

BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

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I would like to first discuss community spirit as it relates to our industry. When I think of community spirit I think of a wonderful community that has many volunteers, has owners who love living where they live, has events that are of interest to all age groups and residents talking about their community with pride and in a positive mode.

Many years ago when I was a community management company owner, carried a base of my own accounts to manage, and lived my job 24/7 for many years, I was very concerned when CAI started pushing the social aspects of a community. I felt that I had a very full plate and couldn't load any more contents to that plate. My initial thought was, "Now, I am supposed to become a social director too?"

Believe it or not, several of my Board members taught me otherwise. Because of a very serious turn in the economy, a few brilliant people determined that it was up to them, as members of the Board, to keep their property values from slipping and in fact seriously increase them. The Developer had decreased the price of each new home he was selling by \$100,000 in two communities. The Board's goal was to increase those values back up to where they should have been and where they wanted them to be, which would enable them sustain the values of their homes.

I soon recognized that social events in a community allow for residents to get together for reasons other than the governance of their Corporation and/or for reasons required by law. Watching it in action allowed me to change my whole attitude. The communities came together to work to overcome what most communities would have considered an insurmountable problem. They actually succeeded in their goal as they kept track of the per square foot each home sold for and kept track of the results of each action. The community, under brilliant leadership, came together to be recognized as "the" place to live in their area.

People are known to just act differently in a social environment. There is no "Us" in the audience and "Them" up front taking the heat and/or control attitude. It is all of "Us" enjoying the event together while celebrating where we all chose to live or working together on a common goal.

Each person who speaks negatively about his or her community to the public is actually hurting their own property value. Nevada is actually a very small State and Las Vegas and Reno are actually very small towns when it comes to this industry. People talk! At times, communities who have not worked on their *sense of community*, are unable to get one single professional management company to submit a bid, let alone manage them because of a bad reputation.

In my humble opinion, here is a short list of where to start in Building Community Spirit:

1. Communicate with owners and tenants regularly through welcome letters and newsletters that are interesting and help to encourage residents (tenants and owners) to be proud of where they live. If a publication is interesting, people will look forward to receiving and reading each one as it pertains to “where they live.”
2. Budget in the annual budget for social events and encourage all resident participation at events. If necessary, find ways to include the children to want to come as they will bring their parents.
3. If your City has recognition for outstanding achievements by a community within their boundaries, submit your name for that recognition, if you have something to be proud of accomplishing. The City of Henderson has awards for outstanding communities on an annual basis and has a recognition luncheon for the award winners. Check for your City or County’s Neighborhood Services to see what they have to offer. All of the public entities have Neighborhood Services. They are looking to help you and have many services to offer. They feel that they are able to reach all of you because of the frequent changing of Directors and Managers.
4. As a Board, place an item on the agenda to come up with the Top 10 priorities that should be addressed in your community, discuss them at the end of each Board meeting as to where you are to date, and take pride when you are able to mark off each item when completed. Residents will see this same enthusiasm and want to help in any way they can to benefit their community.
5. Look at your community from the eyes of a “buyer”. Would you want to purchase in this community again or would you rather purchase in the one across the street that has improved the look of their entrance and common areas? Do you love coming home to your community and are you proud to direct friends and relatives to your community? If not, offer to head a Beautification Committee to work towards that goal.
6. Talk positively about your community. You can always find something to talk about that is good about where you live, if you look for it. Focusing on the positive vs. the negative will at least help you turn your thinking around. Is it close to a mall? Is it close to the freeway? Do you like your school? Do you like the landscaping in your community, which is my particular focus?

I am sure that there are many wonderful ways to build community spirit that could be shared by many of our wonderful Community Managers and Members of the Boards out there. I hope that they will share in future publications so that we all can benefit from their knowledge and expertise as Community Spirit is one of those infectious bugs that can be caught by most.