

Renters by Choice: Madison Providence, Collegeville, Pa.

In this issue, **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** showcases Madison Providence, a new, upscale apartment community in the Philadelphia suburbs. Residents of Madison Providence are renters by choice – they could easily afford to be homeowners – and renters *with* choice, who can choose between two outstanding broadband amenities. Thanks to Dean Holmes of Madison Apartment Group, Todd Stevenson of Telnet Consulting and Michael Slovin of XFINITY Communities for gathering the information for this profile.

By Masha Zager / *Broadband Communities*

Madison Apartment Group, headquartered in Philadelphia, owns and operates 14,000 apartment units in 13 eastern and midwestern states. Though its core business is acquiring and rehabbing existing communities, it develops new communities as well. Experience with this large portfolio has given the company “a good perspective on what people want,” says Dean Holmes, its chief operating officer – and one thing Madison renters want is broadband. “The quality of Internet and cable is viewed as an extension of the amenities that we provide,” Holmes explains.

In its newest property under development, Madison Providence, broadband is especially important. Located in Collegeville, about 25 miles northwest of Philadelphia, the new community is close to several Fortune 500 offices, and the developer hoped to attract employees of those companies as well as Philadelphia commuters. The target renter is a high-income former homeowner who is downsizing and choosing to rent rather than buy. “These residents are renters by choice – they’re not expecting to calibrate down their

expectations for where they live, for the quality of finishes, for the amenities, for anything,” says Holmes.

He continues, “In this rental market and this property, [residents’] expectation is that they’ll have access to high-quality broadband. It’s a nonstarter if it’s not there – it makes the difference between people renting at the property or not. So we market the technology. We make known that it’s available; we’re proactive in making it part of the routine sales process. We show people the fitness center, the clubhouse, the package management system, the dog wash station and the broadband amenities.”

At Madison Providence, the developer actually installed not one but two high-quality networks: a Comcast





XFINITY node-plus-zero network and a Verizon Fios fiber-to-the-unit network. Both offer fast broadband speeds and first-class entertainment options. Pursuant to an exclusive marketing arrangement later extended to cover 25 of Madison's communities, the leasing office promotes the XFINITY service, and XFINITY Communities assigns a dedicated community account representative (CAR) to handle all XFINITY technical support or sales questions for the community.

Holmes explains, "There's a seamless handoff to the dedicated representative. When we're bragging about the services being available, we're not just turning customers loose; we're handing them to someone who can take them through the subscription process." Installing

and marketing great broadband has paid off. Madison Providence is leasing up quickly at a high rental rate and attracting exactly the residents that the developer hoped to attract.

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: Madison

Providence is a 240-unit garden community in Collegeville, Pa., about 25 miles northwest of

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

~ Madison Providence, Collegeville, Pa. ~

- Greenfield community outside Philadelphia serving upscale demographic
- Two world-class broadband services available to residents: XFINITY and Fios, based on node-plus-zero and fiber-to-the-unit infrastructures respectively
- Dedicated account representative assigned to the community by XFINITY Communities

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH

Philadelphia. Construction began in the summer of 2014, and the first units were delivered in March 2015. Amenities include a business center, a clubhouse, a pool, a community garden, a dog park, an outdoor fire pit and an electric car charging station. Apartments feature spacious

floor plans with 9-foot ceilings, oversize windows and high-end finishes.

Demographics: The community has a mixed demographic of millennials and empty nesters, with an average age of about 40. Collegeville is the home of Ursinus College and

is close to R&D facilities of Dow, Pfizer and Glaxo Smith Klein; the community attracts employees of these organizations as well as Philadelphia commuters.

Greenfield or retrofit? Greenfield

Number of units: 240

Style: Garden

Date services started being delivered:
March 2015

THE GOAL: UBIQUITOUS GIGABIT SERVICE

In November 2015, Madison Apartment Group signed a 10-year agreement to use XFINITY's Advanced Communities Network (ACN) in 25 of its properties, giving more than 6,000 residents in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Memphis, Lenexa, Harrisburg and elsewhere access to ultrafast Internet and Wi-Fi, digital phone service and next-generation video capabilities.

Later the same month, Comcast said XFINITY Communities was serving, in total, more than 1 million multifamily housing residents across 37 states – a major milestone for an initiative launched only in 2014.

The ACN provides fiber-to-the-building or fiber-to-the-unit solutions that can be scaled to gigabit speeds with customized packages or DOCSIS-based deployments. One reason property owners that have multistate portfolios, such as Madison Apartment Groups, are showing interest in the ACN is that, within a few years, it will enable them to standardize services throughout their communities. As Michael Slovin, vice president, XFINITY Communities, explains, "Gigabit speeds will be available to everyone across the Comcast footprint. Our competitors are deploying selectively, but for our customers, gigabit will be ubiquitous across our footprint. Property owners are really excited that there will be consistency of service in all the homes and even in Wi-Fi hotspots outside homes. We made a conscious decision that our value proposition would be ubiquitous gigabit services, and that's a huge advantage for us."

Slovin is equally bullish about XFINITY Communities' two other pillars, the XFINITY X1 entertainment platform and concierge customer service. X1 is a cloud-based service that gives residents access to video on demand on multiple TVs, smartphones and tablets both inside their homes and when they are traveling. Live streaming, cloud DVR and voice-activated remote control are also available.

Communities served by XFINITY Communities can be assigned a dedicated community account representative – a concierge service for property management that helps coordinate installations, troubleshoot disruptions, process service changes and assist with moving and property transfers. In addition, residents have access to normal online and in-person service, which Comcast has been working hard to improve. For example, a new feature being rolled out in some markets is a "tech tracker" that keeps customers posted about the likely arrival time of a technician.

"People today choose apartments based on how well the technology services match their increasingly connected lifestyles, so being able to mirror the same services they would receive if they owned their own home is a critical competitive differentiator for us," said Dean Holmes, chief operating officer for Madison Apartment Group. "We are constantly acquiring new properties, and Comcast's vast network means it can accommodate us virtually anywhere we go, both today and well into the future."

SERVICES

Services offered: High-speed Internet access, video and telephone. XFINITY Internet currently has a top speed of 250 Mbps down/25 Mbps up. Comcast announced it is trialing gigabit services in the area, and residents will be able to take advantage of those speeds when launched.

Provider choice: Residents can choose between XFINITY services and Verizon Fios services. (Fios has a top speed of 300 Mbps symmetrical with the equipment preinstalled in each apartment.) The two services operate on separate networks. Says Holmes, "The coordination and communication between the service providers and our technical and construction teams have been excellent. Both service providers were involved in planning, and there was a lot of interaction between their technical folks and the construction people here."

Technical support: The service providers are the primary points of contact. Comcast's CAR is available to help all customers at Madison Providence with technical issues relating to XFINITY services.

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network are owned by the service provider, and which parts are owned by the property owner? Distribution (node) and the splitters and connectors in the communications rooms are owned by Comcast. The wiring inside the units (cable home wiring) belongs to the owner.



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PROPERTY OF THE MONTH

Is there a marketing agreement? Yes,

Comcast has a marketing agreement with the owner for voice, video and Internet services.

How do the service provider and owner work together to market the services?

The CAR at Madison Providence provides collateral to the leasing office, conducts events and acts as the point of contact for the community staff. The rep has been actively involved in establishing communication with residents from the point of their initial decision to lease right through to the activation of service.

What are the benefits to the owner?

The lease-up pace at Madison Providence has greatly exceeded our expectations. The community offers large, well-appointed apartments with beautiful finishes, along with a state-of-the-art amenity package. As developers and operators, we view

the slate of broadband offerings as an extension of our amenity package. Madison Providence attracts a largely renter-by-choice clientele. The value proposition at Madison Providence includes not just a beautiful apartment but also the expectation of access to excellent amenities and services. The XFINITY broadband package helps fulfill that expectation, and our residents have been highly complimentary.

TECHNOLOGY

The XFINITY network is hybrid fiber-coax, with a node-plus-zero architecture. Two outdoor nodes, each with a dedicated power supply, feed the property, and there are no additional amplifiers between the node and the customer premises. RG-6 coax is run through conduit placed between the buildings and through horizontal and vertical risers within the buildings. The handoff to the in-home wiring is in

each unit's garage or utility space. All modems are Wi-Fi capable.

The Fios infrastructure is fiber to the unit with a GPON architecture. A 432-port fiber distribution hub serves the property, and fiber is run through microduct to each unit. An optical network terminal is located inside each unit. Verizon provides a managed Wi-Fi service.

All incoming fiber lines are housed in the main trench around the community, which the electric and gas lines also share. Both providers installed spare conduits in the trench for possible future use. Both providers use handholes owned by the community; in addition, Verizon installed some of its own handholes.

LESSONS LEARNED

What should other owners consider before they get started on a similar deployment?

Dean Holmes: Get your broadband partner engaged in the process as early as possible. Planning and architectural work are performed many months in advance of construction. When we can engage the broadband provider early is when we have the best success. Because their wiring is embedded throughout property, they're the folks we turn to on a consultancy basis to best position the infrastructure they're going to install.

What feedback does the leasing office get from residents?

Dean Holmes: We've got a pretty robust survey process after move-in, and this demographic tends to be vocal. We started the first move-ins in April, so people have been living here quite a while, and they have nothing but good things to say about dealing with Comcast and about the quality of offerings we provide. We're quick to tell them the broadband offering is state-of-the-art and better than anything else they'll find in this market. ❖

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