

# Community MOMENTS



**Ann Bitter**

*Senior Community Association Manager*

RealManage Southern California

October 2019





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RealManage Southern California



**Board Spotlight: Summit 800**

Hans Wu — Board President



**Safe and Fun Halloween Tips for your HOA**

5 tips to ensure Halloween is a smooth affair



**Building Bridges Through Communication**

Improving communication with your HOA

**Message From The President**

I want to start off by thanking you, our esteemed partners, for choosing RealManage to be your community association management company. We consider it the highest honor to serve your community, and we are committed to ensuring that you receive service beyond your expectations.



It is hard to believe that we are already in the month of October, and Halloween will be here before we know it. It is always exciting to see the joy on children's faces when this holiday comes around, I know my kiddos love it! In addition to Halloween, this month many of our associations participated in National Night Out an event that has been celebrated annually for the last 36 years. The campaign was created to promote the enhancement of relationships between neighbors and law enforcement while at the same time working to bring a true sense of community.

As always, we love to hear from our clients. We are in the customer service business and want every opportunity to vastly exceed the expectations of your community's residents and board members. You can send us feedback at [clientsatisfaction@ciramail.com](mailto:clientsatisfaction@ciramail.com). Happy fall!

**Chris Ayoub**  
President, RealManage



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# EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

## Ann Bitter



SENIOR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGER  
REALMANAGE CALIFORNIA



**A**nn Borowski Bitter is the Senior Community Manager and the nucleus of the Palm Desert Office for the Southern California Branch for RealManage. Ann joined the RealManage team six months ago. She brings more than 15 years in the Community Association field, including seven years of portfolio management in the Los Angeles area to our team. When asked how she is enjoying her new position in a new area since moving to Palm Springs, Ann responded, “I was thrilled to take on this opportunity in Palm Desert. I love my new position and colleagues and working in the desert. The homeowner demographic in this area is considerably different and in a good way. Board members take pride in maintaining their communities, and many are retirees that have time to dedicate to their associations. This area, 100 miles away from the LA traffic, has a more relaxed, resort feel with many beautiful golf courses, tennis clubs, and fine restaurants. Mountains surround us, and it’s just such a beautiful place!”

When asked what advice she would give to someone considering a career in Community Association Management, it would be “Don’t take it personally.” My first job in this industry was in the collections department for a small management company. Some of the phone calls I received from frustrated homeowners during that time were brutal! It took a little while, but I eventually learned that those customers weren’t really upset with me, and, at the end of the day, I had my three sweet children to go home to.”

When discussing her biggest challenges as a Community Manager in this ever-changing industry she states, “In a world where technology has enabled us instant access to just about everything, one of the biggest challenges of our industry right now is impatience. I love that RealManage has the Board Portal available to my members so that they have quick access information and offers education for using CiraNet. It’s also helpful to invite vendors and other industry professionals to meet with the Boards. CAI is a great resource for helping Association members who want to be proactive in their communities. I would also encourage my colleagues to join CAI to network with other industry professionals, and take advantage of the educational opportunities.”

Ann also strives to maintain a work /life balance to continue her success. When not working, she is usually hanging out with her two senior dogs. She also enjoys watching football and hockey, listening to all kinds of music, and spending with her (now grown) kids. She is also an active volunteer for charitable causes in the community.

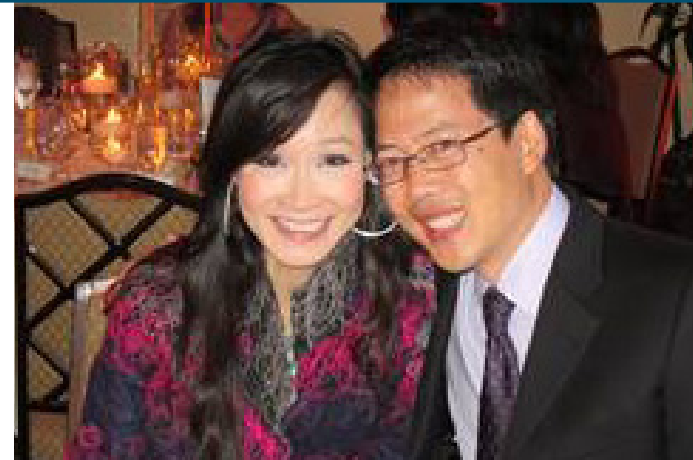
We are thrilled to have Ann as part of our family and is a key ingredient to our continued growth and success in Southern California. Written by Gloria Todisco Senior Vice President, Southern California

Written by **Gloria Todisco, CCAM® CMCA®**  
Senior Vice President — Southern California



# BOARD SPOTLIGHT

## Hans Wu Summit 800 Owners Association



Hans Wu has served as board president of Summit 800 Owners Association since it first became an owner-led HOA board in January, 2018. Having moved to Summit 800, a new, 182 mixed-unit CID, in 2017, Hans saw an opportunity to establish a more positive direction for the community as well as address owner interests that were underserved by the developer-controlled board. Though this was his first experience as an owner in an HOA, Hans felt confident that his background in finance and accounting as well as his experience on other community and corporate organization boards would be useful in serving the community goals and needs.

Together with the rest of the newly elected board, Hans has worked tirelessly to educate and communicate with the homeowners to work through some of the past developer and management issues and to hold both developer and vendors to higher performance expectations than in the past and better results going forward. As part of this process, Hans led a new management company search and proposal

process in order to obtain better professional service, communications, and technology and selected RealManage to start at the beginning of 2019.

While there still seems an endless list to do, Hans feels optimistic that the community is on a better path. "I was a bit naive in thinking that buying new construction would mean that there would be less to do, or less issues and challenges. But it is rewarding to be able to have a substantial impact on behalf of the broader community. It is critical to not be one of those HOA boards that is asleep at the wheel and to have service providers that you can trust to work with and on the HOA's behalf"

When not attending to HOA duties, Hans enjoys spending time with his wife, and family and friends. He actively rock climbs, participates in paddle sports, and enjoys a good read. Hans has been the race director for the Northern California International Dragon Boat Festival ([www.SFdragonboat.com](http://www.SFdragonboat.com)) for 20 years, which, with over 120 teams, is one of the largest, most competitive dragon boat races in the US.

Written by **Suzette Beck, CCAM® CMCA®**  
Director of Association Management





# Safe And Fun Halloween Tips For Your Community Association

It won't be long before Halloween decorations will be everywhere. It's a lot of fun to decorate for Halloween, but when you're a part of a community association or HOA, it can make it tricky. You certainly don't want to break any rules, but you should be able to celebrate the holiday as well. The good news is that there are ways for you and your family to enjoy Halloween without going against the rules at all.

Halloween is supposed to be fun, and we have some tips that can help you keep it that way.

## Tip #1: Get Some Clarification on Noise Restrictions

A spooky soundtrack is a great addition to any Halloween display. But what happens when your HOA has noise restrictions? Those restrictions may not mean that you're not allowed to play any music at all. Make sure you know what your community association says

about sounds. You may be able to have your soundtrack playing softly, or, you may find that you can only play it on the actual holiday. Either way, it's good to know what's expected so you can comply.

## Tip #2: Consider Your Lighting Options

It makes sense that many HOAs wouldn't want their members having big light displays. They can be a distraction, and your neighbors may see them as an inconvenience. Instead, opt for a smaller

light display, or find out if you can put a timer on your lights. That way, they'll turn off at a specific time at night, so your neighbors can sleep soundly.

## Tip #3: Decorate with Smaller Pieces of Yard Art

Everyone is drawn to the large, inflatable ghosts, goblins, and vampires. They certainly bring attention to your property, but your community association may frown on them because they can be an eyesore. Instead, why not go minimal with

your yard art this year? There are so many tasteful options that might make everyone envious of your decorating skills. A few fake headstones and some jack-o-lanterns that you and your family carved might be just right.

## Tip #4: Check the Guidelines on Religious Decorations

Your HOA may have rules in place about using religious decorations, and this applies, even at Halloween. For example, witches are frequently equated with the Wiccan religion, so they should be avoided. Fortunately, witches aren't the only

characters that are acceptable Halloween decorations. You might be able to opt for something that's more harvest-themed, which would be more likely to be considered appropriate.

## Bonus: Consider Filing a Complaint to Change the Rules

If you really feel that the rules governing Halloween decorations are too strict, you may be able to do something about it. There's nothing wrong with filing a complaint; particularly if your neighbors feel the same way you do. If you decide to do that, make sure you know exactly what you would be willing to agree to.

For instance, you may say that you'll agree to only decorating for a two-week period around Halloween instead for the entire month of October, and into November. If you offer a concession like that, the HOA may be more willing to consider changing the rules to accommodate your desires.



# Building Bridges Through Improved Communications

Does it sometimes seem like your HOA board is on the "Bridge to Nowhere?" One-way communication feels that way. In fact, it isn't really communication at all. True communication has a destination on each end of the bridge, and each of those destinations has two lanes: expressing and receiving information.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE BRIDGE WE ALREADY HAVE?

Before you can improve on something, it helps to have a clear picture of where the problems are. Take an honest look at what's been going on between your HOA board and the association members. Perhaps you've already tried (several times) to connect with the members of your HOA,

## THE APPROACH

The Bridge to Nowhere, located in Southern California, was intended to connect two places, but due to flooding, the original road was re-routed and now the bridge is part of a hiking trail. However, its use as a trail is often hampered because the trail going to it washes out, leaving the bridge practically inaccessible. In building a communication bridge, consider the approach—from both sides.

Be knowledgeable and confident in your purpose

## TWO LANES

Does your communication bridge accommodate traffic going in two directions? Help your association members be prepared to receive your communication and deliver it in a means that is relevant and relatable.

Speak the same language as the members. If

but it just doesn't seem to work. They won't listen. Or they seem to listen and then ignore what was said. The board members wonder why they can't get anything through to the association members.

for the communication in the first place. Make sure the reason is clear and easy to see. As much as possible, prepare the other end of the bridge as well. Is it evident to the association members why they need to pay attention to the board and welcome the information into their lives? And do they have a clear way to approach the board with reactions to what the board says or to express both related and unrelated concerns that are common to the community? Is the board prepared to welcome what the owners say?

you are trying to communicate an issue that the board has researched in-depth or if it is closely related to your personal interests or profession, it might be easy to slip into using jargon. If the members don't know what you're saying or if they think you're being arrogant, they will likely turn you off.

## BE DIRECT

What if bridges meandered the way a scenic road up a mountain does, switching back and forth? While both engineering feats serve a purpose, that purpose is not the same and

## MAINTENANCE

Even the best bridges require maintenance. Potholes form; supports and structure are subject to forces of nature and friction; the vehicles using it change in size and shape. Over time, the communication bridge between the board and the association members will need attention. The people on the board and in the association fluctuate, economics change, the social environment changes, and nature can affect the physical environment too.

Monitor the use of your communication bridge

## TRANSPARENCY

A bridge smothered in fog may be daunting to traverse. If your association members feel they can't see what's going on, they are less likely to approach, and you are left with a communication

## STRUCTURE

Every part of a bridge must be structurally sound to create a safe, positive transfer from one place to another. Make sure the structure supporting your communication bridge is sound. Are you using a management company? They are an

cannot be achieved by the same means. Know what you have to say and say it as concisely as possible.

and be aware of potential problems as they arise. Different communication modes are appropriate at different times. While communicating through brief, direct emails may work at times, there will be other times a regular newsletter will be necessary, or maybe you can use bills posted on bulletin boards. Sometimes phone calls are more helpful, and other times keeping the bridge clear by friendly, personal communication like a "hello" when you meet at a mailbox will support more weighty business communications down the road.

gap instead of a bridge. Do not shroud important details in mystery and allow members to stumble onto them. Keep relevant information easily visible and accessible.

important part of your structure. Make sure they are clear on the intent of the board and that the association members know how to access both the management company and the board with their concerns.







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