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On the Front Lines: UMB Champions of Excellence: Emergency Management Team

December 16, 2020 | Mary Therese Phelan

With a mission to always remain flexible, staff has worked tirelessly to help coordinate the University's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and keep the community healthy and safe.

The **Champions of Excellence** campaign is a multiyear branding campaign at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) in which we highlight individuals and teams that exemplify extraordinary accomplishment and represent excellence at the University. This year, UMB is highlighting the employees who've done exemplary work during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the next few months, The Elm will be featuring these UMB Champions, who are making Baltimore, our region, and in some cases the world a better place.



Today: Emergency Management Team, Office of Administration and Finance

Mornings start early for the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) Office of Emergency Management (OEM) team. On most days, by the time many employees are starting their telework shifts, the team has already held virtual meetings for 2½ hours and charted a course of action for the day on how to best meet the University's needs during a global pandemic.

"We start around 6:30 a.m. and usually don't end until 8 p.m.," says Jonathan Bratt, MS, executive director of emergency management. "I don't think anybody signed up for these hours, but there's never been a complaint."

OEM's tireless dedication to UMB led to its recognition as a Champion of Excellence, with Dawn M. Rhodes, MBA, chief business and finance officer and vice president, praising the team in her award nomination.

"Without their experience and knowledge, it is uncertain how UMB would be handling the pandemic," Rhodes wrote. "Beginning with activating the Incident Management Team, OEM's efforts to prepare the campus for a COVID-19 response were exceptional. The OEM team put in many long days to ensure that the safety of students, faculty, and staff was a priority."

(Watch video below.)

The OEM team also includes Christopher Stanton, MS, director of emergency management; Laura Cathcart, PhD, training and exercise program manager; Hayley Markman, MPA, continuity of operations program manager; Carin Morrell, MA, public information officer; and James Chandler, MPA, critical resources and logistics program manager.

"We're very grateful for this award, and it really gives us an opportunity to showcase the value we bring to the University," said Bratt, who was hired in 2018 as UMB's inaugural executive director of emergency management.

When the pandemic began to unfold in February, UMB had in place a renewed Emergency Operations Plan, which had been updated in December 2019 for the first time in a decade. "We started engaging it immediately," Bratt said.

The plan provides a framework for managing emergencies at UMB, but hazard-specific plans, known as "annexes," designed to support that framework, such as a pandemic plan, were not in place in February.

"We hadn't even gotten to that point yet" when the pandemic hit, Bratt said. "So two things are happening in this pandemic. No. 1, while we have the foundational emergency response framework developed, we don't yet have any of the annexes built to support some of these things that we're doing. We're sort of building the airplane as we fly it. The other piece is that no one had prepared for an emergency of this scope and this duration."

Bratt's team focused on establishing the Incident Management Team, a collaboration between UMB and the University of Maryland Medical System. The team's other priority: determining how to draw down on-campus and international operations while ensuring critical research, clinical operations, and education could continue safely. The team also helped to establish Maryland's mass testing operations, supports contact tracing efforts, and is focused on supporting vaccine rollout plans to ensure that UMB and the Maryland community have access to the vaccine as soon as possible.

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"None of this would have been as successful without the Office of Emergency Management team. They're amazing," said Bratt, adding that the team tries to adhere to a motto: "Semper Gumby: Always flexible."

UMB Champions of Excellence - Emergency Management



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