

50th Anniversary Celebrations

Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

Communications: Special Event Marketing

HFA Staff Contact

Scott Elliott

selliott@phfa.org

Introduction

The past year, 2023, was a special one for the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency as it marked 50 years since the agency's start of operations. At the end of 2022, PHFA staff compiled a list of ideas for best celebrating this special time. Ultimately, this list was winnowed down to the twelve best ideas that could be used to extend the celebration throughout the whole year. The emphasis was not just on marking this special anniversary but on using the occasion to educate a variety of audiences about the work done by the agency and the significant accomplishments accrued during our history. The anniversary also provided the chance to recognize our legislative and business partners and strengthen our ties with both. By the end of 2023, through the use of various promotions and events, we were able to use our 50th anniversary as a marketing tool to strengthen our brand significantly in ways that will benefit the agency moving forward.

Most importantly, all the activities related to our 50th anniversary year were executed completely in-house, requiring no external vendors, and we have used expertise that most HFAs have on staff. So our approach is completely replicable by other housing finance agencies. Also, all our campaign elements were quite cost effective, with many requiring minimal expense. The number of attendees at our celebratory events, noted below, is proof of their effectiveness, as is the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received. I think we benefited greatly by using this opportunity to not only draw attention to ourselves, but also to recognize our legislative and business partners whose efforts constitute a major part of our success. The historical press release and videos we created are educational pieces we are continuing to use in the short term to educate the public about the work of our agency and the housing programs we make available to them.

The 12 elements of our 50th anniversary plan

We will now step through all the elements of our marketing plan for the year and note special features of each.

1. A special 50th anniversary logo

We created a special version of our normal PHFA logo that we revised slightly to note our 50th anniversary year. We were careful to keep much of our standard logo but to amend it with gold ring in a pleasing design to tout our anniversary. In this way, our agency's branding was not disrupted by a totally different 50th anniversary logo, but was boosted by a logo that played off our existing brand image.



2. A special 50th anniversary lapel pin as an anniversary keepsake

A good way to expand the use of the 50th anniversary logo was to capture it in a gold-tone lapel pin we gave to business partners, legislators and others throughout the year. These pins were given to all attendees of the various events we held in May of 2023, and any time guests came by the agency during the year. Many staff members continue to wear these lapel pins as a way to express their pride as PHFA employees.

3. Twelve months of a special anniversary email signature

Every email we originate provides an opportunity for special messaging through our email signature. For all twelve months of 2023, we revised our email signature with the new logo and the message: Celebrating 50 years leading affordable housing in PA. In this way, we were able to alert all of our partners and customers to the anniversary celebration in a simple yet effective way.

4. A press release to kick off the special year

In January of 2023, we used a broadly distributed press release to alert audiences to our 50th anniversary celebration and to highlight events planned for the year. The press release served an educational

purpose by noting key periods in the agency’s history and informed readers about the many programs PHFA has started over the years to address changing housing needs in Pennsylvania. The release also introduced the special anniversary logo to the public. That [January 13 press release](#) is available in our News Center under 2023 releases. In addition to statewide press exposure, our staff shared the release with state and local government officials, our business partners and our customers.

5. Large display signs with brief customer stories

We produced six, seven-foot tall pull-up banners sharing the message that “Affordable Housing Changes Lives” and including the 50th anniversary logo. Those signs traveled to PHFA events during the year to promote our 50th anniversary message, and when not in use remotely were displayed in our lobby and elsewhere in our building by conference rooms. These pull-up banners are inexpensive, easy to transport, and share messaging in a powerful way, given their large size and bright colors. A sample of two of these signs can be seen in the image below of Stockton Williams.

6. Two videos sharing agency history through images and music

Knowing that today’s Tic-Toc and YouTube audiences prefer video to text, we recognized it was imperative that we produce at least [one video](#) telling our 50th anniversary story. In fact, we produced [two videos](#) entirely in-house that we used at all our celebration events and on our homepage and on social media throughout the year. To create these videos we have to sort through our best historical photographs and digitize hundreds of them – a time consuming process. The end result was two videos that tell our story with narration, music and images.

7. Anniversary messaging in all sponsorship ads and across digital media throughout 2023

As part of our marketing for PHFA, the agency sponsors numerous community events across Pennsylvania each year. The communications staff made certain that messaging for all our sponsor ads in 2023 included our anniversary logo and special headlines and text tying into our 50th anniversary theme. Every external event possible was used as an opportunity to alert the public to PHFA’s golden anniversary and the many housing services we offer.

PHFA maintains a [timeline](#) of all the major events in the agency’s 50-year history, which we update quarterly. We drew extensively in 2023 from that timeline to put informational messages on our website and on social media about PHFA’s housing successes during the agency’s existence. Customer video testimonials were also featured on all our digital channels, informing and educating the public and our partners about the agency’s rich history and lives changed by our housing programs.

8, 9 & 10. Three special events planned for May 2023

Early on in our planning, we identified three groups we wanted to recognize and include in our 50th anniversary celebration: Members of the state legislature, which created PHFA; our business partners who share our housing mission; and our employees who interject their caring nature into all our housing programs, and have throughout our existence. Three unique events were planned for May to recognize each group.

Our first two events were planned for May 3. Early in the afternoon that day, we held an event in our Capitol rotunda and invited key legislators to speak. We picked a session day so we knew legislators would be in town.

However, since it was a session day, their availability was uncertain. The fact that more than 50 legislators and their staff attended, or sent well wishes, attests to their strong relationship with the



NCSHA’s Stockton Williams shared insightful PHFA history during our celebration event for our business partners on May 3.

agency. This event was used to thank legislators from 50 years ago for having the foresight to fund PHFA and establish it as an independent agency. We also thanked current legislators in attendance for their ongoing support of the agency’s housing programs. PHFA’s housing successes over five decades were recognized. Photos from this event can be seen on [our Flickr page](#).

The second event that day was a gala for our business partners and friends of the agency at a downtown Harrisburg location providing a wonderful venue for the gathering. More than 250 people attended. Light fare was served, and all attendees were provided with anniversary lapel pins and nicely embroidered PHFA ball caps as mementos. The evening’s program included historical videos and 5 guest speakers sharing key aspects of the agency’s history. Included among the speakers was Stockton Williams of NCSHA (pictured above) who informed the gathering that, in fact, the idea for housing finance agencies had first originated in Pennsylvania. The 45-minute program was a hit with attendees, and the whole event is available for viewing on [our YouTube page](#).

Of course, we also had to recognize our staff in May, and this included our retirees. PHFA is known as “the housing agency with a heart” because our staff has a passion for our housing mission and displays that positive energy every day. Held on May 17 at our Harrisburg office, the event included time for staff and retirees to take the mic and tell personal stories from their time with the agency. The event, in fact, had the feeling of a festive family reunion. About 300 current and former employees were in attendance. The event is captured in photos, also available on [our Flickr page](#).

11. The 50th anniversary time capsule

One of the big surprises of the year was the strong response shown by so many wanting to include messages and mementos in a time capsule we had specially created. This time capsule was sealed at the end of the year and will not be reopened by staff until 2073 – the agency’s 100th anniversary. The idea of creating a time capsule came from our staff, and it was the highlight of our business partner and staff celebratory events. At last count, people contributed 62 personal and business items for including in the capsule. The big benefit of the time capsule is that it added a fun element to our celebrations and provided people a tangible way to join in the celebration.



PHFA Executive Director Robin Wiessmann prepares to seal the time capsule during our event for business partners on May 3.

12. Capturing all the year’s events in our 2023 annual report

At the end of the year, our [2023 annual report](#) provided the perfect vehicle for capturing all 12 months celebratory events and saving them for posterity. The theme for the report was “50 Year’s Strong.” Research shows that audiences prefer less text and more multimedia options in corporate communications. So the annual report includes a wide variety of videos including two historical videos, 3 professionally produced videos telling our customers’ stories (a homebuyer, a renter, and a counseling customer), and seven short videos of staff members explaining why they like working at PHFA.

Conclusion

The experience of PHFA during our 50th anniversary campaign demonstrates just how much can be done, on a very reasonable budget, using a variety of media and events to promote the work of any housing finance agency. Our success is reflected in the fact that so many people participated in our events and showed genuine enthusiasm for the work of the agency. That is because, as we do every day, we recognized the many contributions of so many of our partners that helps us jointly achieve our housing mission over our first 50 years and beyond.

Visual Aids

Images from our special event thanking the state legislature for creating PHFA



Our commemorative lapel pin.



The main speakers from the event.



Special citations presented by the state House and Senate to PHFA.





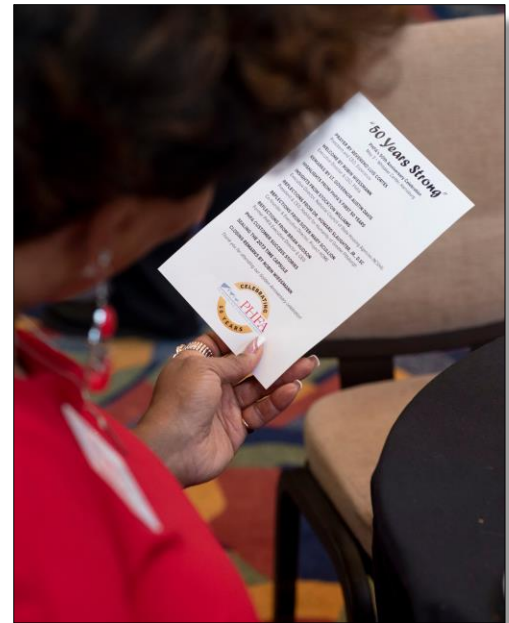
Images from our 50th anniversary event recognizing our business partners



Guest speakers included Lt. Gov. Austin Davis, Sister Mary Scullion of Project HOME, and former PHFA Executive Director Brian Hudson (top to bottom), among others.



More photos giving a sense of the festivities during the two-hour event.



Images from our 50th anniversary event recognizing our staff and retirees



This two-hour event featured staff, retirees, and our leadership sharing PHEFA stories, plus lots of great food.



More images of special elements from our 50th anniversary campaign



Scott Elliott
Director of Communications

CELEBRATING PHEA 50 YEARS

T: 717.780.3916
F: 717.614.2567
sellott@phfa.org · www.phfa.org
211 North Front St, Harrisburg, PA 17101

[f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [v](#)

Celebrating 50 years leading affordable housing in PA.

Clockwise from top-left: The time capsule starts to fill with memorabilia during one of our anniversary events; our special email signature used throughout 2023; a sample of one of the six pull-up banners used at numerous public events throughout the year; and the title page from our 2023 50th anniversary edition of our annual report showing one image from an animated photo montage.

