

Outside View

The Scion Group's Linda Newman brings her on-campus experience to the table as an outside consultant.

Interview by Randall Shearin

Linda Newman started her career in student housing on the academic side of the equation and spent more than 30 years in housing and dining administration before joining The Scion Group. Before joining Scion as the company's director of advisory services, she was the senior director of auxiliary services and executive director of housing at the University of Michigan.

SHB recently spoke with Newman to find out about her work with Scion, and about her work with the company's university clients.

SHB: Tell our readers a little bit about your background.

Linda Newman: I have a master's degree in student affairs, and I spent my entire career working in residence life and housing. My first full-time job was at Middlesex Polytechnic in London. I then moved to the United States and worked at the University of South Carolina for eight years. Then I went to Bowling Green State University and was there for about 10 years, and six of those were as director of housing. I moved to the University of Michigan. I was there for nine years, seven of which

I was the director of housing and dining. For a couple of years my title was senior director of auxiliary services. My career has been managing residence life, facilities, people, technology, dining and programming. Technically, I retired in August 2015 and was just going to do an odd project here or there with Scion, but now I'm working on a regular basis.

SHB: What types of projects and clients are you working with?

Newman: I've done a strategic plan at McGill University in Montreal, and I've done an occupancy management plan at a college in Edmonton, Alberta. In the States, I've done a couple of master plans at Texas State University. Most recently, a market demand analysis for a university to have them look at what comes next. I have done consulting at Santa Rosa Junior College in California and Walla Walla Community College in Washington.

SHB: What are some of the challenges that campuses face today?

Newman: I think one of the biggest challenges is the cost of an education facility. How affordable is student housing? On-campus, housing is an auxiliary and oftentimes helps bring the general service charge back to the institution. In the management budget, keeping housing affordable is a big concern. I was just at Pepperdine University a couple of weeks ago, and this was a big issue for them. It's not just smaller institutions — even the schools that carry a reputation or identity of being expensive private institutions are concerned about the cost of housing and whether that keeps students from choosing the institution or staying off-campus. A lot of schools are trying to figure out at what point on-campus housing becomes too expensive. People are investing lots of money in renovations and new construction, and then it is priced out of the market so students don't live on-campus.

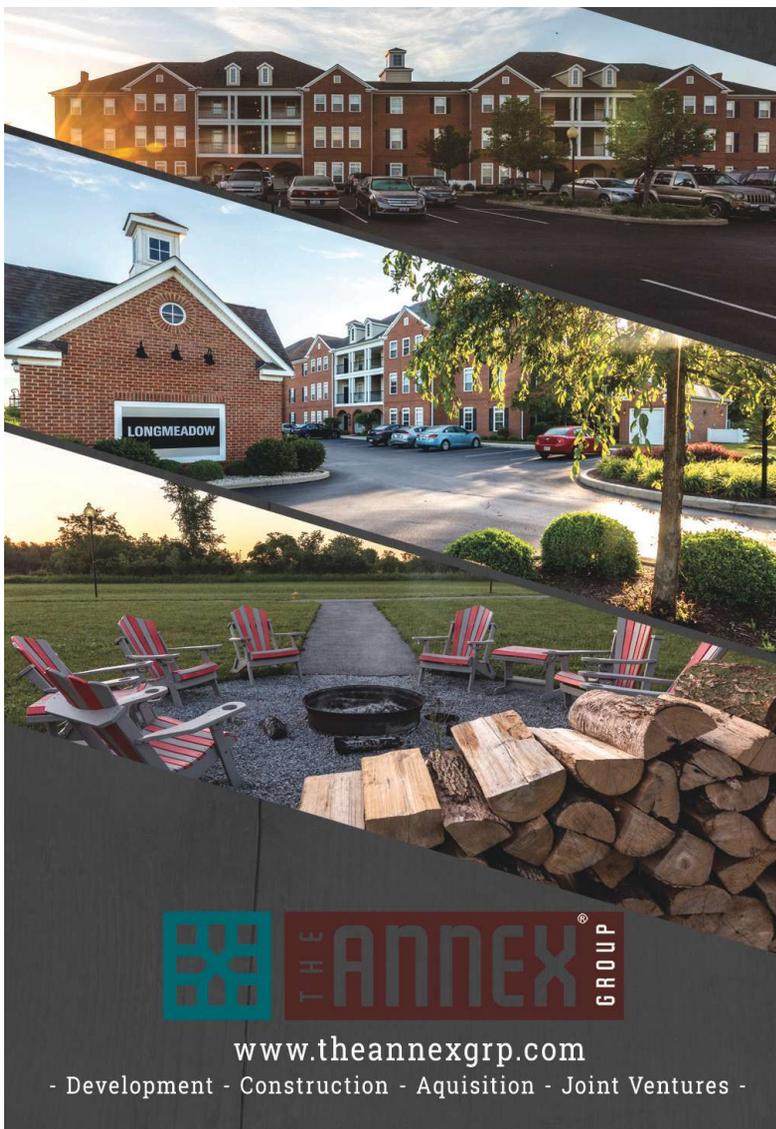
SHB: When you were working on-campus, what were some of the issues you dealt with then? Are they similar to or different than what campuses are dealing with today?

Newman: I think affordability has been an issue for many years. It was an issue at Bowling Green and Michigan. The years of rate increases every year that we saw in the early 2000s have passed. One of the issues at Michigan was how to keep the rate increases to less than 3 percent, yet pay for the mortgage and renovations, and that put pressure on us to find a way to be more efficient in how we do business.

SHB: What are some of the ways that universities are looking to provide a quality student housing and student life environment? What are some of the more innovative elements that you have seen to help enhance that quality of student life?



LINDA NEWMAN
Director of Advisory
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Newman: I think it has to do with the quality of the spaces. Let's think about Maslow's hierarchy of need — and I'm not talking about luxury or granite countertops, I'm talking about hot water going to the top floor of the building. Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure issues are going to be dealt with across the country. I think it is really important for schools to provide a solid baseline facility experience where students are comfortable. I think that is the first level. Good dining and good nutrition are also important. In the last 10 years, we've seen an increasing emphasis on providing group study facilities, more individual study facilities and common spaces. Looking at many of the buildings constructed in the 1960s, there was often nowhere for students to gather. Today, housing administrators are much more aware of the need to provide appropriate group spaces for socializing and for studying for

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people to get out of their rooms. And then there's the increase in programming. There is a whole plethora of living-learning programs tailored to particular institutions.

SHB: What are you seeing colleges and universities focus on? A lot of them, we hear, would like to replace older housing stock but often can't find the money. Public-

private partnerships tend to be mentioned at every turn today, but a lot of universities still don't want to have to go that route.

Newman: With regard to public-private development, they are increasing in number and they are being considered as an alternative. For some schools — I'm thinking of one small community college in New Mexico that is

located on the edge of a reservation with very little money — a public-private partnership is how they have been able to provide housing for students. This is their first venture, and it's really the only way they can do it because they don't have the reserve. Then, we see some of the research, Big 10 kind of schools considering P3 because, whatever the size of the school, there's still a limited debt capacity. For them, it becomes the institutional priority of how to spend debt. A president may decide they would rather see a brand new science building, and there isn't necessarily the same alternative means of funding that as there is with housing. I think that plays into some of the decision-making at institutions who, for sure, would borrow money more cheaply themselves than having a developer do it. It all comes down to institutional priority and if it will pencil.

SHB: What do you like to do when you're not traveling around to universities?

Newman: I'm quite active. I like to play tennis and ride my bike. I try to play golf, and have done the best I can do with that. I enjoy hiking. I live in southern Arizona, and it is a very active lifestyle here. **SHB**



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