

How Condo Managers Help Define a Community

To nurture means the process of caring for and encouraging the positive growth and development of someone or something – a condominium community for example. The benefits of nurturing your condo community, which include and extend beyond a manager's interactions with the board, all residents and trades, is that even small successes will manifest in many different ways.

Perhaps owners will be happy to attend meetings, and you might even see an increase in attendance! Maybe your social events committee calendar will suddenly take off and residents will appreciate and thank you for the barbecues, euchre tournaments and spread the word to their neighbours. Is it simply a dream? Can you nurture the ultimate condominium community – one that will become the envy of your neighbourhood?

We asked our managers to weigh in. Here are some of their thoughts.

A condominium manager is ideally situated in a position of responsibility and influence to have the real ability to shape and define a condominium community.

AS THE ONSITE leader of the management team and responsible for the day-to-day operations of the community, the condominium manager on a very basic level has the ability to create and promote a healthy living environment by maintaining clean, safe and attractive common elements.

The manager, by creating a friendly welcoming atmosphere in the management office, sets the tone for management's interactions with residents, site staff and contractors. A positive approach in the office creates an effect that ripples out through the community and not only makes residents feel welcome but also creates an enjoyable, less stressful workplace for employees.

Condominium managers also have the ability to influence and promote good governance. Managers, by conducting themselves professionally, working with all members of the board, support the board in their role as the executive branch of the community. Community Leadership that focuses on the issues and works together with the manager in resolving those issues will most definitely help shape the future of a community.

Working to promote good governance, well-maintained common elements and a warm and friendly community atmosphere, the manager has the real ability to positively shape the condominium community.

Dave Arnold, RCM
District Manager
DEL Property Management Inc.

What a thought-provoking question: How can a manager help define their condo community? I challenge all managers to think about this.

MY FIRST THOUGHT was: what is a community and secondly should the manager be involved in defining this community? Is that part of our role?

The answer to the first question is a bit challenging as there are varied definitions for the word "community". By combining several definitions, I feel that the most useful one for condominiums is that of "a group of people in joint ownership who work and/or live together for a common goal and do so in a way that allows all members to have a sense of belonging."

Having answered this I am left with the question of whether or not a manager should be involved in defining (or maybe influencing is a better word) this community. My belief is that a wise manager should. If the community is working well together and everyone has a sense of belonging, our job will likely be easier.

The main way that a manager can help define it, for better or for worse, is by example. The approach and the tone used by the manager in dealing with condominium related issues will influence all those involved. This is something that we need to be reflecting upon in every interaction with the members of our condo communities.

Anne Burgoon BSc, RCM
Eastern Ontario Property Management Group

FINALLY THE DAY arrives, it's time for the young couple to move into their first condominium purchased from plans close to a year earlier. Picking the tiles and cabinetry for their first piece of real estate was not easy but it was exciting. Now they are happy to get settled and start using the pool and gym at their new condo.

Not only is this a new unit for the

first time buyers, everything is new even for the property manager. New buildings are a handful for managers as staff require training, building systems often are not complete or are not working as designed by the engineers, and everyone is coming to you the manager to fix their unit deficiencies or ask about using the amenities. Often managers are so busy with these types of challenges that developing a community is put on the back burner.

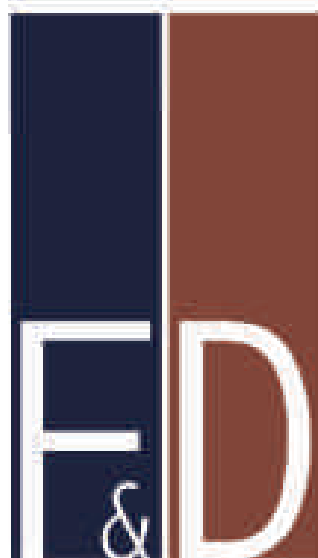
Creating a community is a collaborative effort. Managers shouldn't feel responsible for undertaking this task on their own nor is it possible to create a community of inclusion without assistance. The goal for the manager is to engage the residents to help shape the community by providing the right environment and promoting the concept with the board. Start with one small idea and before long volunteers will come forward to assist with more events or community-building ideas.

Successful community building starts by creating a social committee made up of one or more people to plan card games, a movie night, excursions to the theatre, water aerobics, wine and cheese parties, and the list goes on. Another great community builder is through the creation of a community newsletter that can really get the message out and create talking points for neighbours riding up the elevator.

Whatever you do don't forget your young first time couple who are new to the building. Remind committees to try different things to attract people. That young couple may come out if you have a movie night but would never think of attending a card group. Mix it up keep it fresh and after you have planted that community seed, water it and watch it grow.

Van Smith, RCM
Senior Manager
Malvern Condominium Property Management

AS THE CONDO INDUSTRY continues to evolve, so too do the expectations of today's condominium owners and residents. Today's condo buyer is choosing a lifestyle, and as a result the skill set required



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for a condo manager to be successful is becoming more and more diverse. Strong administrative, operational and financial skills will always be cornerstones of a successful condo manager's skill set, but our role no longer stops with these functions. Condo managers must also be skilled in community building, as this is what your residents will see and feel every day. With that in mind, highlighted below are three things a manager can focus on to help define their condo's sense of community:

1. **Communication:** It always starts with communication. Know your audience and find the best way to reach them. In many condos electronic mailings are now the preferred means of communication, while others continue to use paper notices, calendars and newsletters. There is no "one size fits all" approach; we must find the means of communication that connects with our residents if we hope to have success in bringing them together.

2. **Encourage the growth of committees:** Whether it is participation in a newsletter committee, a holiday party committee, a social

Condo managers must also be skilled in community building, as this is what your residents will see and feel every day. – John Hickey

committee or a green committee, managers must encourage owners and residents to become part of the process. Give your residents the opportunity to participate in the process and your condo community will be stronger for it.

3. **Encourage and support community events:** Holiday parties and summer barbecues are great ideas, but there are often opportunities to do more. Is your condominium home to young families? Encourage events that cater to children. Do you have an active group of residents? Encourage events that focus on fitness and health. Know your condo's demographic, work with your committees,

and encourage events that your residents will be drawn to.

John Hickey, RCM
Regional Manager
Brookfield Condominium Services

Condominiums are everywhere these days. With so much density, how do condominiums set themselves apart and how can a manager help define their condominium community?

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

is so much more than routine maintenance, budgeting and board meetings. It's about creating a community and bringing the lifestyle of the property outlined in the Declaration, to life for its residents.

Managers can help define their condo community in a variety of ways, such as:

- Providing excellent customer service beyond executing the management contract; service that your residents can trust, rely upon and brag about.

- Maintain a same business day turnaround time for responding to resident and contractor emails and phone calls.

- Follow through and follow up on resident requests and concerns. Make your residents feel heard.

- Recognize your residents by name as much as possible. Also acknowledge resident pet(s) and kids by name. Make your residents feel like they are more than just another person paying common element fees.

- Involve your owners in their investment by having new owner welcome meetings, maintaining an open-door policy, encouraging committees and holding Town Hall

meetings; all things that will help to educate residents on their rights and responsibilities as an owner.

- Encourage your board to post meeting minutes and monthly financial statements so there is transparency and so that owners are kept informed of their investment.

Don't be afraid to be the type of manager you wish you had in your own building. Take actions that will create a positive reputation for the community you manage and with strengthen your own skill set, setting you apart from other managers in the industry.

Nathania Norrie, RCM
Brookfield Condominium Services

A PROPERTY MANAGER

plays an integral role in defining a condominium community. Communication is a key element. Homeowners and residents appreciate a property manager who provides frequent communication through notices and newsletters and keeps them informed of their condominium matters. In addition, organizing informational sessions and community events throughout the year helps the homeowners and residents become active and engaged community members. By maintaining open communication with the residents and homeowners, the property manager promotes an atmosphere of transparency and cooperation.

The most important aspect after all is getting the work done successfully and in a timely manner. The commitment and the hard work that a property manager invests on a daily basis, combined with his/her education, experience and knowledge aid in developing a healthy, safe, responsible and high quality condominium. When a property manager is able to effectively organize his/her daily work, delegate tasks and ensure their completion, monitor staff and trades performance and respond promptly to residents inquiries, he/she helps define the condominium community and enhance the quality of life in a condominium.

Mike Nani, RCM
Regional Manager
Duka Property Management Inc.