

# Board – Community Communications

By Mary Helen Amery

## Your board can talk to your residents!

**I like pumpkin pie – Eyes look at the sky** Remember back in elementary school when you played the telephone game with your friends? What a hoot it was to start the message and then listen to the last person in the circle recite the message he heard. It was never the same message! As much fun as the telephone game can be, this is not what board members want to play when communicating with residents.

How a board in a managed community communicates with its members is not only important, but also challenging. There are all kinds of new ways to communicate with residents, e-mail, blogs, and websites. These may seem an easy and fun way to communicate, but they cannot take the place of chatting in the yard about neighborhood issues. The challenge for a community board is to find out how to create an environment in which this type of communication can occur. What can board members do to enhance in-person communication?



**Listen to residents.** Your community is made up of a diverse group of people who are in the community at various times of the day and night. Sometimes changes in the community are only noticed in the daylight, so listening to residents home during the day is essential. Other changes are noticeable in the late evening hours or overnight. Residents who walk during those times or have dogs are good sources of information about the nighttime hours. *Walk through your neighborhoods at different times and engage your residents in conversation.*



**Provide a forum for residents.** Most communities have regular meetings and an annual meeting. Although all of these events are open to residents, how often do we invite them? How often do we ask for their input? And, when they do contribute their thoughts or suggestions, are we open to them or do we thank them and move on to other business? *Make sure your board hears what your residents are saying and responds appropriately to suggestions and complaints.*



**Encourage neighbors to get to know each other.** Neighborhoods where people know each other are stronger communities. Neighbors who know each other look out for each other, their homes and cars. There are many ways to encourage neighbors to meet each other. In our community we hold an annual picnic with food, music and children's games. Each year it gets bigger with more than 300 residents attending in 2006. The picnic is a fun way to meet new residents, reconnect with long-time residents and recruit residents to become more active in the governance of the community. *Brainstorm ways your board can create opportunities for neighbors to meet each other.*

Community managers must also play a role in helping the board communicate. Without accurate and timely information, volunteer board members cannot respond to residents, nor publish relevant information for the residents. How can community managers help?

