

# ASSOCIATION BRIDGE, LLC

*Leading community associations over deep waters*

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY**

### ***Making Connections – Looking Beyond Community Borders***

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Once upon a time, most Boards of Directors looked at the broader community outside the boundaries of their owner community association (CA) and assumed that there was not much the CA could do to connect with it. Perhaps there was some interaction with governmental authorities. Membership in organizations such as CAI may have been promoted to help the Board to more effectively govern the CA, but allowing the CA to be a vehicle for its members to connect to the outside world in their day to day lives? No way.

*But that's not our job. That would be outside our powers and duties as set forth in our governing documents, right?*

#### **Paradigm Shift**

Governing documents provide most of the legal basis of the CA. Without the necessary descriptions of powers, duties, and rights, there could be no organization. Yet, it is all too easy to be so focused on handling governance issues “by the book” that the greater goals of the CA are forgotten and opportunities to make the life in the CA a more fulfilling experience for its members are lost.

Governance and leadership, though related, are not the same. Effective governance starts with effective leadership. Effective leadership requires vision. Effective leaders see the possibilities, engage members, communicate the vision, and help the organization stay on track by maintaining focus on the vision. Leaders elevate their organization by engaging its members, who see the value and pertinence of the organization in their lives.

To take advantage of the potential that lies beneath the surface of their CAs, community leaders may have to adjust their perspective. Rather than viewing the governing documents as restrictive documents that keep the Board from thinking and acting creatively, why not think of them as the basis from which creativity can spring?

*Great, now we're all fully enlightened leaders of vision. What does this have to do with the real world?*

#### **Strategies**

Community leaders have found a number of creative ways that put the CA in a position to be a vehicle for its members to connect with worthwhile outside activities. Through a formal committee structure (such as a standing “Outreach” or similar committee) or on an ad hoc basis, a number of possibilities can be explored. Members become aware of opportunities to engage in new activities. Other members who already volunteer on an individual basis may find more support from their CA neighbors. Here are just a few examples of successful connection strategies:

- Support a park clean-up effort
- Support of a neighborhood school event
- Support of the activities of a charity that has impact in the local community
- Visit a nearby assisted-living community to spend time with residents

- Visits to local merchants to inquire as to special discount coupons for new residents for inclusion in a welcome package
- Volunteer activity with a local community center with a focus on youth activity

Obviously, careful consideration is needed. This is intended to be a community-building effort. Any activity that would alienate members would be counterproductive.

Newsletters and web sites can be powerful tools in communicating vision and community identity. Outreach activities should be promoted and reported on. Newsletter articles can also be focused on bringing the local community into the CA. A roving food critic who visits nearby establishments and could write a regular feature for the CA newsletter (Suggestion: don't publish less than favorable reviews!). Consider feature articles on historic local sites and events.

*This sounds like work. Is it really worth the effort?*

### **Return on Investment**

There are direct and indirect benefits from the time and effort investment. Increased positive member participation, a greater sense of purpose, satisfaction and enjoyment for CA leaders, and the likelihood that new members will have been attracted to the community and will support outreach activity are just a few. Anything that helps members and others view the CA as contributing positively to quality-of-life is a very good thing.

*Well, this all sounds wonderful. Are you saying that if we implement these strategies all our problems will be solved and we can change our name to the "Nirvana Condominium"?*

### **Realistic Expectation**

Since no two communities are alike it would be unrealistic to expect that all ideas will work for all communities, or that they would universally resonate.

Connection strategies are just one part of a much larger picture. Starting small makes sense. Even if only a few members participate in a given activity, or only one or two ideas come to fruition, it is a cause for optimism. In time, associations may just find that, if properly communicated and nurtured, support for an participation in connection strategies build over time to become an important part of the identify of the CA.

### **Why Not?**

Robert Kennedy once said, "Men see things as they are and say why. I dream of things that never were and say why not." The need for creative and effective leadership has never been so apparent. Why not take the challenge to think of your association in a new light, to help elevate it to a new level? It's well worth the effect.

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