

Community MOMENTS



Barbara Lowry

Director of Operations

RealManage San Antonio

December 2019



Message From The President

The last month of the year is a time to reflect on accomplishments, enjoy time with friends and family, and recharge our batteries to start the new year off with strength and vigor. I am constantly humbled by the hard work, passion, and dedication of all the association board members we serve. Each of you is an unpaid volunteer with many other competing obligations, making your service even more admirable.

December is the perfect time of year to communicate with the community members all of the wonderful accomplishments from 2019 and discuss what the goals are for 2020. I am a firm believer that morale is directly linked to being aligned with organization objectives. The most successful communities we manage make it a point to communicate goals and objectives each year and call for teams to take ownership of projects to achieve them. As we wrap up the year, I want to thank you for your commitment to the RealManage family, and we look forward to serving you well in 2020.

Wishing you and your family Happy Holidays and best wishes for the New Year.

Chris Ayoub
President, RealManage



4

Employee Spotlight: Barbara Lowry

Director of Operations - RealManage San Antonio

6

Board Spotlight: Len Weiner

Cascades Condominium Owners Association, Inc.

8

Where to look for Winter damage in your HOA

Maintaining your HOA through winter

10

HOA Holiday Decorations Guide

Writing a holiday decorations guide for your HOA



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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Barbara Lowry



DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
REALMANAGE SAN ANTONIO



Barbara Lowry is an experienced industry leader with over 35 years of practice in community association management. Initially, Barbara worked with mandatory associations as part of her position with a developer, she attended and moderated numerous association meetings in this role. During this time, she recognized an underlying issue of governing documents not being followed, which in turn led her to working as director in charge of the communities to build a formal management department to solve this problem.

Prior to joining RealManage, Barbara owned one of San Antonio's largest and most successful management companies. During that time, she acquired a wide range of skills and extensive proficiency across all aspects of community management, including large, master-planned communities, and developing accounts from inception through build-out.

In 2018, Barbara joined the RealManage family as the Executive Director of Development and has since become the Director of Operations for San Antonio. Barbara has enjoyed working for the company and loves the ability to share ideas and work closely with team members. She commented about the open environment, "It has made this job enjoyable and fulfilling." Barbara brings a depth of experience leading, mentoring, and motivating management teams. Her strong interpersonal skills allow her to connect well with a diverse range of clients and build powerful relationships with boards of directors, homeowners, and affiliate partners to ensure client retention and satisfaction.

When asked what she found most challenging about our industry and how she overcomes it, she stated, "The negativity, apathy, and growing regulatory requirements in our industry is alarming. Overcoming bad association management companies, managers that are inexperienced and uneducated with the industry, stringent rules within management companies all make for very unhappy residents. As industry professionals have to be more pliable and understanding of each resident's concerns, and properly manage the assets of the association."

Barbara shared her insight and observations on the future of the industry. She stated, "regulatory requirements being placed on associations through state laws concern me as most elected officials reviewing and voting on the proposed laws have no working knowledge of associations. The perception by judges when cases are brought forth is the association is using 'draconian acts' in dealing with the homeowners' issue. The amusing part is the associations fill a void in that they are responsible for detention ponds, the easements, and roads in gated communities."

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

The Village of Cascades Brier Creek, NC



Len Weiner

Originally from New York, I spent the majority of my career as a Managing Director of credit and risk management in the investment bank at JP Morgan. In that capacity, I worked on many leveraged buyouts. I prematurely attempted retirement about 11 years ago. Realizing that I wasn't ready to play golf full-time, I went back to work, this time for Wells Fargo. I spent four years helping Wells Fargo work down the billions of problem loans they had inherited from their acquisition of Wachovia bank. At 55, I was finally ready to retire, and we moved from Charlotte, NC to The Village of Cascades.

The Village of Cascades, built in 2006, had been mismanaged for ten years. During those ten years, the HOA ran deficits, had to borrow from its reserves, overpaid on most of its vendor contracts, and didn't collect many of the fees due. In 2016, realizing I could continue to utilize my skills, I, along with four other professionals, joined the board. With my banking background, I was well suited for the position of Treasurer.

The new board now had the daunting task of "turning

the ship around." Our first task was to stop the "cash bleed." We spent hours scrutinizing every line item and vendor contract to understand where the HOA's cash was being spent. We implemented new collection policies to make sure we collected all of the HOA's fees and Assessments. We questioned and continue to question every dollar spent. By the second year, we had reduced our expenses by thousands and were running surpluses. Into our 4th year now, we continue to run surpluses, have paid back most of the Reserve borrowings, collecting all that is due to the HOA and have had to raise dues by only a small percentage in four years.

"Lenny is an invaluable asset to The Villages of Cascades, and we are so happy to be partnered with him and The Cascades Condominiums" states Holly Bunch, Director of Community Association Management.

Where to look for winter damage in your HOA

Winter is a harsh time for any building or structure. Between the ice, extreme cold, and the variable moisture penetration, almost anything degrades over the course of a snowy winter. As a community association, your job is to help make sure that both homes and common areas are safe as your community enters winter and again as winter begins to pass on into spring.

The key is to catch signs of winter damage before any real problems can be caused. This article is a quick guide on where to prevent winter damage or repair damage caused by winter as quickly as possible.

Frozen Pipes

The most urgent type of winter damage is frozen pipes. If pipes freeze with water in them, the water can swell and burst the pipe, causing a frigid and often explosive leak. Check the pipes for all community buildings and amenities for signs of freezing, past leaks, or vulnerability to freezing. Consider wrapping each pipe in insulation to prevent the risk of freezing in the future.

Window Caulk

Caulk is the gummy substance used to hold window-glass firmly to the window frame. This forms an airtight seal that keeps the cold winter air out of a home or keeps the air-conditioning in during the summer. However, extreme changes in temperature can cause caulk to pull away from the windows. Check all windows in homes

and public HOA buildings. Reapply caulk that has pulled away to seal up the windows and ensure a warmer winter.

Gates, Fences, and Amenity Structural Security

Cold weather can cause other things to contract as well, including metal structures and bolts. Now is the time to check on the gates and fences of the community. Make sure all bolts and fasteners are tightly secured and that hinges or rollers are well-oiled, so they will work even in the iciest conditions. If you have playground equipment or sports equipment, check to make sure these are secure and stable as well.

Rooftops

Roofs take the most damage every winter from a variety of hazards. Piled snow can cause long-term moisture damage. High winds can rip off shingles. Hail can cause roof-softening pock-mark damage. Even tree branches, heavy with snow, can fall and damage a roof. So keep a close eye on the community rooftops and clean them often with a long-handled roof sweeping broom.

Gutters

Gutters are at risk when they fill, freeze, or become

the home of heavy icicles. Gutters can crack and break away from the roof if they become too heavy. Ice in the gutters can also cause ice dams which can result in flooding and home damage. Clear out ice dams, break off icicles, and apply a de-icing agent to gutters to keep them clear this winter.

Swimming Pools

During the winter, swimming pools should be drained and/or covered to protect them from the cold. Pipes will need to be insulated, and faucets should be protected. Before the pool is brought back into service when warm weather returns, everything should be thoroughly inspected for safety. The water filter must be refreshed, and the pool lining should be inspected for ice damage. Pool furniture, signs, and safety equipment should be cleaned and set back out as well.

Basements

Basements go through interesting pressure, and moisture changes as the winter comes and goes. Snow builds up at the top of a basement and frozen earth hardens around it. Moisture can seep in or be pushed in by melting snow. Most basements in winterly regions should be inspected regularly. Watch for signs of wall cracks from pressure or for flooding from shifting moisture levels outside. The basement is also where you can insulate long sections of pipes that run through the home.

Community Pavement

Snow can wreak havoc on pavement, and so can chemical de-icer agents. Every HOA should take responsibility for keeping the community roads and

pavements de-iced during the winter. Then watch out for signs of erosion caused by chemical de-icers or moisture penetration from the ice and snow. Concrete, in particular, contracts and expands with temperature and may crack during the winter or following the warm season.

HVAC Systems

Finally, keep an eye on every HVAC system in the community. During the winter, heaters can be a health and safety requirement. Ensure all units have filters and are running properly as your community enters the coldest part of the year. Then do a springtime check to make sure all heaters are still running well, and ACs are ready to start coming on.

Winter damage is something that happens to every community. Your HOA can make a difference by taking good care of the common areas and amenities and encouraging homeowners to take this checklist to heart when caring for winter damage of their own homes. For more insights into detecting and preventing winter damage, contact us today!

Writing Holiday Decoration Guides for Community Associations

Holiday decorations are part of what makes the season so magical. Driving past houses that give the impression of gingerbread cottages and warm holiday cabins is a special sight. Of course, there are always a few houses that go overboard. When decorations become gaudy or distracting hazards, many HOAs feel inclined to draw the line. What rules can an HOA legally and reasonably make for holiday home decorations? How do you define what is attractive and acceptable, all while still giving homeowners the freedom to decorate to their tastes?

Fortunately, there are a few helpful guidelines you can follow to keep your community beautiful and inclusive this holiday season.

KNOW YOUR AUTHORITY REACH

The first step is to know exactly how much authority your HOA possesses when it comes to curtailing home decorations. This will depend on how your governing documents are written. HOAs almost always have "architectural control," which determines whether you can tell HOA members what to do with their homes and decor. Not all architectural control is equal, sometimes relating to decorations and sometimes not.

Get to know what you can control and what you can't. From there, consider the types of regulations you can put forth. Even if you have no authority to fine, you might simply post decoration guidelines to help homeowners design tactful, safe, and non-distracting holiday displays.

SET A HOLIDAY DECOR SCHEDULE

Scheduling is a big part of HOA decoration control. Most HOAs limit holiday decorations to a certain period of time before and after each holiday. For the

winter season, often the decoration period starts at Thanksgiving and extends into early January. Most homeowners are fine with a simple holiday decor schedule, which gives them the freedom to decorate but encourages neighbors to take down their decorations after the holiday has passed.

FOCUS GUIDELINES ON DISRUPTION AND SAFETY

The most important regulations you can make are those of safety and disruption. If a holiday display is creating a safety hazard or preventing the community from resting or relaxing enjoyably at home, you may have more authority to regulate and more responsibility to step in. Architectural control is also more likely to apply in cases where decorations are unsafe or profoundly distracting, so focus your policies in this direction.

BRIGHT LIGHTS NEAR THE ROAD

Blinding lights are never acceptable. Just as you'd step in if someone pointed a spotlight at the road that was blinding drivers, blinding holiday lights are also a poor choice. You may consider a lumen-limitation (light levels) and ban any lights that point directly at the road or obscure the view of drivers at night.

FLASHING OR DISTRACTING LIGHTS

Flashing lights are another problem. Lights that flash brightly can shine through the windows of neighbors and prevent the community from getting good sleep. Lights that flash too erratically can cause seizures in those with certain medical conditions. Flashing lights may also serve as a hazard for drivers.

UPSETTING DECORATIONS

Halloween is particularly well-known for decorations that might fool neighbors into thinking a crime has been committed. Advise your community to keep it PG-13. Anything too realistic/upsetting may need to be taken down to avoid unnecessary repeated calls to the police.

INFLATABLE DECORATIONS

The single most popular way to control community holiday decor is to ban inflatable decorations. They tend to be the largest and least attractive of the decor options because they are oversized and often of poor visual quality. Inflatable decorations are also potentially unsafe if they deflate or come unanchored.

UNANCHORED DECORATIONS

All decorations must be properly staked into the ground or secured to the home structure to be considered safe. If a storm comes, rooftop or oversized decorations can become more than a safety hazard. Require all decorations to be safely secured and consider a limitation on holiday decoration size.

DOUBLE-CHECK FOR CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE RULES

Finally, double-check all of your decoration policies are culturally inclusive. There are some arbitrary limitations that seem neutral on the surface until you take a second look. Make sure you are allowing all color-combinations and symbolism that may be meaningful to each family in the community. Also, make sure any safety-based policy isn't accidentally targeting one culture over another.

AVOID COLOR LIMITATIONS

It may seem like a good idea to only allow red, green, and white decorations. But remember that Hanukkah

is blue and white, and Kwanza is red, green, and black. Homes going for a neutral gingerbread theme might choose a rainbow strand of lights. Color is not the issue. Often, when you think the color is the issue, the problem is actually with the intensity (brightness) or flashing lights.

THERE IS NO APPROVED LIST OF SYMBOLS OR CONTENT

You can't limit decorations only to depict Santa and reindeer or only depict 'neutral' themes because neutral themes are hard to pin down. In general, it's safer to let each family have their creche, yard dreidel, etc. You can limit gore on Halloween, but most holiday themes should be considered a personal family choice.

If you have the authority to write rules about holiday home decor, make sure those rules are preserving the safety and peace of the neighborhood first and foremost. If you don't have authority, send out a flyer of guidelines anyway with advice on how to ensure each home's decorations are not a road hazard or an eyesore. Written courteously with safety as your primary point, most families will understand and make decoration plans accordingly.





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