




THE CLARE

# CONNECTION

SUMMER 2020 Issue 218





*Kyle Exline, Executive Director*



## THE CLARE

*Gold Coast Retirement Living Your Way*

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*“Our world has changed, and The Clare has changed with it. You should have great confidence in knowing The Clare will consistently rise to the top.”*

# Managing COVID-19

During my six years as the Executive Director of The Clare, my focus has always been on taking one step at a time, remaining focused on challenging the status quo and moving The Clare forward. This has meant solving the day-to-day issues that arise, creating opportunities for our workforce and delivering a level of service to our residents that is unmatched. Back in February, The Clare had a fantastic month of operations. We recorded several sales and move-ins, occupancy was at all-time high levels and all of our staff positions were filled. I anticipated that 2020 would be another extremely successful year for The Clare.

Then COVID-19 happened.

When I step back and think about what I look for when I hire directors, managers or employees, I assess their character and potential based on one question in particular: If they fell into the deep end of the pool, could they survive? To me, that means if everything they know falls apart, are they able to quickly adjust? Can they be creative? Can they think outside of their current job and do somebody else's? How resilient are they? Now, in this scenario that I play out during an interview, I am mostly thinking about day-to-day operational challenges, not a pandemic. But the reason The Clare has managed COVID-19 successfully is that our team was unknowingly built for it.

As of this letter, The Clare has dealt with 16 positive employee cases of COVID-19, and four positive resident cases. We have not had any deaths associated with the virus, and 90% of the positive cases were asymptomatic and identified during mass testing. I am not willing to “celebrate” our overall good record, as we have learned COVID-19 is seemingly lurking around every corner and constant vigilance is required. For transparency, I think it is important to share what I think were critical decisions we have made, some that in hindsight were right and others we might have carried out differently.

### Service Adjustments

On March 9, Illinois issued a state of emergency related to the spread of COVID-19. By March 13, the state issued another warning that congregate settings were considered very risky for the spread of the virus. Within a few hours of that release, **Francesco Tardio**, Director of Dining Services and **Hagop Hagopian**, Executive Chef already had a plan in place to shift dining operations to delivery and pick-up only.

*“The reason The Clare has managed COVID-19 successfully is that our team was unknowingly built for it.”*

Around the same time, our Director/Management team met every morning in The Grafton. This functioned as our COVID-19 task force to quickly adjust to feedback and new information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Within a few days, we halted all community programs and restricted visitor access.

### Staffing

We always felt that if the virus was going to get into The Clare, it would come from our employees. The biggest threat we faced was that many of our employees work in other retirement communities and health care centers. We therefore made a decision early on that if an employee worked at another community, we would not allow them to also work here.

Additionally, we documented employee spouses who worked at other communities, tracking cases in these facilities. If an outbreak was reported at a community in which one of our employee spouses work, we required our employee to quarantine for 14 days. Likewise, if an employee, spouse or someone else in the household experienced any symptom, however minor, we had them quarantine for 14 days, as well.

Throughout March and April, we had close to 100 employees stay home for a variety of different reasons. Safety was our greatest priority, and we made the crucial decision to take absolutely zero risks with our staff. If we were even the slightest bit concerned about an employee's health, they stayed home.

At this point, we played out worst case scenarios to determine how we could deliver essential services with the lowest number of employees. We

even purchased 100 sleeping bags, just in case we needed team members to spend the night at The Clare.

### PPE and Masks

Looking back, I realize we were never prepared for this type of situation. I have been in communities dealing with minor infectious outbreaks, but with those, we were able to isolate the resident and immediately stop the spread. While we were always ready for those type of occurrences, COVID-19 presented challenges we didn't expect. We quickly scaled our supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and found new outlets to source various items. This started by identifying our current inventory and establishing what our "burn rate" was for specific items. Masks and gowns became the hardest to source. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sent us trash bags for gowns, and we purchased rain coats, scarfs and other makeshift gear to protect us in case we ran out of PPE.

In the beginning, it wasn't perfect. We had to be very strategic with our PPE distribution while still protecting our residents and employees. Fortunately, Life Care Services (LCS) was able to do much of the heavy lifting and found reliable sources for PPE. Currently, we track PPE every day, and we now have a year's worth of supplies.

In early April, we made it a requirement for residents to wear a mask when in the building outside of their apartments, and we provided washable masks to the community. As we have learned more, that recommendation and our residents' willingness to follow that guidance has likely saved lives.

### Testing

Early in the pandemic, COVID-19 tests became gold. Everyone was looking for

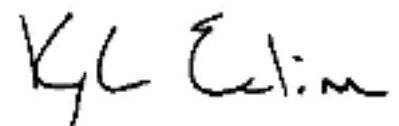
them, trying to establish connections with labs to produce timely results. We heard on the news how readily available tests were, but the reality was much different. We had employees with a symptom that could never get tested, and a few of our employees were out for nearly six weeks awaiting a test.

While testing has certainly improved and we now test every employee each week, we still face a 48-hour delay in getting results. With the incubation period of the virus, that means the test is outdated the minute you get the results. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is working on sending retirement communities instant testing, which will go a long way in our ability to reopen.

### Today

I could write for days about this virus and its overall impact on the community. Oftentimes we have felt like we are flying blind, unaware of what's to come. Our motto has been to make the best decision today, for today. We have been lucky to have the unwavering support of our residents and their families, and for that I am eternally grateful.

When you move to The Clare, you expect the very best. This is the brand The Clare has built over the last 10 years. Our world has changed, and The Clare has changed with it. You should have great confidence in knowing The Clare will consistently rise to the top. I look forward to seeing you all very soon around The Clare. ☺



## NEWS FROM YOUR COUNCILS & COMMITTEES



### Hospitality Committee

Gail Margolis | Chair

The Hospitality Committee works to provide personal mentoring of new residents and to develop activities aimed at increasing interaction of all persons within The Clare community. During the past year, we sponsored the program called "Dine with New Friends," which drew 60 participants on four occasions to share dinner with randomly chosen residents. This program will resume once there is a return to food service in our dining rooms. The Committee also facilitated informal get togethers where persons sharing similar interests came together to discuss their involvement and experiences. Interest groups that met included photography, educators, writers, artists, travel, food, psychologists and social workers.

Following the advent of the pandemic, our activities included reaching out to newcomers via Zoom, setting up a telephone tree to contact our neighbors during the lockdown and offering the services of qualified residents to respond to those who might like to touch base with a receptive ear. Going forward, we will sponsor a "Newcomers Zoom" to introduce neighbors who have joined our community in recent months.

Our committee currently consists of 9 members, all of whom welcome input as to future activities and well as suggestions for improving our mentoring efforts. We look particularly to your thoughts about activities that we might engage in during this challenging period. ☺



### Marketing and Communications Committee

Harlean Barth | Chair

The Marketing and Communications Committee members met via Zoom to discuss some of the stumbling blocks presented by COVID-19 guidelines. The collection boxes for pull tabs, Box Tops for Education, greeting cards, etc. on different floors are now on hold. We encourage residents to continue to save these items at home, but at the present time, the volunteers at the schools and Ronald McDonald House are not accepting donations.

Otherwise, we are excited by the many new programs that Director of Sales and Marketing **Lynne Lukas** and her team have devised to present our wonderful living experiences here at The Clare through videos with our residents. For example, Betsy Kennedy, sitting in her living room, tells the viewer all the reasons for our friends to move to The Clare.

Remember, your feedback is always important and listened to! ☺



### Life Enrichment Committee

Becky Davidson | Chair

The Life Enrichment Committee has big plans for the year ahead. We have returned to nightly movies on Channel 1902, and a new Great Courses program on the Founding Fathers includes a lecture and discussion every Monday afternoon. Fitness classes led by Fitness Manager **Emily Buxton** continue on Channel 1901, and very limited in-person activities have restarted in the community.

Additionally, an early August Goodwill donation drive proved beneficial for many residents, as they used the lockdown to clean out closets and gather items to give away. **Lori Griffin**, Director of Resident Experience, will keep arranging musical performance, art presentations and other lectures via Zoom. ☺



### Resident Advisory Council

John Clum | RAC President

I am honored to serve as President of the Resident Advisory Council with members **Harlean Barth, Suzanne Chapple, Linda Chinn, Becky Davidson, Gail Margolis, Ken Mullin, Dorothy Pirovano, and Mark Schwartz**. Our goal is to be a transparent, responsive organization, representing the needs and concerns of the entire Clare community to the Executive Director. Please feel free to get in touch with any of us regarding your questions and concerns.

There is an open meeting of the Resident Advisory Council at 3pm on the first Tuesday of the month. For now, thanks to COVID, the meetings have moved from the Oxford Room to Zoom. At the meetings, the chairs of the various RAC committees give brief reports, followed by news from Executive Director Kyle Exline and Administrator Monica Rusboldt. There is opportunity for questions from residents as well as RAC members.

Additionally, the RAC had a closed meeting with Kyle on July 16. He gave us an update on The Clare policies regarding COVID. After Kyle's presentation, the group discussed possible changes in the election process to make it more transparent as well as a more orderly process of electing officers and committee chairs. ☺

# A Shift to Virtual Programming at The Clare

Social distancing recommendations have eliminated the possibility of in-person programming at senior living communities amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Since social and learning opportunities are a major component of The Clare lifestyle, the community had to get creative with its enrichment offerings for residents.

That's where Zoom meetings and live streaming came into play.

"Clare residents have responded very well to virtual programming," says **Lori Griffin**, Director of Resident Experience at The Clare. "They adapted quickly and learned the logistics of Zoom technology."

While the senior care industry is often depicted as lagging in embracing technology for residents, The Clare prides itself on taking initiative when it comes to tech solutions. Given the current circumstances that require residents to stay in their apartments, this focus has been crucial in the adoption of and adaptation to the world of virtual programming.

"Whoever said you can't teach an old dog new tricks has not met the residents of The Clare," resident **Sheila Rock** says. "At the tender age of 80+, I am 'Zooming' with my brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren, friends near and far. It is not perfect, but this technology is giving us the ability to keep in touch."

Instead of typical group cardio and yoga classes, Fitness Manager **Emily Buxton** began leading live workouts for residents streamed daily via The Clare's in-house TV channel. Rather than gathering residents for cooking demos, Executive Chef **Hagop Hagopian** brought them into The Clare's kitchen via Zoom, demonstrating the steps to make simple dishes such as shakshuka. Virtual wine tastings, virtual book clubs and virtual coffee hours have also been



added to the calendar for resident interaction and entertainment.

"It is important to stay engaged mentally and socially during this time of uncertainty and mandated social distancing," Lori says. "Engaging in activities and learning that you find interesting gives some sense of normalcy and happiness. Connecting with friends and family via virtual options or other means helps provide security and comfort, as well."

In addition to classes, programs and events routinely put on by employees, The Clare is also known for bringing in talent and experts from the likes of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the University of Chicago and more. Naturally, outside programs brought to The Clare have been canceled. Still, Lori knows they are important for

residents, so she searched for ways to bring Clare favorites to them through the internet.

On Wednesday, April 29, the Chen Quartet, featuring CSO Concertmaster Robert Chen and his family, exclusively performed for Clare residents via Zoom, bringing them live music they have so dearly missed. Earlier in April, the Field Museum partnered with The Clare to present on their collections, and film critic Zbigniew Banas hosted an interactive movie discussion about *Jojo Rabbit*. Looking ahead, virtual programs throughout the month of May include a presentation on South America, a tutorial on iPhone settings and a salon concert and conversation about women in classical music.

"These days, the recurring theme is, 'I can't believe that two months ago, I didn't know what Zoom was,'" resident **Carolyn Rusnak** says. "Now, we 'Zoom' through everything. Within the context of the new normal, it's always a good day."

Residents have even started creating their own Zoom meetings to connect with one another socially.

"Zoom is an excellent opportunity to see many Clare friends, at various management meetings or in smaller group gatherings," resident **Barb Arsenault** says. "I'm in a group that 'Zooms' regularly, and being able to socialize and keep those connections with each other means a lot."

And for residents who aren't as tech savvy, a variety of programs and classes are being streamed directly to resident televisions via The Clare's in-house channel.

"This time of virtual programming has reminded me that Clare residents are up for any challenge," Lori says. "I am inspired to continue to try new methods of programming even once we resume our usual operations." 🍷

# The Clare Residents Thank Employees for COVID-19 Efforts

Employees of The Clare often say the best part of working for the community is the residents. This sentiment has never been more true than throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, which has affected the senior population at alarming rates.

As COVID-19 descended upon the United States, The Clare implemented a number of changes to prevent the negative effects of the virus seen in so many retirement communities across the country. New restrictions were unveiled seemingly every day to keep residents out of harm's way, prompting employees to react quickly and adjust to tasks outside of their job descriptions. The Clare drivers sorted and delivered mail directly to resident apartments. The dining team pivoted to all-delivery service, housekeeping took to religiously cleaning common areas and high-touch points, and fitness classes and programming went virtual.

All the while, employees have also had to grapple with the reality of the pandemic in their own lives. They feared contracting COVID-19 on their commute to and from work, spreading it within The Clare and bringing it home to their families.

Yet their commitment to the community was unwavering. Employees showed up to work each and every day, contributing to The Clare's overall success in the fight against COVID-19.

"In March, when the COVID-19 situation really started to develop and changes were happening quickly, it really allowed for The Clare to show who it is," Executive Director **Kyle Exline** says. "Our employees had to step up as they were dealing with not only an incredibly difficult situation at work, but also at home."



*Bartender Jackie Milano and resident David Andersen*

And in typical fashion, The Clare residents were quick to step up and acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of employees.

The Clare Charitable Foundation, a resident-run organization with the mission of supporting, recognizing and rewarding Clare employees, launched a one-time fundraising drive. And The Clare agreed to match every dollar the Foundation raised to financially reward employees.

"When the quarantine began, residents recognized the additional stress and hardships the employees faced and were impressed by how quickly the staff responded to the 'new normal,'" says resident **David Andersen**, president of The Clare Charitable Foundation. "There was universal appreciation and gratitude for everything the employees were doing, and we wanted to make sure that they understood what their efforts meant to us."

Over the course of two weeks, The Clare Charitable Foundation collected \$108,000 from residents. With The

Clare match doubling this amount, employees were set to receive a substantial bonus based on hours worked from March 1 to May 31.

The Clare Charitable Foundation distributed checks to employees the last week of June, and employees were beyond appreciative for the unprecedented gesture.

"Resident generosity goes well beyond a donation to The Clare Charitable Foundation," Kyle says. "Daily thank you's and positive energy that residents provide this community are what bring our employees back day in and day out."

For residents, stepping up in this way was simply a no-brainer.

"The Clare is a community like no other," David says. "The employees work extremely hard every day to care for the residents and ensure our safety. The residents, in turn, truly care about the employees and want to treat them like family. We just hope we never have to go through anything like this again!" ☺

# A New Normal: A Day in the Life at The Clare During COVID

When Clare resident **Renee Zellner** moved to The Clare from Cleveland about three years ago, she swiftly took advantage of new friendships, various concerts and lectures, and exploring her new neighborhood in the Gold Coast.

In recent months, however, the life she carved out for herself doesn't look quite the same as it once did. In early March, when COVID-19 took a foothold in the United States and prompted The Clare to implement a number of safety restrictions, Renee and her fellow Clare residents had to adjust to a new normal.

*“There is never any need to expose oneself to the virus with the programs in place at The Clare.”*

“Things changed quite drastically when COVID entered our world,” Renee says. “From the beginning of the lockdown, I have felt safe and well cared for. And the employees sprang to action and quickly created ways to keep us busy and engaged.”

In fact, Renee manages to keep her schedule jam-packed with activities. Between book clubs, wine tastings, coffee hours, cooking demonstrations, and live concerts via Zoom, she hasn't

lacked in terms of social connection, mental stimulation and cultural enrichment. The Clare's in-house television stations stream exercise classes throughout the day, and movies are shown each evening for nightly entertainment.

For Renee, all of this is in addition to taking an online class through Northwestern University's Osher Lifelong Learn Institute (OLLI) and regular video chats with her immediate family. She also participated in recording an interfaith service that was televised to residents on The Clare's in-house channel.

Because of technologies like Zoom and FaceTime, Renee has even had the opportunity to join 15 of her family members for a Passover Seder and several birthday celebrations, all without ever leaving the comfort and safety of her apartment at The Clare.

What's more, Renee and her fellow Clare residents have access to three meals a day delivered directly to their apartments. The extensive and varied menus change entirely each week, and they always come with daily specials and two homemade soups available every day.

“There is never any need to expose oneself to the virus with the programs in place at The Clare,” she says.

As the city of Chicago has gradually reopened, The Clare has slowly eased some restrictions, as well, providing residents with more freedom to come and go from the building for family visits, small group meetings and outdoor walks. But Renee feels no need to rush from her apartment, as she is content, safe and cared for within her new normal.



Renee Zellner

“The Clare administration made careful, well thought out decisions with the best interest of the residents in mind every step of the way,” she says. “The result is that at this time in August, not one person in Independent Living has been diagnosed with COVID.”

Overall, there's no questioning the difficulties associated with the lockdown, especially for seniors. But the positives The Clare has provided for its residents through it all are monumental.

“I feel so fortunate that I have been living at The Clare during this challenging time,” Renee says. “I don't feel as isolated as I would if I were living on my own. And my children and grandchildren are happy to know that I am content and stimulated every day.” ☺

# From Dine-In to Delivery: A Change in Dining Operations at The Clare

*Through these changes and more, the goal has always been to maintain The Clare standard on each day's menu.*

In the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, The Clare has incorporated countless operational changes throughout the community to promote safety and reduce the spread of the virus. However, no change has been as drastic as that which took place within The Clare dining program.

Bars and restaurants in Illinois have now been closed to dine-in customers for over two months, and the dining venues at The Clare are no different. Given how quickly the situation unfolded and closures occurred, The Clare dining team pivoted seemingly overnight to all-delivery service in order to keep residents fed and happy.

This required major shifts to inventories, scheduling and more with

little to no preparation or training for employees.

“From ordering to producing, from packaging to delivering, we had to drastically change our operations,” says **Francesco Tardio**, Director of Dining Services at The Clare. “Getting the whole team involved and communicating the changes was crucial.”

With the main dining room no longer in use, it quickly became a storage space for extra supplies, specifically to-go containers. Another area of the dining room converted into an assembly line for deliveries to keep production in the kitchen as normal as possible. The Hostess Stand became a call/customer service center where



*Server Sandy Neal delivers lunch to Clare resident Joanne Celewycz.*



*Cook Arturo Huizer adds finishing touches to desserts ahead of dinner service at The Clare.*



employees took orders and answered questions. And with the bar closed, The Clare Bartender Jackie Milano took her services on wheels, delivering glasses of wine and specialty drinks to residents at their doors.

On average, The Clare now completes between 350 and 370 meal deliveries on a daily basis. Breakfast and dinner tend to be the busiest, averaging about 150 deliveries each.

“The fact that the kitchen produces meals three times daily and delivers each and every order to those living at The Clare is nothing short of phenomenal,” Clare resident **Marilyn Day** says.

Through these changes and more, the goal has always been to maintain The Clare standard on each day’s menu. Options have included filet mignon, rack of lamb, duck breast, Ora King salmon, and swordfish, among others.

“Offering the same quality menus that we had in our dining rooms has been a priority for us, as it allows for some normalcy in our residents’ lives during such trying times,” Francesco says. “It is also uplifting for our team to know that we are not compromising our service standards because of the challenges we encounter. We are The Clare, and pushing limits is what we do.”

And since holidays at The Clare are always culinary events, it has been important to maintain celebratory food offerings, as well.

“I am especially grateful for the unexpected preparation of special meals for holiday celebrations,” Clare residents **Renee Zellner** says. “Without being asked, the Dining Services team surprised us with traditional foods for Passover and Easter, among other holidays.”

Of course, Clare residents have had to adapt to a new normal, as well. Dining at The Clare is as much of a social event as it is a culinary one, and residents enjoy the freedom of exploring Chicago’s dining scene, too. Relying so heavily on in-house



*Executive Chef Hagop Hagopian prepares salmon filets for dinner service at The Clare.*

delivery is certainly an adjustment, but it’s one that residents understand is necessary, and they are undoubtedly appreciative.

“We have experienced an outpouring of gratitude and an incredible display of patience from residents as we work through these changes,” Francesco says. “Their feedback is what keeps us motivated to continue to do more and do better.”

Overall, there’s no question that the current restrictions presented unique challenges to The Clare dining

program, and everyone is looking forward to some sense of normalcy in the coming months. But all those involved have demonstrated resilience and high spirits every step of the way.

“The culture of being open to change and looking for ways to always improve existed before this situation, and it has served us well.” Francesco says. “If anything, the lesson we will hold onto is to be grateful for the resources we have and our team’s commitment to keep going no matter the challenges.” ☺



*Dining Director Francesco Tardio organizes lunch orders for delivery to residents.*

AROUND  
THE CLARE



With the bar closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, The Clare Bartender Jackie Milano took her services on wheels, delivering wine, quarantinis and other specialty drinks directly to residents at their doors. Jackie livened up the experience even further with clever sayings adorning the bar car and decorations for holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Memorial Day.



"It's just wonderful," resident **Betsy Kennedy** says. "You have to experience it to understand just how everyone has gone out of their way to keep us happy." 😊





*I*n the midst of the lockdown, resident **Virginia Wolff** wanted to find a way to brighten up the atmosphere at The Clare. She learned of a florist in New York City who began doing huge arrangements of flowers on street corners, all in an effort to provide a moment of joy during quarantine. Given that she is a retired event florist, Virginia wanted to recreate the sentiment at The Clare with elaborate floral arrangements in the Lobby. "The response was terrific – it was just what I'd hoped," Virginia says. "What a unique opportunity I have to be able to do that for The Clare. We need that right now in these trying times." ☺





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