

The best way to welcome neighbors

With today's era of computer technology and "Going Green" many boards question if the benefits of sending out a Welcome Packet outweigh the cost.

There are several reasons that negate sending out welcome packets:

- Cost to the association for copies, envelopes, labels and postage
- Possibility of outdated information going out
- Too time consuming to do every month
- Additional trees killed to produce paper products
- More waste products for the landfills

There are also several reasons to encourage a board to send out a welcome packet:

- Allows the new homeowner to establish a connection with the community
- Gives important association information including meeting dates and places
- Governing documents can be included to ensure the new owner has received the correct documents
- Local information is very useful; especially if the new owner does not know the area
- Maps and pamphlets can be included from the local Chamber of Commerce, City or County Office.

The board needs to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. They need to look in depth at each reason before coming to a decision. The manager should provide the board with as much information as possible in deciding this issue. Yes, this will initially produce more work for the manager and the board, but in the long haul it may decrease their workload.

Items the board should consider putting in the welcome packet:

- Present some samples of free pamphlets and maps that can be obtained from the local Chamber of Commerce, city or county office, and fire and police departments.
- Letter of Welcome from the board and, separately, the manager, including time, date and place of association meetings, names of current board members, and meeting conduct information.
- List of local addresses and phone numbers for electricity, water, trash, city offices, county offices, school district and other useful contact information
- Governing documents including improvement forms and architectural guidelines.
- List of committees and a pre-addressed envelope for the sign-up sheet.
- Voter registration form.
- Homestead exemption application
- Home alarm application for the police department.

New homeowners often become offended when the first communication they receive from the association is a letter regarding a deed restriction violation or a statement telling them they owe money. Is this the type of first impression the board wants new homeowners to have or would they rather have the homeowner receiving a positive communication with valuable information? Remember the first impression produces a lasting impression.

Yes, sending a welcome packet will be additional work for the manager or committee. However, the information that is in the packet may prevent numerous phone calls and e-mails requesting information, forms or, worse, miscommunications and misunderstandings. The homeowner will not be able to say "I was not aware of the restrictions since I did not receive any governing documents when I closed."

The person responsible for producing and sending the welcome packet can manage the time they spend on welcome packets by making two or three extra ones whenever they compile them. This will result in a stockpile of packets available when they are pressed for time. Preparing the packets and mailing them every two weeks will reduce time spent on the project and spread the cost.

An even more environmentally-friendly approach would be to upload the material to a CD saving the file as PDF. Think about how many trees you can save and landfills that won't grow because of your "green" welcome packets!

The benefits of a welcome packet far outweigh the cost. Spending time and money to establish good relations with new homeowners is a benefit for the association, the board and the manager. Up-to-date information goes a long way in making homeowners feel they are an important part of an association – because the success of their community depends on them.