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Communications Rehab

IPC helps Covenant Retirement Communities improve its communications infrastructure with solutions from Mitel.

Chicago-based Covenant Retirement Communities (CRC) is among the larger not-for-profit retirement living organizations in the U.S., serving approximately 5,000 residents at 14 locations in nine states. CRC's facilities offer a full spectrum of senior living options, including independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, memory care, and rehabilitation.

The organization recently has been rehabilitating its aging communications infrastructure with help from IPC Technologies.

Years earlier, when CRC first began to transition from an analog to an IP-based phone system, the organization implemented a hybrid solution that incorporated elements of both. This has always been a popular choice for organizations making their first move toward Voice-over-IP systems because it enables them to gain new features and cost efficiencies while protecting investments in their existing copper-wire infrastructure.

While the hybrid approach was initially effective, CRC ultimately determined that quality and interoperability issues had become limiting factors. The chief issue was a lack of integration between phone systems at the organization's various campuses. Additionally, the transcoding process for converting voice signals into digital data was adding to network overhead and contributing to voice quality problems.

"We had a couple of challenges with the old technology, and we didn't really have the right solutions or the networking capacity to deploy across all our campuses," said CRC Chief Information Officer, Bill Rabe. "IPC came up with a very good solution that we've deployed across 14 of our locations thus far."

IMPROVED FLEXIBILITY

IPC is working with CRC to implement end-to-end IP communications from Mitel. The unified communications platform not

only resolves existing challenges, it opens the door to an array of business communications methods such as voice, messaging, mobility, presence, conferencing, and collaboration. It also gives CRC the ability to integrate key business applications with the communications platform.

Working closely with CRC's IT team, IPC engineers helped CRC define its technical requirements before designing, building, and launching the system on a campus-by-campus basis. The design utilizes SIP trunking to establish communications between each campus and the enterprise PBX housed in CRC's Chicago headquarters. IPC also set up route-points, powerful configuration tools that enable calls to be routed to any location within the organization.

"That gives us four-digit dialing for the campuses and enables site-to-site dialing between campuses, allowing us to communicate a little bit easier," said Rabe. "It gives more flexibility, especially during emergency situations, like natural disasters, when we need all campus calls to be rerouted to another location."

Mitel's Connect Client and Mobility Client provide additional flexibility by allowing users to access all features of the UC platform from a smartphone, laptop or other mobile devices. This gives CRC staff the ability to communicate, conference and collaborate with colleagues, customers and partners on a single device whether they're in the office, at home or on the road.

EASY DOES IT

The cumulative effect of this design is that CRC has a communications solution that is highly redundant, reliable, and flexible. Those qualities have been extremely valuable in recent years when CRC facilities were threatened by hurricanes off the East Coast and wildfires on the West Coast.

"Because everything is integrated, we were able to easily route all calls to a command center at our central office in Chicago," said Rabe. "The team from IPC helped us set that up really easily. We couldn't do that with our older system because there was no integration across campuses.

"We didn't have any damage, but you never know. It was important to have the ability to maintain communications and make sure that everyone was okay. With everything the staff had to do at those facilities to prepare for these events and make sure that our residents were safe, it was nice to be able to take a little bit of work off their plate."

Centralized management also helps the IT staff at CRC's facilities focus on supporting residents' technology needs. Rabe says many of the baby boomers in CRC's retirement communities are surprisingly tech-savvy.

"You wouldn't believe it," he said. "Some of our residents have 10 different devices — smartphones, iPads, smart TVs, computers, Alexa. We have one technology person at each location, and this Mitel solution makes it a lot easier on the infrastructure side and lets them use their time to help our residents."

Rabe said he is looking forward to working with IPC to roll out the Mitel solution to the remaining CRC locations.

"The people at IPC have been very easy to work with and I value our partnership," he said. "Those guys are professionals. They've been able to work through all our challenges and make it very easy for us."