adobe Suite and Canva** – these software packages are already tools in our belt. We use the Adobe Suite to create publications, images, graphics and more for daily communications. Canva is a \$12.99/month online graphics software that extends our graphic capabilities. It allows us to make quick, animated images, short videos, graphics for videos, slides for our homepage and social media images.

Additional Links

- [Virtual Ribbon Cutting Ceremony](#)
- [Daniel Pitino Shelter](#)
- [Nicky Hayden Memorial Foundation](#)
- [Owensboro Times Article](#)
- [Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer Article](#)
- [RoadRacing World Publishing Article](#)
- [WFIE 14 News Broadcast](#)
- [MotoAmerica Interview Mentioning Apartments](#)