

## **Community Association Communication - REVISED**

Remember the famous line from that great Paul Newman movie “Cool Hand Luke”, when the warden states, “What we have here is a failure to communicate”... as true as it may have been, its not something we want our community to be thinking. Open communication to the members and from the members is an invaluable tool that Boards and managers can use to let the members know of progress or issues that the Association has made or is facing, or to become aware quickly of issues brewing within the membership.

All humor aside, the type of communication practiced can form the basis of clear understanding and agreement or chaos and conflict. One of the community association Board's greatest challenges is to communicate to the members effectively. There are various methods of community association communication:

**E-mail.** In terms of speed, efficiency and cost, e-mail can be a great boon to the Board if used properly. E-mail allows group discussion and transfer of information. But e-mail requires a high degree of skill. There are significant differences between a face-to-face and an e-mail to e-mail exchange. In person, facial expressions and tone of voice can make all the difference to meaning. Small misunderstandings can be instantly corrected as the conversation progresses. With e-mail, the words stand alone and are subject to interpretation of the receiver. A casual comment made by a sender can be received and perceived as incendiary by the recipient. Therefore, your choice of words are extremely important, as is the presentation of those words. The use of all caps for instance could be misinterpreted as being over emphasized or using a raised voice in normal conversation. Since the dynamics of group communication can be complicated, it is best to stick to factual information.

**Newsletters.** All community associations should produce at least quarterly newsletters to keep the members abreast of financial issues, important rules or changes thereto, design standards, current contact information and updates on projects that may be underway. They can be used to remind residents to not leave their trash cans out after 6PM, that pets need to be on leashes when outside or even changes in schedules for facilities and coming events. While pictures and graphics may provide splash, content is key.

**Website.** Providing critical need-to-know information to members and prospective buyers is an extremely important association function. This phenomenal form of communication has made contact virtually instantaneous. The use of community websites to provide copies of documents, ARC guidelines and forms, Rules and Regulations, contact information, calendars of events, committee information, utility providers, etc. Members can generally provide their information to an Owner Directory, which makes contact easier among neighbors. The website for an Association is an excellent tool to provide information to new owners as well making moving in and getting acquainted with the community a little easier.

Whatever form the communication takes, it will enhance the relationship between the Board and the membership and provide for a better community.

Today, it is easier than ever to provide inexpensive access to your community communications through your website. Minutes and Newsletters can be posted for access by everyone. The community website can be reached through the Sentry Website. There is an Associations tab in the upper right hand corner of the page. Once you click the tab, another page will appear that will allow the owners to log onto your community site. Each owner will need their 16-digit account number (it can be found on the coupons everyone receives with which to make your

assessment payments). Just follow the simple steps to access the first page of the Association website. Owners should be encouraged to fill out the profile. It results in a Directory – whose content each owner controls. Please be assured, that this information is accessible only to your community. Without the owner's 16-digit account number, the site cannot be accessed.

One of the benefits of the profile information is it should provide an e-mail address for each owner. A situation in one of our communities recently required the cancellation of an important meeting due to weather. We were able to send out an e-mail blast to each owner with an address to let them know it was cancelled. It can be used to notify of gate problems, or other situations that could affect your community.

Let's communicate! Send a regular letter to your members detailing the instructions to get them started today.

Sentry Management