

Lucas

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. We have a great friend on and one that probably everybody in the industry knows. We've got the infamous, the famous David Schless, he's the president and CEO of ASHA out of DC. Welcome back to the program, David.

David

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. Pleasure to be here. It's always great to talk to you guys. As I hope you know I'm a big fan of Bridge the Gap and delighted to spend some time with you today.

Lucas

Well, we feel the exact same way. We love spending time with you and your team, and we're going to go into a couple of big topics as we enter into this 2022 year that are of importance to are listeners into the industry. You are big on advocacy and you have advocacy programs specifically around consumer education efforts and a initiative called Where You Live Matters. And you've been at that for a few years and we would love to hear about the progress of Where You Live Matters has taken and some of the insights that you've gained and what your goals are at ASHA with Where You Live Matters.

David

Sure. Well, Where You Live Matters was an initiative that we launched several years ago. And it was really the first time ASHA really directly said, we're going to try and deal with consumers and their families. And we had in the previous, probably 25 years or so, we had never done that directly. And that was a a big, it was kind of a big move for us. It was part of a strategic planning initiative. As we typically do, we pull a committee together of, of members who really help us think about how we want to approach things. And at the end of the day, we really wanted to make sure that Where You Live Matters was non-commercial. I mean, we really looked at it as it was like a public service and, and the goal was to try and help empower older adults and their families to really better understand their options.

David

I would say that was the kind of primary goal was to help people kind of navigate what can be a very confusing roadmap and what their options are. That was the initiative. We launched it with GlynnDevins out of Kansas City. And they're of course now Attane and we continue to work with Attane, it's been a really good partnership for us. And you know, we've just made a very solid commitment to investing in content which again helps a us make sure that the site is fresh, that it's got, a wide range of material, whether it's video content, whether it's checklists, whether it's editorial so it's really stayed robust. And it's a multifaceted digital platform.

David

It has a Facebook component, an Instagram component. This year in 2022, we're going to try Pinterest because again, what we see with Pinterest is the potential to get to maybe a younger age demographic in terms of interact with Where You Live of Matters. So it's been a real commitment to try and empower older adults and their families. And as I've been in the business over the years, that one of the things that that has always struck me is, the people who move into our communities almost always, say, gosh, I wish I had done this earlier. I wish I knew about this. I wish I moved sooner. And I think when I think

about Where You Live Matters. It's really an initiative that's aimed at helping a consumer or their family maybe make a decision sooner.

David 5:00

And maybe it's six months sooner, maybe it's a year sooner, maybe it's three months sooner, but it's helping them make a decision. And the other thing that we, that we did a few years ago is we had not initially had a community locator on the on the site. We had added that a few years ago and, and really there's several thousand as member communities on Where You Live Matters in the us and, and in Canada.

And again, I think we just wanted to add that as an almost source of convenience, if someone was on the website, looking for information about the veterans, aid and attendance benefits that they could actually look for assisted living in Knoxville, Tennessee. And what we have seen is that yes, I mean, there are people who do access that community locator at all hours of the day, seven days a week. That was one of those things that we hadn't initially thought about doing, and we added it and that's, I think worked out very well for the consumer and for the industry as well.

David

The site itself really was a tremendous help to us during the, the COVID period because we wanted to try and do some public relations work. We kind of had this platform and were able to use an advertising strategy that allowed somebody to go to Where You Live Matters. We had added a lot of content there that somebody could look at to get the real story of what was happening in these communities. And you know, I think that was also where we kind of realized that there's a dollar for dollar relationship between how much you spend and how many people come visit the website. And we had 30 some million people that were on the website in 2020, and that was driven by financial commitments we made to various media sites across the country from the Boston Globe to the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Dallas, Atlanta, we just kind of covered covered the country.

David 07:33

That was something I don't think anybody ever thought like, oh yea we're going to use Where you Live Matters for this PR effort, but, you know, it was incredibly beneficial to have had that platform there. And then this year we're going to move into Pinterest, which is kind of a new area for us you know. We'll kind of pilot it and see how that works. Where You Live Matters is kind of a living, breathing constantly evolving platform for us. I think it's one of those, I would say probably the area that we have not done as well with Where You Live Matters is we would like is getting the industry to use it as a resource, which it really is. And there's just a ton of good content that can be used by a sales counselor, somebody who's following up with a perspective resident and a lot of folks in the industry. I don't think realize that all of that, all those resources are there for them to potentially use as well.

Lucas

Well, you bring a, a such a great point there, you know, as occupancy continues to be, a topic of conversation, we're all looking for resources and content. And then the other big things that I hear out of this is something that's very close to Bridge the Gap is changing public perception. Oftentimes, you know, to your point, Dave, we hear from residents, you know, "I wish I'd done this sooner." Before that comment takes place, you hear from the adult daughters or the, the family members that are trying to help navigate this is, this is very confusing. Where are the resources, where are the insights? You know,

Josh, we talk about that frequently. And this kind of changing, is a kind of a clashing of all these different ideas and an effort to try to help in those categories.

Josh 09:43

It really is. And education is at the forefront of that. And the research surrounding the education and ASHA does such an amazing job at that as a member of that. As a member of ASHA myself, I look forward to every so often getting the research not only by email, but the materials, the printing materials, so actually I just got in the last couple weeks Dave the great book, I think you call it the senior living guidebook, is that right?

Dave

Yeah. The probably The State of Senior's Housing.

Josh

Yea, so that book is such a great resource because obviously we've got a few different areas of the country that we're specifically working in, but that particular gives really this global perspective of what's going on in each sector of the senior living industry and senior housing that helps to frame kind of the industry for us and all the different segments. Can you talk to us a little bit about the research that ASHA typically does, but what more specifically here in 22, what are some of the specific initiatives that you guys have going?

Dave

Sure. I think when ASHA was started, which was back in the early nineties, there was very little data out there at all on anything. And that was what, it was one of the things we first started to do was finding some different and avenues to collect data. Obviously some of it we do now with other groups, like NIC and Argentum et cetera. I think it's always something we're focused on. It's ASHA's. ASHA's kind a unique animal because it's more of a boutique. And I always say that, ASHA is not the right group for all people. We're focused in certain areas. One of those categories for us has always been research.

David

And so we put probably about a third of our budget into research. I would say if there's one thing I'd like to think about ASHA's, there's, there's no bureaucracy. I mean, we're always looking at listening to the members and reading emails and answering calls. And almost all of our research has probably started with somebody, sent an email or picked up the phone, or just said, you know, I'm looking for this, or I'm struggling with that. And can you think about, is there a study there we can do? And almost all of what we've done, and some of what some of what we do, kind of annual surveys. The State of Seniors Housing, we started in 1992 initially with what was then Coopers and Lybrand now Price Waterhouse Coopers.

David

And that was kind of an early effort to understand, just basic revenue and expense data for the industry. And it's evolved, it's a thousand times better than it was when we for started doing it. An annual state regulatory handbook that we do that is based on a survey we do of states. So some of those things we do and I'm not gonna say they're they ever get easier. The state of seniors housing is a monstrous project. Colleen Blumenthal and Samantha Madrid at Health Trust do a fabulous job, NIC and Argentum,

and NCAL LeadingAge, I mean everybody's involved in that. Then we're always looking for new projects. I think we've started to do some really interesting work with Ann Tumlinson and her team at ATI advisory.

David 13:42

Last year we what will become an annual project now, which is a called the Senior Housing Data Book. That's really looking at Medicare consumer beneficiary data. And it's a very focused on different segments of the older adult population and how they spend healthcare dollars, how they utilize the healthcare system. So that's an annual project that we'll be doing with them again. One of our new studies this year, again, we're doing with ATI is really focused on, on looking at, at socialization and the impact of socialization on physical and mental wellbeing. And conversely social isolation and the impacts that that has on physical and mental wellbeing. That's one of those of projects tht I think we all inherently know that one of the one of the real benefits of senior living is that sense of community and that sense of you know, being connected with other people in social ways.

David 14:51

I think there's a, you know, there's a, probably a policy element to what this research is going to do for us too. Because as you, as you both know, there's kind of this sense that everything that is being done on a policy side should be focused on keeping somebody in their home. Yeah. For some people they've got networks of family and friends and that's great. That's a great option for people, but there are unique benefits of living in community. And we think that this is one of those projects that will be, beneficial in terms of kind of helping to shine the light on that. So that's a new project we're very excited about this year. And then another project we'll be doing this year again, another research project with ATI, it's really kind of looking at revenue opportunities for operators associated with new services.

David

And so again these are kind of areas that I think the industry's starting to look at. I think you know some companies more so than others, but again, are there opportunities to partner with innovative new health insurance companies that are willin to potentially pay you for things that you are doing? Or maybe things that you aren't doing, but could do to, again, help ensure the wellbeing of older adults that are living in your community. That's again kind of a new area of research for us and that'll happen this year as well. And then just another project I want to mention is one that we're going to be doing with ProMatura out of Oxford, Mississippi. We've done a lot of research with ProMatura over the years.

David

And again, a lot of what we try and collect data on is consumer research. How can we better understand who lives in our buildings? And maybe more importantly, how can we better understand the folks who look just like our residents, but haven't made that decision to move? And so we're gonna be doing an independent living study. It's actually in the field right now. That will be very, not looking at this segment of the study. The study will have some historic IL data. It will have some current IL data. What does the current IL resident look like? But it's really a forward looking study. It's going out to people who don't live in these communities. It's about a 20 page questionnaire, so it's a very detailed survey. It will be a scientifically representative of a very robust study. And again, I think we're looking forward trying to better understand what does that next generation of independent living look like? Because, in all probability, it's not going to look like the independent living that was built in 1991. It's going to look a whole lot different.

Josh 18:07

You know, that is really great information for our listeners that maybe aren't familiar with this information that is published, that you can get access to ASHA living.org. I would highly encourage you to go check it out. Also, Dave was talking about Where You Live Matter, which is where you live matters.org. We've got a lot of listeners, as we know, you may be listening right now, and you're not familiar with any of this because you're new to our industry, or maybe you're a student that's thinking about getting into our industry, understanding our industry is key. Where it's been, where it is, where it's going, and the, the folks there at ASHA, Dave's team does a great job. So rounding out our show, Dave one last thing that I don't want to miss out on just kind of getting a summary on is the all important topic of advocacy. You guys have a lot going on. I've actually seen some exciting... really, I guess synergy was the way I would say it a lot of momentum around also the pack that you guys have started. Can you talk a little bit about that?

David

Sure. yeah, so again, I mentioned we're focused. We're kind of focused in three areas, the research meetings, which, you know, we probably won't get into today, but, but the third is advocacy. And that was really when ASHA was started, we were started by a group called the National Multifamily Housing Council, which is basically a multifamily housing group that started us in 1991, kind of incubated us. A really terrific group was a group that was started by some of the giants in multifamily housing, Trammel Crow, and Preston Butcher, and Howard Ruby, and just really an incredible organization. So advocacy, we wanted to, you know, provide a voice for companies that develop, own and operate senior living. It was initially primarily for profit oriented or companies that were for profit oriented.

David 20:17

So it's always been something that we've been really very focused on. Maybe a little bit unique for us as we've always really tried to focus on tax issues. The tax treatment of this tax type of, of real estate is unique. And to some extent, we're, we're not necessarily apartments. We're not necessarily hotels. We're not, so there's some unique tax issues. So that's always been a kind of a core focus for us. We created a seniors housing political action committee in the mid nineties. So it's probably the first of the senior living packs that was focused on supporting federal candidates on the basis of senior living issues. We're not supporting local candidates, so these are just people that are federal candidates.

David

So it's the House and the Senate. I would say historically really tried to spend, you know, roughly what we bring in. This past year we raised about for \$525,000. We spent, it's not exact number, but I think we ended up contributing about 505 or 500, \$10,000. So, you know, again, roughly bring it in and you're supporting members on a bipartisan basis. And obviously, I mean, the past couple years have just been incredibly intense legislative advocacy efforts. That PAC is indispensable because you're not buying anyone's vote. I mean, that's not how the PAC works but you're getting, you know, direct face time with members of Congress who really are in a position to make decisions that impact you and I would say over the course of the past couple years, I'm not sure that the industry would've any federal assistance at all in terms of provider relief funds, if we didn't have that access.

David

I'll tell you a quick story. I always remember this one. But there was a Senator from Florida who, is no longer in the Senate. He was in a previous life he had been an insurance commissioner. This was a long time ago. This was back in the eighties. There had been some, I'm just gonna say scandals, because there were. There were some scandals involving Entrance VCCRCs a long time ago, really not reflective of the modern senior living. And so I always remember we supported this individual, the Senator and had an opportunity to have breakfast. We'd spend an hour, we'd chat, and over a period of time I think we were able to convince him and he ultimately became the Senate Aging committee.

David 23:26

Yeah. I think we had these opportunities to convince him that look at what happened in 1980 or what you saw when you were an insurance commissioner before you entered politics. It's not reflective of the modern business. I would say over the years, I'm not sure he was necessarily always a great friend of the industries. When we first started having those opportunities, to have dialogues with him he was, he had a very incorrect and very negative perception of the industry. And by the time he left the Senate we were able to change his perception. That's maybe a kind of an extreme example, so important to have those opportunities to discuss the industry's perspective with elected officials.

David

The PAC has just been a really important part of that whole process. Obviously we've talked about this, the industry needs to do a better job getting local state elected officials into these communities to come in and have coffee with the residents. Because if you haven't had a direct personal involvement with senior living, with it's independent living, or assisted living or CRCs, you have no idea what it is. And so that's that's one of those things that I think everybody can do. Whether you've got one community, whether you've got a hundred communities, we all need to take those opportunities. The residents love it.

David

It's great for somebody who's up for reelection for Congress. I really encourage that type of activity to take place and all of these things are really important in making sure that people understand, okay, I get it. You're serving a population that is 80 plus that maybe physical or mental limitations, but I get it because I've seen it with my own two eyes. I know what you do. And, and if you haven't had that direct you know, relationship, which again some members of Congress have, but many of them haven't had. So that's a really important thing to be focused on as an industry in months and years, that it's really important.

Josh

You're exactly right. Dave, so developers, owners, operators people interested in getting into the industry, thinking about a career in the industry, consumers, what a great resource ASHA is. Dave, thanks for leading such a great team there and providing such great information for us and taking time to be with us on the show today.

David 26:48

Pleasure. Any, any time I always love chatting with you guys and we'll look forward to look forward to seeing you soon. Any time we can be of any help, as I say, give us call or shoot us an email. Thank you for what you do. I've loved watching Bridge the Gap blossom, keep rockin', you guys do a great job.

Lucas

Absolutely. Thanks, Dave. Absolutely. So all of our listeners can go to [BTG voice.com](http://BTGvoice.com), check out the BTG network there, connect with us on social, send us a note and follow along. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.