



Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative

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Michelson Found Animals



Operator Case Study

The Company: Milhaus

Overview: Milhaus Opens Its Doors (and Its Arms) to Pets

There are moments when an organization pauses to reflect, assessing opportunities for change that may have a positive impact both internally and for those they serve.

Milhaus, an Indianapolis-based mixed-use development and property management company that oversees 5,000 apartment homes at 20 Class A properties across the U.S., saw such an opportunity in its pet policies. By re-evaluating and resetting, Milhaus realized an opportunity both to differentiate from the bulk of multifamily operators, as well as improve the lives of its residents and contribute to the surrounding communities in which it operates. As it undergoes a planned growth period over the next few years, a key goal for Milhaus is developing truly pet-inclusive communities.

While the majority of rental housing operators consider themselves to be pet-friendly — about 76%, according to the [Pet-Inclusive Housing Report](#) — the same study revealed that 72% of pet owners still struggle to find a home that will accept their pets.

Milhaus recognized this disconnect, spurring the decision to eliminate restrictions in order to meet the needs and demands of today's apartment renters.

An Antiquated Approach

David Brackett, senior vice president of property operations at Milhaus, recalls that, back in the 1990s, many multifamily communities did not allow pets at all or discouraged pet owners from renting. Milhaus followed a similar path, allowing pets on a restricted basis. As a pet-loving company, however, leadership began to realize that the industry norms were perhaps behind the times.

"Milhaus' leadership sat down in a room and talked about why the industry had these restrictions in the first place," he explains. "To a degree, they had been following the industry status quo. As a forward-thinking company, Milhaus decided to set themselves apart by offering no pet restrictions. We decided it was time to welcome pets with open arms."

In 2018, Milhaus announced its policy change, dropping breed and weight restrictions and moving its policy more in line with its philosophy and pet-positive company culture.

Going All-In on Pet Inclusivity

Making life better for its residents is not the only goal of Milhaus. The company also places an emphasis on making a positive impact in the neighborhoods where its properties are located, and that includes the animals that live there or have yet to find a home. Operating across various regions of the U.S., Milhaus extends its philanthropy to every community in its portfolio by partnering with local humane societies, which includes volunteer work and pet adoption events.

"There are many organizations out there that we support," Brackett adds. "Each city has its own pocket of charities that we work with. Milhaus as a whole is very committed to improving the quality of life of all the residents in the neighborhood, not just the ones who live in our buildings. Our leadership believes in that wholeheartedly, and our onsite teams believe in it wholeheartedly as well."

An added benefit to that approach is that humane societies and animal shelters will often recommend Milhaus properties to pet adopters, knowing that pets and their owners will find a good home at a place that eagerly welcomes them.

Milhaus keeps its pet rent in the mid-range of its competitors and conducts background checks on only the prospective resident rather than the pet, which Brackett says has worked well. While it's not a requirement, leasing teams encourage owners to bring their pets by the office so the teams can meet them. Part of this is to familiarize associates with the pets on their property, but part of it is just because Milhaus teams genuinely love meeting pets and always have treats on hand in order to welcome them to their property.

"I see videos of residents' pets in our offices on social media all the time," Brackett says. "We also do a 'pet of the month' at a lot of our properties which include a complimentary Bark [or Meow] Box. Our teams and residents have a lot of fun with it. Going to work and having fun is a great thing, so the more we can allow them to do that, the better off we are as a company. Pets just bring people together."

Among the pet-inclusive amenities that Milhaus provides are onsite or centrally located dog parks, as well as pet washing stations, which Brackett says have tremendous appeal for prospects. The high demand for this perk prompted Milhaus to include the stations in all current development projects as well as future ones. In keeping with their value of supporting the surrounding neighborhood, Milhaus communities also partner with local retail stores for pet training sessions and other pet-related events for residents.

Important to note is that some of the concerns commonly associated with lifting pet restrictions and increasing the number of pets on site have not materialized for Milhaus. The company uses pet rules suggested by the National Apartment Association in its animal addendum for leasing contracts, which lays out requirements for pet owners and procedures for violations and complaints.

These policies include keeping pets on leashes while walking through the community, staying current on vaccinations and utilizing pet waste stations. Brackett says this has worked well and complaints are very uncommon, as are issues with pet waste.

"The great news is that we don't have restrictions, and we really don't have any problems," he adds. "We require that you pick up after your pet. If it's a chronic problem we notify everybody and ask for their help in making sure we're picking up after the pets, but we don't have those issues very often."

Stronger Communities Make Stronger Teams

One thing that pets accomplish like few other things is to bring people together. Pet owners are also likely to refer their community to friends, which helps drive occupancy numbers and reduces the need to spend marketing dollars to fill vacancies.

"There's definitely a society of pet owners within each building that gather at the same time every day at one of our pet parks," Brackett says. "They may bring their own cocktails or their own refreshments down, and they'll hang out. I've seen probably seven or eight of our pet parks that are packed for a lot of the day. They get to know each other, they get to be friends and that helps build community, as well as renewals."

Pets build Milhaus retention rates for both residents and employees, both of whom are more likely to stay knowing that pets are appreciated and provided with pet-focused amenities. The leasing staff isn't placed in the uncomfortable position of turning certain pets away, and renters are able to find a home that accepts their four-legged family member.

"I think it's really helped us move the needle and perform better than our competition in a lot of cases," Brackett says. "I think our employees like it, too. They get satisfaction out of knowing that we're pet lovers, and we're not going to shun pets away from the front door."