

Community Building: O.K. Morale

Gimme an H! Gimme an O! Gimme an A!

By Jack McGrath

Working to create safe, attractive and healthy neighborhoods throughout Central Oklahoma.

To adapt an old saying so it's relevant to association living: "You can keep some of the people happy some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time." This may be true, but it's no excuse to get complacent when the morale in your community is just so-so. You've probably heard it before, but I've found that the secret to pleasing most of the people most of the time is good old-fashioned communication, whether it's verbal, written or e-mail. But high morale is not achieved by keeping grievances at bay. You want the people in your association to feel good about their homes and get excited about the community, so sprinkle in some fun events throughout the year – parties, community-service projects – and show members some appreciation, for example, by presenting awards periodically for, say, best decorations or community volunteer of the year.

The Basics

Even the most rollicking Halloween party or mirth-filled holiday decorations awards can't save you if members are ticked about the basic functions of the association, such as the way the budget is handled, drastic fee increases, or a protracted lawsuit. To stave off criticism and disappointment, you must communicate with all residents. Be as open about any important developments as possible. Be prepared to explain the board's position on every decision. In my association, we post meeting minutes on our bulletin board for all to see, and we pass along information about important matters through the mail or email. With the assistance of our management company, in additions to keeping in touch through e-mail, members can post comments on our website, which includes a question-and-answer section.

Another important ingredient is compromise. It's not enough to make decisions and dictate them to the community, no matter how diligent you are when it comes to keeping everyone informed. Members should be involved in decisions from the get-go. Listen to what they have to say, and consider giving in if it seems it will lead to making the most members happy.

No One in the Bleachers

As a board member, it might be disheartening to look out during a meeting at a sea of empty chairs. You might think it means that no one cares, or that the dates and times of the meetings aren't well-known. And this could in fact be the case. But at play here could also be the same principle behind the maxim "No news is good news." Maybe members are so pleased with how the community is being run that they don't have anything to bring up at meetings. For example, there aren't many residents who attend our meetings, and this seems to be a sign that their representatives are doing a good job. When they do attend, as occurred at a recent meeting when we discussed pool repair, board members explained details of our plan, and the residents supported our actions – which included initiation of a lawsuit and the first special assessment in the 12 years of our community's existence.

If you reason with people, keep them in the loop and make an effort to insert some fun into their everyday lives, there's a good chance your members will want to reach for their pompoms.

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