

## A Steady Climb Up the Ladder

PETER LEWIS'S INTRODUCTION to property management began in high school, when he and a friend worked at the friend's father's 60-pad mobile home park in Middletown, R.I. He did everything from maintenance to landscaping to carpentry and even sales before going off to college, where he majored in forest resource management.

Unfortunately, he graduated in the midst of the recession of 1985, and even though he did seasonal work for the Forest Service in Oregon fighting forest fires, he just couldn't get a full-time job.

He decided to return to property management and began with Ferland Management. "I trained with them and got promoted pretty quickly to property manager," he said. He moved to Boston in 1988 and spent about eight years working for Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly. He advanced "from recertifications to assistant manager to manager before becoming a regional manager overseeing five of their properties," he said.

Lewis then went to work for Peabody Properties in 1995. He left in 2001 and joined Rhode Island Housing's asset management division, overseeing about 22,000 units. He was there until December 2004.

After a brief stint in condominium management, Lewis went back to affordable housing at Cornerstone Corporation in Westwood, Mass. He was there until October 2006.

### A CHANCE TO GO GREEN

The Schochet Companies "came looking for me," Lewis said. "I didn't even have my resume out on the street." He

joined Schochet in 2006 when it managed about 3,000 units. It now has 4,500 units of housing, most of it affordable, as well as roughly 300,000 sq. ft. of commercial space.

Schochet is celebrating its 40th anniversary, and Lewis is very proud of the reputation and quality of management the company does. He directly supervises five senior managers, the director of compliance and the director of resident services, and through all of them, the property managers and related staff.

The Schochet Companies were recently awarded Accredited Management Organization (AMO) of the Year by Boston Metropolitan Chapter #4 of the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM).

What Lewis finds stimulating right now is "making sure our properties are sustainable," Lewis said. The company started its sustainability program around 2008, "and it's been a driving force for us ever since then."

The Schochet Companies recently received full SPI-HUD Accreditation for their efforts in sustainability throughout their portfolio. SPI-HUD Green Organizational Accreditation is part of the Affordable Green Initiative launched by HUD in 2012. The Sustainable Performance Institute (SPI) recognizes those HUD grantees and affordable housing organizations that achieve portfolio-wide improvements.

The vision of this initiative is to enable organizations to institutionalize sustainability and achieve higher levels of performance of the manage-



ment of their housing portfolios. Accreditation distinguishes organizations that implement green building and operational best practices, build capacity of staff, track and measure building performance effectively over time, realize significant

improvements in health and energy efficiency, and achieve exemplary cost savings.

Only 24 organizations from across the U.S. were accredited through the pilot. Of those, 17 (including Schochet) achieved full accreditation, meaning they have already implemented most or all of the best practices contained in the accreditation criteria and can document their actions accordingly. "Many of our properties are older, so it's not easy to get LEED certified," Lewis noted. "Still, every capital improvement we make includes anything we can do to get the best bang for the buck and do what's best for the environment."

### VALUING THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY

Among the things Lewis appreciates about working in the affordable housing industry is that "no two days that are the same."

"You have to be able to roll with the punches and be adaptable in this fast-paced, ever-changing environment."

Lewis said he values his memberships in NEAHMA and NAHMA because it's a chance for "everybody to share what's happening with HUD and the industry. It's important to know you're not alone. Sometimes you think you are, but you're not." **NN**