

TEXAS TOPICS



Apartment Living Fosters Much Needed Sense Of Community

(NAPS)—Communities are more than groups of people who live together in the same geographical area. In their truest sense, communities transcend the physical spaces they occupy to become places that harbor a feeling of fellowship cultivated by shared common interests, values, attitudes and goals.

Atlanta-based multifamily real estate investment, development and management company Cortland believes one of the biggest benefits of apartment living is the sense of community it creates, regardless of location. Cortland has long striven to foster meaningful and enduring relationships with its residents, from hosting events such as Food Truck Nights and outdoor happy hours to lending helping hands when neighbors need it the most. That community philosophy and mission were put on display in winter 2021, when Cortland's Texas residents suffered from the effects of a once-in-lifetime weather event.

On Feb. 13, 2021, Winter Storm Uri turned Texas into a tundra and left more than 5 million without power, more than 24 million with water loss or disruption and created estimated damages of between \$195 billion and \$295 billion. This included more than 41,000 Cortland residents and 615 Cortland employees at 77 Cortland apartment communities, who weathered the storm together and helped each other get through the frigid days and nights.

"We had many Cortland team members who stayed on-site during the entirety of the storm to make sure all of our residents were taken care of," said Trey Lopez, managing director for Cortland's Dallas-Fort Worth, Colorado and Arizona properties. "It wasn't a request we made. It was a sincere gesture of help and putting residents' needs above their own."

Jerome Jacobs lives at Cortland on Coyote Ridge in Carrollton, Texas, but works at Cortland Canyon Creek in Richardson, Texas, as a service manager. He sprang into action during the storm, working virtually nonstop and taking fire watch in Canyon Creek. While his own apartment home was without power, he assisted Canyon Creek colleagues and residents, repairing leaks (often after hours). He also taught Waste Technician Ronald Norton how to fix leaks and handle other service issues around the Canyon Creek community to expedite repair work.

"He was exhausted, but never complained once," Lopez said.



The worst of times can bring out the best in people, as many Texans discovered during a terrible winter storm.

At Cortland's Attiva Denton active senior living community, Service Technician Carlos Pollard left his wife and children at their home without water or power so he could prioritize the community's senior residents. In the single-digit temperatures, he carried five-gallon buckets of water to numerous residents' apartments so they could flush their toilets. He helped shovel snow and ensured the residents were safe and had what they needed. Throughout the ice storm, he was also on fire watch. And he managed all of this while continuing his daily tasks.

Some traveled from far away to lend a hand. For example, Regional Service Managers Jeremy Jackson came from Atlanta, Mike Hannigan came from Ohio and Lou Beauge came from North Carolina to assist Cortland's Texas communities.

Two members of Cortland's interior design team call Cortland Waters Edge home and they immediately leapt into action to assist where needed at their community.

"They absolutely went above and beyond," Lopez said. "They covered fire watch for us throughout the storm, helped catch a leak flooding one of our homes, and knocked on doors to check on residents and keep them informed. We cannot thank them enough for everything they did to help our residents during this time."

These are just a few of the hundreds of Texas Cortlandians who worked around the clock, stayed on-site at communities, fixed leaks, stayed on fire watch, brought food and water, picked up and shuttled residents for supplies

and so much more. It would be tempting to brag of Cortland's Texas associates for going beyond the call of duty. They are indeed heroes. But at Cortland, exemplary customer service and sense of community are simply the norm.

"When things were at their worst in Texas, our team was at its best," said Lopez. "I'm proud of our Cortland family. During extreme circumstances, they showed resilience, kindness and, most importantly, treated our residents like family."

Residents themselves huddled together to share food and water when roads remained too icy for trips to the grocery. They shared blankets and other cold weather supplies with neighbors who weren't as prepared. And they checked in on each other throughout the ordeal, their communal bond strengthened by the shared challenges of surviving a bitterly cold, once-in-a-lifetime winter storm.

"The recent storm was certainly an extreme event that required an exceptional response," Lopez said. "But whether the experience is getting to know neighbors at the dog park or next resident event or seeing community team members step up in a big way during a crisis, the sense of community created in those moments is oftentimes what makes the difference in loving where you live."

After all, communities are more than their locations, updated architecture, newest décor and coolest amenities. They're about people coming together to care for one another.