

Communicating the Message of Membership Value

BY LORI R. STORM, CCAM



As board members, you know the value of having a greater understanding of what the association is responsible for, how it manages its assets and who the contractors are that assist in making the corporation function. It does seem, however, that many homeowners do not have this knowledge and often obstruct or complicate the ongoing operation of the association.

How can you educate these homeowners on the value of their membership in your community? And, just as importantly, how do you turn this education into volunteerism?

HOW TO SHARE THE PERKS OF MEMBERSHIP

You may already have a few ideas on how to talk about membership benefits, and your community manager may have given you some thoughts on the most effective avenues for distributing information to your membership. The big question is, what exactly should you convey? Here are a few main points you should make:

- **Members are part of a specific community:** Remind your members what makes your community unlike others in your area. Maybe you are right next to a golf course or wonderful public park. Perhaps your association is age-restricted, allowing people of your age to more closely form bonds and share social activities. Highlight whatever it is that makes your community unique.
- **Members benefit from establishing and maintaining standards:** Don't overlook the opportunity to point out that the well-maintained homes, landscape, pools and other common areas are due to the set of standards each homeowner has agreed to and that the association upholds. The upkeep is good for aesthetics and great for property values.
- **Members have access to desirable shared amenities without the big bill:** The cost of a gym membership and a backyard pool is far greater than the cost of shared amenities in an association. And who has room for a pool table in their home anymore? These shared amenities are available to members at a fraction of the purchase and maintenance price to a single homeowner.
- **Members enjoy discounts on utility and upkeep costs:** Members of an association may not realize this is a benefit. Usually the cost of trash pickup, landscaping maintenance, house painting and roofing repairs are discounted over prices offered to individual homeowners. Contractors appreciate that they can bundle services and capture a large set of customers within a small geographic area.

Any effort you make to educate your membership is beneficial.

TURN PRIDE INTO PARTICIPATION

Now you can build on this better understanding of membership by encouraging involvement. You can promote pride in the community and inspire members to uphold or improve the standard of living. Here are some ways you can stir people to positive action:

- **Invite members to give their input:** Encourage the membership to share their opinions and help shape policy. When a project is coming up or a change is being contemplated, ask your members to help brainstorm ideas. (What are some ways to improve the condition of the pool and lower maintenance costs? Should we consider changing the color scheme of the homes next time we paint?) Put a special homeowner's forum on your next agenda to discuss a single topic. Encourage email input that can be read to the group.
- **Ask members to help solve a specific problem:** Ask for participation on an ad hoc committee formed to decrease pet problems, or devise a way to welcome new residents. Make it a short-term obligation with an easily defined goal to get people involved without too much commitment. This is a great way to focus the energy of those interested in doing their part.

Any effort you make to educate your membership is beneficial because informed owners are a key component to any great homeowner's association. Through all of your efforts, make sure each member knows their voice counts: this will engage them and create enthusiasm about the community.

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