



**From left, Nonprofit Association of the Midlands' Hannah Young, policy and events manager, and Rosey Higgs, program manager.**  
*(File photo)*

## In the thick of COVID-19, Midlands organizations persist and evolve

**by Michelle Leach**

*Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles sharing first-hand experiences from local organizations on how their respective industries are adapting to COVID-19.*

Before and since the coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a national emergency on March 13, Midlands organizations have been adapting and persisting despite seemingly constant change and uncertainty.

In a March 17 message, 18-year industry veteran agent, Jenn Bennett, communicated that Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Ambassador Real Estate was "still open for business" and assured "the real estate market remains stable and consistent."

"Most people are looking for some positive information," Bennett said. "This is not 'doomsday.'"

She referenced a corporate-  
**Continued on page 22.**

# In the thick of COVID-19, Midlands organizations persist and evolve

## Continued from page 1.

wide message last week that noted: "I'm expecting us to sell 1,110-1,200 new pending transactions this month, which is less than I would have expected prior to this, but still a very strong month."

"A normal March for our company would be 1,300 to 1,400," Bennett said, adding that last spring was slower, too, due to flooding. "The economy was so good going into this epidemic — stock market strong, low interest rates, low inventories — expectations were very high for a strong spring and summer market ... these factors are contributing to the fact that the market remains steady."

Most clients are moving forward with plans. The few that aren't are putting things on hold for a bit; for example, Bennett's young dentist client is looking to buy his first home, but dentists are limited to emergency and necessary procedures now.

"Since my client is paid by procedure, his income is down a bit," she said. "So, he is going to wait until he can work at or closer to full capacity to pick back up with his new home search again."

All that said, Bennett emphasized precautions.

"We ask that the client limit the amount of people attending the showings to the main decision-makers, please leave children and parents at home, and we're asking no one attend who has any symptoms or has traveled recently," she said. "We are sanitizing all doorknobs, light switches and surfaces before and after all showings."

Social distancing is practiced, with well below the 10 attendees recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Additionally, Bennett is creating virtual tours for all listings, and virtual showings of new construction models or existing homes when people aren't comfortable visiting in person.

Seller tips are akin to the aforementioned precautions, while buyers are encouraged to bring hand sanitizer, wear booties, and refrain from touching surfaces.

"Of course, we are asking anyone who is experiencing any symptoms, or who has traveled out-of-state recently, to please stay home,"

Bennett said.

First National Technology Solutions has seen an increase in companies seeking support to enable a remote workforce.

"Many companies already have the ability for employees to work remotely on a limited basis but, with the current situation, further adjustments and enhancements are needed to enable an entire workforce to work remotely," said FNTS President Kim Whittaker. "Fortunately, through cloud technology, there are several tools available that enable collaboration and access for remote employees."

Companies began reaching out more in early March, and FNTS leveraged its Microsoft Gold Partner status to assist with the deployment of Office 365.

"We have seen an increase in the use of collaboration tools within Office 365, such as Microsoft Teams, which offers a secure avenue for employees to collaborate," she said.

Generally, FNTS gathers organizational and employee information to develop technical solutions and provide ongoing support services post-implementation.

"Review the current setup of the organization and then engage a service provider who can ensure the remote workforce is connecting to corporate data securely," Whittaker said. "I recommend leaders spend time focusing on collaboration and employee engagement within the remote workforce. This could include daily touchpoints to stay connected with the team, providing outlets for employees to share non-business-related topics, and using video conferencing to stay connected and engage face-to-face."

The more leaders embrace this new arrangement and encourage fun in the environment, she said, the better.

"Today's remote work tools are easy to use and allow employees to function no differently than if they were in the office," Whittaker said. "In addition to technology, looking for ways to make this new way of working fun and giving employees time to engage in non-work-related conversations and activities can keep comradery and collaboration high."

The Nonprofit Association of the Midlands engaged its 650-plus Nebraska and southwest Iowa members in a March 16 "pulse poll" to

understand COVID-19's impact on nonprofits; 505 survey respondents answered questions on the likes of anticipated decreases in revenue and expenses, and ways they prepared and/or responded to the outbreak.

"We will be doing another survey in a week or two," said Public Policy and Strategic Partnership Manager Hannah Young. "A number of people had to cancel events, trainings and fundraising, and those can have serious consequences."

Reportedly, 91% of respondents canceled or postponed events; with limited resources, many rely on earned income and fundraising to sustain missions.

"A lot of people are postponing their events to the fall, and then we have the issue with everyone's events being in the fall," Young said. "We just canceled our conferences and are looking at what webinars we can put on, [they're] cheaper than in-person events anyway."

A reported 80% of respondents are transitioning to virtual fundraisers; for instance, Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School announced March 25 that its annual gala on May 8 is "going virtual" April 10 to April 13 instead. A means of creating an emergency tuition relief fund, the virtual gala supports affected students and families, and community partners — Completely Kids, Dundee Memorial Park Association Merchants Relief Fund, Food Bank for the Heartland and Youth Emergency Services.

Additionally, 65% of responding nonprofits are "revisiting work from home and sick leave policies."

Young noted not all members have the resources to support remote work, nor are they accustomed to navigating such arrangements. So, NAM developed materials around work-from-home best practices, leveraging information from heavily-impacted like associations throughout the country.

The level of "collaboration in a time of crisis," Young said, represents an upside.

"There are positive things coming out of this, nonprofits in this community are stepping up and looking at what can be done together to help lift up the community," she said. "Things are tight now, but [support] is needed now more than ever."

NAM reports 1 out of 11 Nebraskans work for the many nonprofits who serve individuals hit hardest by pandemic-related job losses.



Bennett