

# COMMUNITY MOMENTS

A REALMANAGE PUBLICATION



# Jackie Cleveland

Director of Community Association Management

RealManage Washington



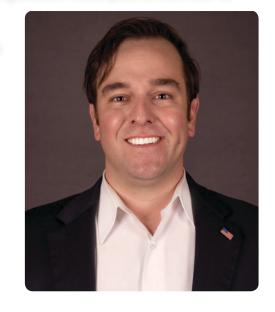
# President's Letter

Thope this letter finds you and your communities well. It looks like it will be six more weeks of winter; Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow this year. However, even with the few more weeks of winter, it is time for most associations to begin preparing for amenity season and getting common areas ready for spring and summer use. If your association has amenities, your Community Managers will be working with you to ensure everything is functioning and ready to go by the start of the season.

At RealManage, our team wants to make your lives as association board members, residents, and vendors as smooth and worry-free as possible. We are committed to exceeding your expectations through all our interactions from the first call or email, to facilitating your annual meeting or construction project. I hope the upcoming spring season is the best one yet, and I am so honored that we get to partner with you in service to

If you have any feedback for me or my team, please feel free to send me an email at clientsatisfaction@ realmanage.com

your community.



**Chris Ayoub** President, RealManage

#### **EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT**

# **Jackie Cleveland**

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT

ackie (if you call her Jacqueline she thinks she's in trouble for something!) was raised in Ballard. The Ballard area is a prime example of a neighborhood feeling the impact of the exponential growth in the Puget Sound region. "My father was raised in Ballard. He went to Ballard High. So did my sister and I – GO BEAVERS. What was once a more workaday, blue-collar part of town is now almost unrecognizable with so much new construction and so many more people. Historic buildings have been renovated into bars, restaurants, workspaces. The house I grew up in cost my parents \$16k in 1970. They sold it at what was considered the height of



the market at the time a few years ago, for \$475k. It now is on Zillow at \$775k. We aren't talking a vast tract of real estate, either – we, a family of four, grew up in a 2 bedroom, one bathroom home. It is a shock to see my hometown go from what essentially was small town to major metropolis. Counting construction cranes is a new hobby!"

If there was ever a place to be to grow our company and hone our craft, Seattle and the Puget Sound area is it. "Our market is relatively new to common interest communities, compared to other regions," she explains. "Where other regions have decades-older homeowner associations and co-ops which have driven practices and legislation, Washington is in its infancy. This is the place to be to learn, to be challenged, and to be a part of growing our professional industry."

When it comes to the practice of association management, Jackie is a budget and insurance enthusiast. She is fully aware that these interests sound boring to many others. Communities often come to us after being self-managed and she is instrumental in helping to bring them up to speed in maximizing the market value of the homes in the community and making them financially viable in their funding.

"When you have been managing for over a decade, you find your niche! For me, it's building limits and bottom lines." Jackie hopes to find more opportunities to teach seminars and contribute however she can to the Washington State Community Associations Institute as far as education is concerned. "I just wrapped up a couple-year long stint as co-editor of the Journal, the WSCAI monthly publication. Meeting with a team of industry leaders and business partners on a very regular basis was a wonderful opportunity to keep up on trends and issues in real time. Commitment to education is one of the things that enticed me to RealManage - if we can't always be improving, we can't be the best partner with our clients. It's a value I believe in to my core."

Outside of management, Jackie enjoys reading, running, and rescuing – dogs, that is. She recently rescued a one-year-old stray from a rescue from Montana named Rocky Racoon. He joins her and her first rescue, a shepherd mix named Gracie Lou. "He's part husky, part heeler, and all boss" she gushes. "I prefer him that way – he is teaching me so much about patience and giving chances. He ran wild, and was found injured and full of porcupine quills. He deserves love like all beings on Earth, despite his rough edges".

RealManage is so honored to have Jackie as a part of the team and is confident that she will continue to serve our clients with the highest level of professionalism, dedication and respect for years to come.

#### **BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

# **Jeff Bennett**

TRAILS OF WEST FRISCO

he Trails of West Frisco is a highly sought after master-planned community of 1670+ homes nestled in over 650 acres of open space in Frisco, Texas. Bordering the beautiful Trails of West Frisco Golf Club, this vibrant community and its active homeowners enjoy two swimming pools, a basketball court, tennis courts, numerous greenbelts, hiking, and biking trails all surrounded by pristine landscaping. The HOA's social committee plan and execute fun activities that include family-oriented events like movie nights, festivals and other community group outings that bring the neighborhood residents together.



I recently caught up with Trails of West Frisco board president, Jeff Bennett, to ask him "what makes Trails of West Frisco tick" and to share his perspective as a board member of this prestigious community. Jeff works for a large cosmetics company in their IT department. He graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Information Systems and holds a certification in Project Management. Jeff has served on the board for the past three years. His business background and keen project management skills are evident in the well–run Trails of West Frisco HOA.

### Q: Jeff, What brought you to Frisco Texas and specifically Trails of West Frisco?

Jeff: I have lived in the Dallas/Fort Worth area my entire life, but until we moved to Frisco I have always lived on the Fort Worth side of the metroplex. After living in the city of Arlington, a suburb of Fort Worth (where the Dallas Cowboys built their current stadium), my wife and I decided to move closer to my work in Dallas. We found a great neighborhood

in Frisco and moved here in 2013, which coincidentally is where the Dallas Cowboys just recently completed their new training facility! (They may be secretly following us). The moment we drove through the Trails of West Frisco, we were greatly impressed with the neighborhood and knew is it was a place that we would love to live.



#### Q: Why did you decide to serve on the board of directors for Trails of West Frisco.

Jeff: Moving to a home in an HOA neighborhood, I wanted to learn everything I could about it, and I read up on the governing documents of our HOA. My wife and I also began volunteering for various functions and going to the monthly meetings. I often remind homeowners that coming to the monthly HOA meetings is a great way to find out about issues

that affect your neighborhood. Due to an opening on the Trails of West Frisco Board, I saw an opportunity to increase what I could do to help and learn more about our great neighborhood, so I ran for a board position in 2015. After I was elected to a board position, I had the honor of being appointed president by the other board members.

# Q: What challenges have you faced as a board president of such a large community?

Jeff: Being president of a large HOA of nearly 1,700 homes can be a somewhat daunting task. Starting in that position after never having served on a board before can make it even more challenging. After I decided to run, but before being elected, we also lost our property management company. They had internal struggles which caused them to shut down operations. The board members at that time did a great job of not only finding a new property management company but handled the day-to-day activities during

the transition. RealManage was hired, and they did a really good job of gathering information to begin the task of managing our large property. As luck would have it, my first day as president was also their official start as our property management company. We have put many hours together to learn about our neighborhood and to keep it looking great while also working towards an even better future for our area.

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# Q: How has the community changed during your tenure on the board? Is there anything you are proud of that you have accomplished serving on the board?

Jeff: When I first started on the board, there was a waning of participation from homeowners. The board members worked hard to cover all architectural requests, social events, landscaping projects, and much of the enforcement of the governing documents. For a five-person board, that is quite impressive. However, with that much work, some items started to slip. I have learned that apathy can cause many issues to become even larger. As homeowners, we may see an issue that we would like corrected, but may not know the process to help correct it and so it stays uncorrected. A side effect of that is that we did not have really any committee participation to speak of. We now have many volunteer-run committees including a thriving Landscape Committee, and Social Committee made up of numerous homeowners that work tirelessly to make our neighborhood great.

One of the issues that our board members faced when I joined was some discontent with our landscaping. Although it still looked good, we knew it could be better. In addition to that, we were also hit with plant diseases causing large tree loss. After working with the landscape company for a year, we ultimately decided to go forward with a new company. With the help of our new landscape company along with the fantastic work of our Landscape Committee members, our landscaping is looking better and better. I am also proud of our social events. As a community ages, more of an HOA's resources are needed to work on infrastructure demands, but our Social Committee members do a fantastic job of organizing great events on a tight budget. These events also really help bring out our fellow neighbors and help reinforce a sense of community.

# Q: How does RealManage help you in your role as board member and in supporting your community?

Jeff: RealManage has been valuable to help identify ways to improve the communication with the community and to help allow board members to keep an eye on processes within the neighborhood. The RealManage portal has been invaluable to us to find items before they become bigger problems and gives board

members the transparency to be able to help answer questions for homeowners at a moment's notice. While it has not always been a smooth road, the tireless work of our property managers is an invaluable resource to our board members.



#### Q: In your opinion what do you feel makes a viable community?

Jeff: The number one thing that keeps a community viable is keeping an open and honest dialog with fellow neighbors. As I mentioned before, this can be done often by having social events where people meet their neighbors and start forming new friendships. Sometimes, there are hot-button items that can start to drive a wedge between neighbors, but I believe that apathy in a neighborhood can be its greatest threat. Getting neighbors involved and communicating not only helps take some of the workloads from

the other neighborhood volunteers, but it also helps keep the communication lines open between the HOA members and the entire community. I encourage social events, regardless if they are HOA related or neighbors hosting a block party. I try to go to as many of these as my schedule will allow. With these new communication opportunities and new relationships, we can identify new areas that need attention, reduce the items that may have a negative impact, and enhance or expand on items that are having a positive impact.

I am very glad to be able to make a positive impact on our neighborhood and look forward to what the future will bring to the Trails of West Frisco. – Jeff Bennett

Jeff has a wife and one grown son, one grandson, and two cats. For the last few years, he and his wife, Robin, have begun traveling, alternating each year between domestic and international trips. Last year they took their first cruise to the Baltic Sea. So, if he is not working at his IT job or doing HOA tasks, it may be because he and his wife are on their next vacation trip!

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## Maintaining Community Association (HOA) Playgrounds

Having an HOA playground is an attractive feature for young families looking to purchase a home. A playground is also a great place for young children and parents to make friends. As children swing, slide, and climb, injuries are bound to happen. An HOA playground is a common area, and therefore maintenance is up to the association. A property maintained playground is the best defense against injuries and possible litigation. Let's take a closer look at the types of careful considerations needed when maintaining a community association playground.

## STATE AND FEDERAL REGULATIONS

A clear understanding of federal, state, and local regulations is important when it comes to playgrounds. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission sets the standards for playground equipment. The Commission publishes the standards in a 42-page "Handbook for Public Playground Safety. "The handbook is an informative resource tool for evaluating current playgrounds or planning for a new recreational

area. HOA playgrounds must meet ADA requirements which are mandated by the federal government. A maintained wheelchair ramp providing access to the play area is one example of ADA compliance. State and local regulations vary; check with your local building inspection office about any permits the association might need to start or make changes to the HOA playground.

### LEGALITY

When planning a playground for the first time, it is a good idea for an association to meet with its attorney. Most likely, the association will be working with a vendor to provide and install the equipment. An attorney can review any contracts, permit applications, and insurance policies. Children often become injured while playing; whether

it is due to their playing or faulty playground equipment. If it is the latter, then having the association's legal bases covered is important. Even after a playground is established, reviewing policies with the association attorney every so often helps in ensuring that everything is current and up-to-date.

### SAFE SURFACES

Considering that falls are the number one cause of playground injuries, a safe landing surface is a must. Two of the most popular surfaces for HOA playgrounds are wood chips and loose rubber. Both are affordable options; however, they tend to be highmaintenance. Wood chips require a

depth of at least 10-12" and loose rubber a depth of 6". These materials require raking and replenishing due to constant movement from children. A higher-priced rubber surface covering might be a worthy investment as it requires less maintenance.

## **MAINTENANCE**

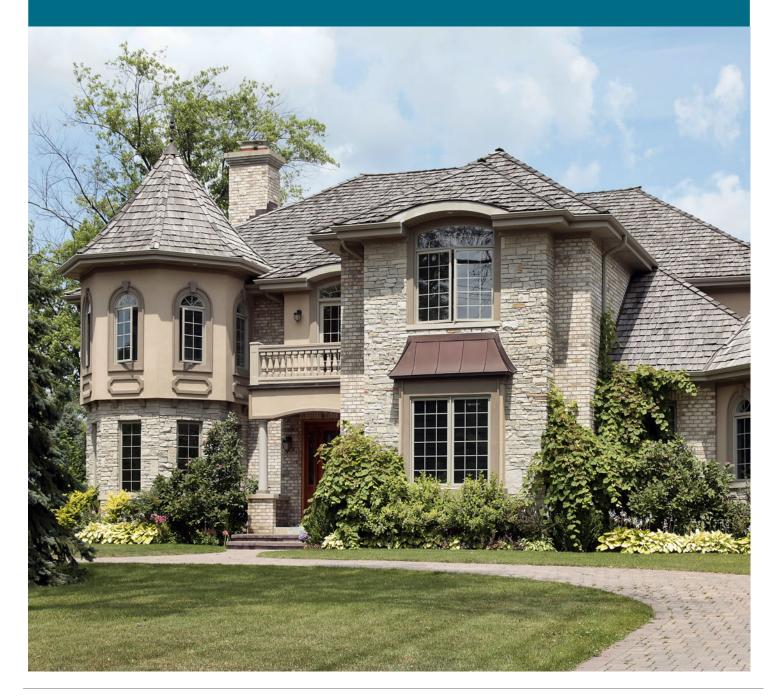
Playground equipment and surfaces take a beating over the years from all the jumping, climbing, and running. Industry experts estimate the average life of playground equipment to be 15 years. Regularly scheduled maintenance is important for preserving the equipment for as long as possible. Surface rust, for example, can lead to structural failure if not treated early. Local government agencies may have trained playground inspectors on staff, and some localities

may even require regularly scheduled inspections, which help in identifying issues not seen to the naked eye that may present a serious safety concern. Consider holding a training session for association members when it comes to playground equipment and their safety. Training members to keep an eye out for structural problems is a great way to catch problems that otherwise might go unnoticed.

Playgrounds play an important role in the development of children. Movement helps them stay active and healthy, and they develop socialization skills playing with other children. Fresh air does wonders for children and parents as they can enjoy meeting other parents from the community. In today's world of smart phones and technology, it is now more important than ever to encourage children to spend time playing outside. By properly maintaining a common–area playground, HOAs can offer children a safe place to run, jump, climb, and play with others.

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