

Communication - A Community Necessity

Communication is essential for the wellbeing and harmony of your community. Do you have a regular news or informational letter? Is it informative and timely? Do the owners read it? Is it worth reading? Answers to these questions vary, but more often than not, most newsletters are “throwaways”. It doesn’t need to be that way.

In community associations, consistent and effective communication is extremely important to build consensus and to keep the gossip mill at bay. Besides the timely distribution of meeting minutes, newsletters or informational letters are key to this charge. While printed newsletters have been the norm (and local printers thank you), the Internet offers a wonderful alternative to publish newsletters online and eliminate printing, mailing, labeling and postage costs.

The content of your communication can provide invaluable information to residents about dialing community living. What is the process for requesting a service? Who do they call for a pool key? What is the policy for the enforcement of violations? Do the members know that it may take weeks or even months to cause a situation to be resolved through the proper process? Are they aware of the collection policy? Do they know who the Board is or who serves on the committees? Contact information for the management company? Notices about special or upcoming projects like tree trimming, road paving or fence repairs or pressure cleaning.

Information about these things can serve to reduce the number of complaints about “nothing being done”, negativity about the community and provide an antidote to the rumors that can and will circulate.

In addition to the business side of the Association, the newsletters can provide a means for announcing upcoming activities, such as Halloween activities, Winter Parade, a Pool party or other community event. Include an event calendar. Provide information for the formation of a social committee.

Unless your community transacts all its business town meeting style, a newsletter is essential to keep the residents informed. Almost all communities should produce a newsletter at least quarterly to remind old timers and notify newcomers of critical information. There are some newsletter tricks to increase effectiveness and readability. Here’s a short list:

1. Keep the articles short. Get to the point. Headings and bullet points grab readers’ eyes as they scan. Put important information in boxes.
2. Include good stories. Newsletters can be much more than information. Profile your board, committee members. Include a Newcomer section. Promote events. Include a Q&A section (even if you make up the questions).
3. Put “hook” into your headlines. A good headline reels the reader in. For example: “Board Raises Assessments” will pique more interest than “Board Passes New Budget”. Use puns, rhymes, tv shows, movie titles, etc. to headline your articles.
4. Proofread. Use a second set of eyes and always double check spelling.
5. Share the good news. This is a golden opportunity to publicize accomplishments and things to come.
6. Use humor. Jokes and cartoons liven it up.
7. Highlight and recognize your volunteers.

It is essential that the Board communicate to the members. Apathy can make the spirit of communication difficult. Sometimes the feeling is “if they want to know, let them come to a meeting”, and this is a reasonable expectation. But the Association’s responsibility is to continue to communicate. It does make a difference.

Getting the word out that the newsletter is available is a snap. Every Sentry community has the technology available to provide access to every member who has a computer. The cost is far less than it would be to print the newsletter and mail it. The most important part of your distribution network is getting the owners to register their profile on the community website. Each quarter the Board can provide to the manager the newsletter and through the website, for a cost of \$25.00 for up to 250 residents, the newsletter can be “blasted” to each owner who has their profile registered. While we all feel the need to make the most of the dollars available, this practical and economical way to provide communication is a key in keeping your residents “in the know”. Additionally, for a nominal fee, Sentry can post the newsletter on the community website or other information that may be of interest to the residents such as the new budget, activities calendar, or minutes of the meeting for that month.

While the paper chase will be with us for some time, the web is a terrific way to reduce costs and improve efficiency. Anything you can lay on paper can be done on your community website. Newsletters can inform, tweak and pique interest. Informed owners tend to be more supportive of Board business and more likely to become involved as volunteers. Use newsletters to unify and harmonize your community.