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Best Practices

Boosting Volunteer Engagement

By Domenic Apperti and Natasha Paz | Community Manager, March April 2022

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COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION managers, board members, and homeowners collectively want to create thriving communities. Many residents will volunteer their time to accomplish that shared objective, but some may not know where to start. Managers can maximize volunteer engagement by creating systems that foster strong participation and effectively communicate opportunities to get involved.



The seasonal nature of communities in warm weather states like Florida narrows the window to recruit volunteers. For instance, most residents at Crystal Lake RV Resort in Naples are from northern U.S. states and Canada who typically spend November to April in the community before returning to their primary homes. However, the community has a high rate of volunteer participation when residents are in town. Similarly, the Sterling Condominium, a high-rise community in Miami Beach, manages to consistently generate considerable volunteer engagement despite also having its fair share of seasonal residents.

Here are some best practices that can motivate homeowners to volunteer, no matter how much time they spend in their community:

- **Form volunteer committees.** Having committees with specific focus areas brings residents together in a structured manner. The associations at Crystal Lake and the Sterling Condominium both provide residents with opportunities to volunteer on numerous committees. They range from social and holiday committees to financial, arbitration, screening, and architectural design committees. Association bylaws may vary when it comes to how many committees an individual owner can join. Therefore, community managers and board members must establish ground rules for each committee so that every member understands their role and any applicable restrictions.
- **Communicate the opportunities.** Crystal Lake holds monthly town halls during the high community occupancy season to provide updates on ongoing volunteer activities and announce committee openings. Committee members also spread the word through a resident website, social media, and message boards. On the other hand, the Sterling Condominium successfully uses print communications on bulletin boards as well as an internal database that sends committee meeting notifications, project updates, and emails to all residents to keep them informed of volunteer opportunities.
- **Normalize one-off volunteering.** Committees are not the only way to drive volunteer engagement. Some residents may want to chip in without the obligation to do so in a formal committee setting. They can still play an important role in one-time initiatives such as setting up holiday light displays, community cleanup projects, or counting ballots during annual elections.
- **Show your appreciation.** Each year, Crystal Lake holds a dinner to thank volunteers, inviting all residents with verifiable contributions to attend. While this is an effective way to express gratitude to volunteers, ongoing messages of appreciation are equally important. Public shoutouts at town halls and committee or board meetings serve the dual purpose of thanking volunteers and inspiring others to get involved. Following up with personalized emails or handwritten thank-you notes to each volunteer makes them feel appreciated as well.

Simply put, organization, communication, and appreciation are the key ingredients to developing enthusiastic and engaged volunteers in your community, whether they are seasonal or year-round residents.

Domenic Apperti is a general manager at KW Property Management & Consulting, a Florida-based property management company. He oversees Crystal Lake RV Resort in Naples. Natasha Paz is a manager for KWPMC at Sterling Condominium Association in Miami Beach. www.kwpmc.com