

WELCOMING NEW RESIDENTS INTO YOUR COMMUNITY

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How did that sound when you read the title? Didn't community sound so much better than your common interest community or homeowners association?

Many years ago, before there became a recognition that these are communities where people live, the attorneys would just harp on enforcement vs. the lifestyles and making people feel welcome. I fell into that trap when I was managing initially. I was not a social director, I was not a babysitter and a whole list of other "kinder and gentler" things I was not.

Because our industry started to realize and remember that people live in our communities we started to understand that it was our responsibility to help build community within our clients property boundaries. People live in these communities and it is their last place of refuge from the stress of our times.

Our organizations, common interest communities, reach inside the residents homes and govern what they can and can't do to an extent. Nuisances are not allowed such as blaring music, smoking in some cases, dogs barking and even what materials they can use to cover their floors because of noise to the unit below.

The last thing one of the residents wants to receive is a letter from the association reminding them of the contract that they signed with their neighbors regarding these dos and don'ts in their community.

When a purchaser buys a unit in your community, they receive a LOT of paperwork that they are required to read in a very short period time. Some read every page like I did and other skim through and generally note something that may or may not pop out at them.

Moving your residence is one of those life activities that causes a lot of stress since not all moves happen smoothly. I used to work in the moving industry so I do know that that side of the relocation can have "issues". Changing addresses with all of the service providers, getting the Internet service up, the phone service, etc., etc., etc., is stressful. Reading a huge stack of paperwork is really not a priority.

So how do we get the new owner to acknowledge that they signed a contract will all of their neighbors to do or not do certain things. Everyone gave up something that would be nice to have when they move into a common interest community. I wish I could park my large RV longer in my community, but understand that I only have a very limited time to load and unload. Yes, I knew this when I purchased and abide by it whether it is convenient or not.

A bound set of documents and useful information is a start in getting the new owner to recognize the common interest community exists. If the front page of the document they receive in escrow says "Important Information for the XYZ Homeowners Association", it will pop out at them and will be kept separately from all of those other papers they received, hopefully.

A welcome letter also serves as a wonderful way to welcome them into their community. In the letter, some of the helpful information that may make a difference in their lives would be to list when trash is picked up and the times that they can leave the trash out. Don't make their welcome letter be a letter telling them they did it wrong and left it out too soon or too long. Cover issues in your community proactively that you have had to address in the past in that community.

A quarterly open house for new owners has been successful in some communities. Inviting all owners, but specifically the new owners to attend an informational meeting, which just happens to be a social function goes a long way in building community. People act differently in a social environment vs. a meeting where someone is in control and someone is not. Conveying formation over coffee and cookies is a lot different from rapping the gavel and demanding control.

Social events will go a long way towards building community in your Nevada nonprofit corporation. It not only lets neighbors meet neighbors in our clicker society where we go in and out of our garages and don't see a sole, but in building a successful Neighborhood Watch community where neighbors know who should be in and around any of the properties.

Knowing your residents will definitely help the board to understand what types of social events will be successful. Do you have a lot of children? Do you have a makeup of only 55 and older, etc.? If you are not an official active adult community you need to remember all of your residents in any social atmosphere and try to have something that appeals to as many of the residents as possible; this includes tenants as well. If you treat tenants like second class residents, they will act like it.

Try it! It works. I found over the years that helping my clients to build a sense of community in their association went a long way to homeowner enjoyment and worked to increase property values. Individuals tended to talk more positively about their community vs. going out in the community at large and complaining about the "jerks at the helm."