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COMMUNITY MOMENTS

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Valarie Sharrow

Director of Community Association Management – Tampa

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Happy Holidays from the RealManage team! We are so excited for this season and eagerly anticipate some quality time with family and friends; it seems as if 2017 has flown by!

As the President of our organization, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your partnership. We are so grateful for the opportunity to serve you and your community every day. The clients we serve and the team members we employ make my job a true joy, and I feel so privileged to come to work every day. Thank you!

If you ever need anything, please do not hesitate to drop me a line at clientsatisfaction@realmanage.com. I wish you and your family a happy holiday season and best wishes for the New Year!



Chris Ayoub
President, RealManage

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Valarie Sharrow

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT
REALMANAGE TAMPA

Valarie Sharrow is the Director of Community Association Management for RealManage-Tampa, which currently services about two-thirds of RealManage clients in the Florida market in an area of responsibility that covers eight counties along the gulf coast and requires two offices – Tampa and Port Charlotte. Operating in Florida poses its own challenges in the community management industry from investment communities to Board members living out of state for large portions of the year. Valarie has been a strong presence in the Florida market for a number of years, directly contributing to back-to-back client satisfaction awards from the Florida Community Association Journal.



Unlike most residents in Florida, Valarie was born and raised in Tampa. She received a degree in computer science from high school, eventually working for an engineering firm where she processed reports for large-scale air ventilation systems. She moved on to work in processing closing paperwork for residential real estate sales before she started working for RealManage as an administrative assistant in 2010. Valarie eventually progressed into a Community Association Manager role by 2012 and then took over as the Director of the Tampa market in 2017. In addition to managing some of our most important clients in Florida, Valarie also took on the critical roles of lead trainer for integrating new managers into RealManage and was also responsible for managing any new clients transitioning into the branch's family of clients.

Tampa has a diverse set of clientele, roughly a third being condominiums or townhomes, and a fifth are controlled by real estate developers. Valarie has organized her staff to understand the varying needs of their clients, ensuring that the board of directors for any of the communities get sound, accurate advice as they require it, whether they are a developer or a residents of the community. For 2017, RealManage-Tampa enjoyed a 4.7 out of 5-star rating on Google and received critical praise from a national developer saying, Valarie is “very knowledgeable and helpful and has a unique understanding of our fast-paced environment.” More than just providing great service to her clients, Valarie cultivated an office environment that is warm, friendly, and always “has a great feel to it.”

When asked what she likes about the community management industry, Valarie responded by saying, “It is the changing nature of it. You will not ever get bored in this industry as every day brings new issues to resolve.” RealManage Florida operations continues to grow, particularly along the gulf coast region, and Valarie is sure to keep it on track for the future.

Written by **Joe Hansen**
Vice President - Central Florida

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Robert "Sam" Conn II

BOARD PRESIDENT, HIGHLAND PARC CONDOMINIUMS

There are many reasons that people decide to become involved in their community association by running for and serving on their board of directors. For some, it is pure altruism, a desire to volunteer time to serve their community, a sense of civic duty. Some people want to get on the Board of their association for a specific community project, like a pool or a park. For others, it may be a need to prove themselves to others as important (ego driven reasons). For Mr. Robert "Sam" Conn II, Board President of the Highland Parc Condominiums in the Seattle suburb of Sammamish, Washington, it was not specifically one of those reasons - it was more a desire to have a direct effect on the biggest investment he has - his home.

Mr. Conn bought his home in Highland Parc in 2009 and decided to join the board of directors in 2011 because he "was concerned about the financial management of the association, so I decided to take a bigger interest in helping run what is essentially a \$700,000+ per year corporation". Mr. Conn said that he is not an altruist, it was all about the money and the investment in his home and that of his neighbors in Highland Parc. He explains to the membership at their Annual Meeting each year that he joined the Board because he thought it was worth his time to make sure his investment is being properly managed. As he tells the members, "My interest is 100% about watching my nest egg, but it is a nice coincidence that I am protecting all of you as well."

Mr. Conn was born in Ohio and spent his formative years in the Los Angeles area. He has spent the last 25 years of his life developing high-end financial software systems (ERPs - Enterprise Resource Planning software). Hired by Microsoft in 2000, Mr. Conn relocated to the Seattle area in 2002 where he continued to work for Microsoft until 2013. He has been the Chief Technical Lead for the company dataMavens since leaving Microsoft.

With a deep understanding of finances and software, Mr. Conn felt his skill set would be very helpful in assisting the board of directors to make sure their association was being managed well and the investment in his home and his neighbors' homes was properly protected.

As frustrations with their prior management company escalated after joining the Board, Mr. Conn and the rest of the board of directors began searching for other management options. After gaining an understanding of the RealManage software platform that would be available to them and the direct access to the community's information that the RealManage Board Portal offers Board members, Highland Parc made the switch to RealManage on January 1, 2015.



Mr. Conn explained that the "day-to-day visibility into the community's finances and management instead of waiting to receive reports at the end of the month" is one of the most important aspects of the RealManage software system that has had him so excited for the almost three years since they made the switch to RealManage. The transparency afforded Board members via the Board Portal "is critical to the visibility into the day-to-day operations. The sooner you can detect any problems, the sooner they can be corrected". He also mentioned that an intrinsic by-product of this visibility for Board members is that it keeps the management team

on top of things. As he further explained, although the Board Portal is a feature that benefits the Board members, it actually creates tremendous effectiveness of the entire management team that results in a well run HOA.

Mr. Conn's satisfaction with the services RealManage provides extends beyond the most comprehensive software platform in the HOA industry. He said that he has a perception of a "flat hierarchy" with regards to the management structure at RealManage, explaining that the couple of times he has had to escalate things above his direct manager, the response from higher ups, including the company president, made him feel valued - "not only was I heard and listened to, but the issues I brought up were quickly resolved". He continued to explain that with their prior management company, which was 100% local, they had more communication issues with their leadership that they ever have with RealManage.

Continuing on this thought, Mr. Conn said that he expects that RealManage may sometimes get pushback from boards that may not like that we have a centralized back office far away from many of its clients. He said, in his experience, RealManage goes the extra mile to combat the misperception that you must have a local management company in order to receive the level of service you need and deserve from a management company, adding, "I have never not had great communication all the way up to the top".

Mr. Conn concluded his thoughts on his experience with RealManage by saying the only reason he is still on the board of directors after seven years is because the community made the switch to RealManage - "If we had not moved to RealManage, I would not have stayed on this board".

A rabid Seattle Seahawks fan, Mr. Conn enjoys spending his spare time with his family. The father of two teenage boys, one a 17-year-old high school senior and the other an 18-year-old freshman at Washington State University, Mr. Conn said spending time with them is what gives him his greatest joy.

Written by **Greg Veldman**
National Director of Client Success

PRESS RELEASE

Elgin, Illinois

Kara Cermak, CMCA®, AMS®, PCAM®, President of Rowell Incorporated, AAMC®, selected as a Member of the Board of Trustees for CAI® National



RealManage is pleased to announce that **Kara Cermak**, CMCA®, AMS®, PCAM®, President of Rowell Incorporated, AAMC®, has been selected as a member of the Board of Trustees for CAI® National and has been elected to the CAI® National's Community Association Managers Council. RealManage took over management of the Rowell, AAMC® managed communities in mid-2017 adding them to its ever growing Illinois footprint.

With over 26 years of experience in the community association industry, Kara has served as a board member of CAI® Illinois' board of directors, serving a year as the President. She has also appeared on the NBC local station in Chicago; been quoted in Chicago Crains Business; served two terms on the Community Association Managers Council previously and has been a member of CAI®'s National Faculty for eight years. In 2016, Kara was awarded The Influential Women in Business Award from the Daily Herald's Business Ledger.

Ms. Kara Cermak states "It has long been my goal to provide leadership to the community association management industry because our industry is comparatively quite young. While I have contributed locally, and continue to do so, I am excited to provide help and guidance to the industry on a national level, through CAI® and by working as part of the RealManage team. I look forward to contributing my expertise, and my passion, through both of these avenues that I am blessed to be involved with."

"Kara's passion for developing members of our industry is second to none." states Mr. **Christopher Ayoub**, RealManage President "We are fortunate to have her as part of the RealManage family and look forward to the amazing impact she will have on our industry."

Holiday Safety Tips For Your Home or Condo

The holiday season is upon us! You are likely making plans on how to spend the time with your friends and family. Candles, trees and holiday lighting are traditionally a part of festive winter celebrations no matter where you live, but as you enjoy the festive time, extra precaution should be taken in order to prevent holiday accidents. The statistics are shocking – according to Electrical Safety Foundation International, an average of 373,900 home fires occurred every year between 2005 and 2009, with 30% of them in winter! Here are some quick holiday safety tips you can use this upcoming holiday season.

SMOKE ALARMS. According to the National Fire Protect Association, seventy percent of all home fire fatalities occur in homes with faulty smoke alarms or no smoke alarms at all. You should be doing regular check-ups on smoke alarms to minimize the risks. Here are some things you can do to ensure your smoke alarms are in good working condition:

- Make sure all smoke alarms have a label of a recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories.
- Mount the devices on a wall 6 to 12 inches from the ceiling.
- Install a new battery each year, or sooner and replace the alarms every ten years.
- Check the device every month with the test button.
- For best protection, all smoke alarms should be internally linked to go off at the same time.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS AND EXTENSION CORDS. Improper use of extension cords and damaged holiday lights can all cause short-circuits that result in fires. Most risks can be minimized, if you follow a few simple rules:

- Check all lights and cords for damaged plugs and bare wires.
- Never connect more than three light strands together.
- Do not fold or staple any extension cord.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets and consult the manufacturer's instructions for the power requirements of each device.
- Keep all electrical devices clear of snow, water or any other liquid.

TREES. Trees tend to be an essential part of holiday décor. As reported by the National Holiday Tree Association, more than 36 million trees are sold annually. Unfortunately, they are also susceptible to multiple risks, and United States Fire Administration points out that trees are involved in at least 400 fires every year. To avoid becoming part of this statistic, practice the following:

- Choose a fresh, green tree to reduce the risk of fire hazard of dry needles.
- Give it plenty of water – a six-foot tree loses half a gallon of water daily.
- Make sure to keep it away from heat sources and flammable materials.
- Turn off the lights on the tree when no one is around to minimize the chance of a short-circuit resulting in a fire.
- Make sure you keep your toddlers and pets away from the tree. They can knock it over and either be hurt, or knock over a candle and cause a fire.

CANDLES, FIREPLACES AND CHIMNEYS. According to National Fire Protection Association, candle use has doubled in the last five years, and, sadly, over the last decade fire accidents caused by improper use of candles has tripled. Candles, just like fireplaces, should be used with extra caution, as an open flame poses additional risks to your safety.

- Never leave a child or a pet alone in a room with candles or a fireplace.
- Keep combustibles at least three feet away from all open sources of fire.
- Have your chimney checked every year before the holiday season.
- Flammable liquids like gasoline and lantern fuel should never be used to light a fire.
- As a rule of thumb, never leave fire unattended and extinguish all candles and the fireplace when going to sleep.

Winter Safety Tips for Common Buildings

Many cities and towns have already experienced the first chill of winter. If your community is one of them, and it has not implemented winter safety measures for common buildings, it is essential to implement the measures below as soon as possible. Doing so will help protect residents from dangerous slip and fall accidents, and thus protect the community and its community management provider from the potential legal fallout from such incidents.

Apply Snow Melt If Needed

Many brands of snow melt work well down to a temperature of -6 degrees. However, the higher the temperature is, the more effective snow melt is at liquefying ice and snow. Because winter temperatures can change fast, it is a good idea to apply snow melt liberally to outdoor egress paths in the event of sleet and snow. If your community is in a climate that need not worry about ice and snow, then enjoy the cost savings of not having to buy snowmelt.

Shovel Snowy Walkways

Keeping walkways well-shoveled can help prevent slips and falls when the temperature is too cold for snow melt to work. Shoveling walks also improves the performance of snowmelt, as it decreases the amount of snow and ice that must be melted. If you live in a warm climate where snow is only talked about in books, forget shoveling and enjoy the nice temperatures!

Apply No-Slip Tape

Thanks to state and municipal laws, some common buildings contain no-slip tape in the form of luminescent fire safety tape. If the common buildings in your community are not among them, having the community management provider implement no-slip, luminescent tape according to the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Life Safety Code will help prevent slips and falls in egress paths.

Position Wet Floor Signs

The custodians that clean your community's common buildings should have access to "wet floor" signs that are used to identify freshly mopped floors. The signs are also useful for identifying floors that are wet as a result of egress traffic in winter. The signs can be used in any location where slick, non-carpeted floors increase the chance of slip and fall injuries.

Use a Floor Drying Fan

Commercial floor drying fans are available from big box retailers such as Home Depot and Lowes. The fans are designed to blow a forceful stream of air across the surface of floors. Placing them in areas where heavy foot traffic creates wet floors can help floors dry faster. Keeping floor drying fans going strong in the winter months can help prevent slips and falls.

Creating an HOA Budget Committee

Your homeowners association has set up a board of directors that will help govern the HOA. Not every responsibility, however, must rest with every member. To work alongside and within your board of directors, should consider having a budget committee to help control the finances of your homeowners association.

What is an HOA Budget Committee?

The HOA budget committee is responsible for overseeing the financial aspects of the HOA. This includes routine management of the community, from keeping up with pest control or maintaining the grass and plants in community areas, to ensuring that there is enough money in the reserve pool to cover repairs and other unexpected expenses that may arise as the year progresses. The budget committee is also responsible for assessing the funds needed for improvement projects throughout the community and may need to discuss how to raise additional funds or bring in additional income to complete projects not already covered by HOA dues.

What are the benefits of a Budget Committee?

Having a specific budget committee allows the HOA board of directors to operate and hold meetings with the answers to many common questions already in hand. The finance committee will know exactly how much money the HOA has on hand, how much can be spent in repairs or on community projects, and which contractors are able to offer the best benefits for the lowest costs. This also allows the HOA board the freedom to concentrate on other aspects of managing the community.

Having a budget committee is a great way to ensure that your HOA's funds are being spent in the most responsible way possible. If your HOA board of directors is still form or you have not had a budget committee in the past, it's time to consider how it could positively impact your board and your homeowners.

Who should be on the Committee?

Your homeowners association budget committee can be made up of members of the board, members of the homeowners association, or a combination of the two. Members of the committee should not have a personal interest in how funds are spent. Ideally, they should be responsible individuals with budget experience to help them make the decisions that guide the HOA's spending. The HOA treasurer should be on the budget committee and may be the chairman of that committee.

What are the responsibilities of the Budget Committee?

Specific responsibilities of the budget committee will depend on the HOA board and the needs of the homeowners in the community in the upcoming year. This may include:

- **Assessing the funds necessary to complete maintenance over the next year**
- **Obtaining estimates for regular services to help ensure that the HOA is receiving the best savings for its needs**
- **Obtaining estimates for projects and services that will need to be completed in the upcoming year, but which are not completed regularly**
- **Deciding how to raise funds when the reserve is not adequate to covering the year's needs, including cutting costs in some areas, raising dues, or assessing a one-time fee for homeowners**
- **Estimating the reserve that needs to be kept in the budget in case of unexpected expenses, including natural disasters that are common to the area**
- **Setting long-term financial goals for the HOA. This might include setting aside funds each year for long-term projects or for future repairs.**
- **Monitor adherence to the budget and ensure that the HOA is sticking to the guidelines created by the budget committee**

In some cases, the budget committee may be responsible for evaluating the needs and desires of homeowners. For example, it may be important to know whether or not homeowners want pest control for the entire community or if they want landscapers who take care of blowing leaves off of communal areas.



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