



Daily Call Keeps Team Informed During Crisis

For many of us the early days of March were a blur of confusing yet alarming news reports and anxiety over this new illness that became known as COVID-19. However, for certain members of the VHRC staff, this time was highlighted by daily conference calls to discuss preparations to protect VHRC's residents and staff from the virus.

Between 17 to 20 staff members, including our CEO and CFO, the administrator and a clinical support person from each building, the heads of each department, and communications staff, participate in these daily calls. The calls were initially led by Lisa Desmond, who is our Director of Clinical Operation and also our Infection Preventionist. Over time the calls transitioned from preparedness to containment and Rick Bova, our CFO, took the lead on the calls.

During the call, each participant shares the status of his or her community or department. If there are gaps or a need for collaboration or communication, the call helps share these needs and assign duties to the correct person. As we enter our seventh month of living with COVID-19, the calls continue and still provide an opportunity for each department to check in and provide updates.



Executive Assistant Michele Parra sets up the daily conference call and takes roll to ensure all the necessary staff are on the line.

"As the leader for the call, I see it as an opportunity to bring the team together to discuss challenges, coordinate efforts and hear from the various subject matter experts," said Rick. "The calls have been a key component to the successful results we have experienced throughout this pandemic. I can't think of a meeting where we did not have at least one key moment of discussion that made us a better organization and better in our efforts against the virus."

CEO Libby Bush concurs. "After almost seven months, these calls are well-organized, efficient and critical to our pandemic efforts. A key reason for the success of this process is that every one of these team members has the top priority of our joint efforts first: the health and wellness of our residents and dedicated staff."

Sharing National Treasures

For 35 years, you always knew where to find Nora Whalen two mornings a week. As the guaranteed docent at the American History Museum on Tuesdays and at the Natural History Museum on Fridays, she did the Highlights Tours for both. "There were days I didn't go, but that's because the road froze or the snow fell and the Smithsonian cancelled. Otherwise, I'd be there." That is, until March 14, when the pandemic closed their doors.

Nora, who still keeps up with current exhibits through online tours, recalls how her docent work started. After a military life on the go with her husband Don, whom she met while in high school in Pennsylvania and who served in the Army in Germany, Viet Nam, and at the Navy War College in Rhode Island, the Whalens moved to Washington in 1983. "I had always wanted to do something at the Smithsonian, even if I had to dust!" She applied, trained and started working as a docent at the American History Museum. Three years later, she happened to be in the Natural History Museum and noticed people coming in and leaving again in just 20 minutes. "I was just appalled; you could spend days in there!" So she became a docent there too.

Now that the Smithsonian is beginning to open up again, she is uncertain when she will return. "But I've had a marvelous time!" says Nora, who had been slated to receive a special docent award in May. What has she loved best? "There's wonderful things that people can walk right past and never even notice, and I get to tell them about!" Her tours have ended in applause more than once. "Who would ever think somebody would do that? It just makes you feel as if they gained something, something different that they did not expect."



Nora holds a replica of the Hope Diamond which is on exhibit at the Natural History Museum where she is a docent.

The Campus Voice

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