

Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative

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Michelson Found Animals



Operator Case Study

The Company: J.C. Hart

Overview: Expanding pet inclusivity and adoption awareness through increased commitment and volunteerism.

In Indiana, love and appreciation of pets are abundantly apparent; the state ranks fifth nationwide for pet ownership in 2022 according to World Population Review, consistently ranks in the top ten of pet-friendly states, offers numerous animal protection laws, more pet-friendly retail, and higher availability of pet-inclusive multifamily housing.

Indiana also has the employees of the J.C. Hart Company, which recently earned an award for most successful pet-adoption event at the inaugural Michelson Found Animals 2022 AIM Pet Awards. Most J.C. Hart properties currently have no breed and weight restrictions, and the company has a measured approach to becoming completely pet-inclusive.

Expand inclusivity and expand adoption awareness

It was this pet-positive environment that encouraged one of J.C. Hart's residents, Erica Thompson, to apply for a property manager position. Now the director of marketing Thompson understands that restrictions on pets may also restrict growth and possibilities.

"We realized that at some of our properties, pet restrictions were limiting our residents' quality of living," Thompson explained. "We wanted to make sure that we were able to open that up and give residents as many options as we could."

In addition to the expansion of inclusivity, J.C. Hart employees were keenly aware of another issue that every state deals with — pets that need homes. It's an issue that constantly warrants attention, and J.C. Hart's teams are passionate about having a positive impact.

Restriction reduction and increased commitment to adoption and volunteering

J.C. Hart has taken a gradual and strategic approach to its shift in pet policies, evaluating guidelines by each property. Location, density, and greenspace are all considerations when evaluating pet policy changes.

"As we build new developments, we have made sure pet policies are more inclusive, eliminating size restrictions and severely limiting or eliminating breed restrictions," Thompson said. "When you're opening a new property and establishing policies from the start, it's much simpler. Existing properties can be a bit more challenging."

To help address that challenge, J.C. Hart relies upon its onsite teams to effectively manage change, being mindful of resident concerns and welcoming feedback. Thompson said that effective communication is the driver of success. "We make sure everyone, both pet owners and non-owners, feels heard and understood with empathy and sensitivity."

A top concern voiced by residents is the possibility of increased pet waste once restrictions are lifted, so J.C. Hart instituted a three-pronged approach to address the issue. In addition to DNA testing and fines, J.C. Hart's onsite associates distribute rewards for resident reporting and responsible pet ownership. "Our teams have taken it upon themselves to reward residents," Thompson explained. "If they see a resident picking up after their pets, they receive a \$5 gift card to a local business as a thank you for being considerate of their neighbors."

The most pride for employees, however, comes from J.C. Hart's commitment to matching pets with loving homes. Thompson, along with Director of Communications Jane Gosling and other employees, began to work with the Humane Society for Hamilton County (Ind.) Their efforts have led the company to become a strong advocate for pet adoption through events and education.

"We are really, really proud of our involvement with the Hamilton Humane Society," Thompson said. "We're corporate sponsors with an annual donation of around \$5,000. We also have a volunteer team, who go out and do projects that are open to the whole company."

J.C. Hart also holds events that benefit their communities' own furry residents and bring in additional contributions to the humane society. "We just finished a free microchipping event at one of our properties," Thompson continued. "It was open to all of our residents across all of our properties. Extra microchips were given to the humane society as a donation."

A positive response from residents and community growth

J.C. Hart is one of a growing number of rental housing operators experiencing a wealth of benefits as they reduce pet restrictions, with very little downside to the changes. The company continues to expand its pet amenities and events, providing a dog wash, a dog park, or both at its properties.

"I would say really where we shine is our nonprofit involvement and our events," Thompson said. "We involve local pet stores and support those businesses as much as possible. We partnered with Hollywood Feed [a natural and holistic pet food store] for a gift basket giveaway for one of our residents. The Humane Society for Hamilton County organized a social media contest for their Pit Bull Awareness Campaign. Our residents were able to submit pictures of their dogs and cats, even if they weren't pit bulls, which they love to do." The winner of the contest was a pit-mix emotional support dog, which helped to reinforce that a dog's breed has very little to do with its behavior.

"You're bringing people together with similar interests," Thompson continued. "There's this temptation for people to be reclusive in an apartment environment. But because people are so passionate about their pets, it's a great incentive for them to get out and meet their neighbors."

J.C. Hart plans to continue expanding pet inclusiveness and increasing its volunteer work to include residents. These efforts and the company's continued advocacy will help J.C. Hart remain one of the apartment industry's most pet-inclusive operators.