



Pointe Royale

Community of the Year

The honor of being chosen the first *FLCAJ*/Becker & Poliakoff Community of the Year can only go to one community. It belongs to Pointe Royale, a condominium association of 141 homes located on the scenic banks of the Caloosahatchee River in downtown Ft. Myers, Florida. As the winner of both the Civic Involvement and Safety and Security Community of Excellence small association awards, the judges recognized them as outstanding even amongst the winners.

The three 16-story residential buildings, three-story garage, clubhouse, tennis courts, and pool comprising Pointe Royale were built during the 1980s, but the community has continued pressing forward. "I thought our

community was a shining star,” says long-time manager Bobbie Golfes, who initiated the nominations for the group. And the judges agreed that they have achieved excellence by looking after others through extensive volunteer service and looking after themselves with a new, comprehensive safety and security program.

Civic Involvement

“At least 75 percent of our residents are involved in community service,” says Bobbie. The average age in their community is early 60s, but many residents are retired and thus able to spend more time in volunteer work.

“Volunteering at the hospital is most popular,” Bobbie notes. “There are about a dozen residents that work at the front desk, help patients to other locations, and bring in flowers. About a half-dozen residents volunteer at Hope Hospice, where they collect donations for resale. Members of the Shriners hold events to raise money for the children’s hospital.”

The nature of their volunteer work varies with each individual’s interests. “We have a doctor who volunteers with the American Red Cross, and whenever they have a disaster, he goes out for them,” contributes Bobbie. “We have some ladies who sew baby clothes for ladies who are down on their luck. A former board president reads on the radio for the visually impaired.” Others participate in a wide range of activities including making teddy bears for terminally-ill children, supporting local disadvantaged individuals, and volunteering with the Chamber of Commerce, library, visitor’s center, and more.

Bobbie attributes much of the volunteerism to their generosity: “They’re a very giving bunch of people.” And they encourage one another to join in, generally by





word-of-mouth, though the association does advertise community service opportunities on bulletin boards, in the newsletter, and on the house cable channel. Bobbie says, "One of the unit owners will get into an organization and they'll tell one of the other unit owners, when we have one of our socials, 'How would you like to help out?' They'll say, 'Oh, I can fit that into my schedule.'"

The regular community social schedule where ideas may be passed along is a monthly themed potluck dinner. Bobbie describes, "Every month has a different motif. In February, it was really cute—for Cabin Fever they had it decorated like a cabin with little pine trees and a little bear and everybody brought comfort food like chili. For St. Patrick's Day in March, since it's green, everybody will bring a different kind of salad."

Security and Safety

The community began a major upgrade of its safety and security system in 2006, partly in response to a few crime incidents and the concern that growth in the area would mean growth in crime. Bobbie states, "I started the security review because we

had security at the front gate from six P.M. to six A.M. and not on the weekend. Our problem was twofold: 1) it was hard for us to monitor who was coming in and going out of our community, and 2) we had a lot of trouble with contractors. It was hard to keep track of where they were going and if they were licensed and had insurance. Also," she says resignedly, "they weren't too careful how they treated our property."

"I was spending a lot of my time being a policeman," Bobbie states, so she wrote up a synopsis of what was going on to give the board a fuller picture. "They were very open to the information, and really didn't realize how much went on during the day. They just saw little snippets when they were coming and going. I gave them a bird's eye view of everything." She also pointed out, "It's getting more developed here on the river with a lot of construction. If something should happen, the board needs to have used due diligence in keeping the people here safe."

The board responded by forming a six-member security committee that proceeded to review recommendations, visit other communities, and seek professional advice. One major aspect was a new camera system. Bobbie recalls, "We did have cameras in place, but they were just in the garage and were as old as Methuselah. You couldn't even record with them, and they were out more than they were on. At the time the committee was putting together recommendations, we were taking up the asphalt and putting down new pavers, so that was a good time to put in the conduits for the new camera system." The committee recommended it to the board, who approved the 16-camera system. The cost was \$43,000, but was paid for with a surplus from the pavers project. There is no ongoing monthly

cost and the images are recorded on a hard drive.

Bobbie is relieved to have the camera system and figures, "It's paid for itself already and we've avoided a lawsuit. We had one contractor from an office delivery system who slammed a box of paper down and cracked a granite shelf in half. When I called the company and said their delivery guy had damaged it, they asked if we were sure it was them and I told them I had it on film. They said, 'Well, get an estimate.' We had a bottled water company guy who drove over the sidewalk with his heavy truck and broke all the pavers. That was the same—when I said, 'I have pictures,' they said, 'Send us an estimate.'"

The residents are very positive about the camera system, according to Bobbie. "They like it because they feel much safer. Two people didn't like it because the guard could look on the balcony, so we just blacked out their balcony."

"Every hour the guard does a tour of the whole property with the cameras because they turn 360 degrees and zoom in," Bobbie explains. "When contractors come in, guards can follow them on the cameras and make sure they park in the correct lot. Also, when some of our ladies come in late at night, our guard can watch that they park and get into the building safely. It's worked very well, and the people really like it."

With the camera system, the community switched to round-the-clock guards. "We had an outside company doing our security, and sometimes, they would send up people who couldn't speak English, and we weren't getting what we were paying for. If we were going for 24/7, we were switching to in-house employees. We reviewed the cost and we got 24-hour security seven days a week for what we were paying a company for six P.M. to six A.M. coverage," Bobbie reports. They have a full-time security supervisor and

seven part-time guards. She considers the cameras plus 24-hour guard service a win/win situation. If a community couldn't afford both, she advises, "I would go with the cameras, but you'd have to have someone watching it. The guards will call me and say, 'Look at the camera and see if you can recognize this person.' We have cameras at the doors that are connected to cable television, so the residents can see the people at the door on their TV. If you have guests coming, you can keep an eye out and buzz them right in."

Though their property is fenced, they were able to further limit access by changing from one broad entrance and exit to a more easily controlled situation. Bobbie explains, "We used to just have an 'in' gate and we added an 'out' gate. That helped because before when the guard was busy, perhaps signing in a contractor, the car behind could go around and come in. Now there's a gate with a narrow entrance and everyone has to wait to get in without bypassing it."

"After we got 24-hour security and brought it in-house, the security manager and I put together a security manual to cover



everything from soup to nuts,” Bobbie reports. The manual states policies for keys, deliveries, unloading and loading, vehicle identification and passes, fire alarms, evacuation procedures, flooding, emergency generators, elevators, pools, parking, use of force, garages, roofs, contractors, real estate agents, and other data needed for protection or response to potential dangers. Depending on a contractor’s job, they will be issued a day pass, or for longer projects, they must meet insurance and licensing requirements and will receive a limited-term contractor’s pass. Hours of work are limited from eight A.M. to six P.M., Monday through Saturday, and from experience, there are specifications for where loading and unloading are allowed, etc. Bobbie adds, “Since we don’t have a freight elevator, the guard calls maintenance to install pads in the elevator to protect the walls.” The manual even addresses “Dealing with People Who Want to Be an Exception to Security Rules”—a must-read for 24/7 security personnel.

Another improvement was electric doors, at a cost of \$12,000 per building. “Everybody loves it,” reports Bobbie, “because they have remote openers. Before, contractors would put the foot down and leave the doors standing wide open and we were forever yelling at them. Now the owner has to provide them with a key or buzz them in.”

When the security committee began putting together recommendations, they invited the local Sheriff’s office to visit and address the community. They provided information on the crime rate, scam artists, and what to look for and what to ask of unexpected guests. Some of the recommendations they suggested that were implemented are putting signs on the fence that the site is monitored by camera and having guards check all outside doors and the pool gates at the shift change. An additional potential opening to be checked is the Friendship Gate. Bobbie says, “A lot of the residents are members of the Royal Palm Yacht Club next door. There’s a gate—the Friendship Gate—that goes directly there which is keyed, but they do have to make sure the gate is kept closed.”

The fire department was also invited out for a demonstration. Bobbie shares, “The fire department showed us how to use the fire extinguisher—I didn’t know how. A lot of the owners came, and a board member videotaped it and put it on the in-house channel so the people who couldn’t make it could see it.” The firemen started contained grease fires in the parking lot for participating residents to extinguish—undoubtedly the start of Condo Survivor.

Only one of the residential buildings has sprinklers, though the other two will be required to install them by 2025 in the common areas. “We do have fire alarms in each building connected to central dispatch,” Bobbie explains. “Every time there’s a malfunction the enunciator says, ‘Evacuate the building. There is a fire.’ I tell the older ladies that it might be a false alarm, so just go to the stairwell because you can’t make it down these stairs without help. If it is a fire, the firemen will come help you. We may have two dozen residents that are limited, mainly with pulmonary problems, who may not be disabled but might be hurt by going down the stairs.”

Another benefit of improved security is savings in insurance. Though she could not break out the benefit from the camera and guard service alone, Bobbie says, “Our liability insurance went from \$22,000 to \$5,000, not just from cameras but also from a mitigation inspection by our engineer.”

For prospective owners, the enhanced security is a big attraction. “For the people who come to look at purchasing a unit, that’s one of the first things they like—especially if it’s a single lady,” Bobbie notes.

A New Look

Another attraction for the property is its new, youthful appearance. Bobbie says, “Pointe Royale was one of the first condominiums here on the river. But they started building these brand new condominiums down the street, and we were starting to look like the old shoe on the block. Since 2005, we’ve probably spent four million dollars in renovations. It was just time.”

She explains, “Our president was very instrumental in telling the people, ‘We have to start investing money into the property so that we keep property values up.’” Though the oldest building had already undergone balcony repair, an engineering study recommended that the two newer condominium buildings needed balcony repair, painting, and new screen enclosures. But they didn’t stop there. “When that was finished, each building remodeled their lobby and their elevators. Then, they remodeled front entries and we did pavers throughout the property. We had new roofs put on. We’re almost brand new—it looks beautiful!” Bobbie exclaims.

“Next, we did major landscape renovation because of the wear and tear from construction,” she says. Another improvement was bringing their grounds maintenance in-house. “Now we have an in-house gardener and everybody thinks he’s terrific because he just babies everything. He was a find. I had put an ad in the

paper—'Must love plants'—and he does. He takes care of everything with a fine-tooth comb and it looks beautiful." In conclusion, she feels, "Everything looks good and everybody's happy."

Of course, every advance has a price. According to Bobbie, "Everything was paid with special assessments and that was the hardest part. I would credit the board and especially the president for being very forward-looking. He was treasurer at the time and he was very good at budgeting the projects." The major renovations were approximately one million dollars each for the two buildings requiring concrete work, so assessments of over \$20,000 per unit were required. Bobbie recalls, "There was a little resistance from some homeowners, but they realized the buildings were old and if they wanted to keep up their property values, with the new condos coming, it had to be done."

Now that the work is done, besides the obvious enjoyment of the refurbished community, there is the benefit of minimal maintenance needs. "Since everything is brand new, we don't need that much maintenance. Everything looks beautiful so my maintenance team's job is to keep it up. We brought that in-house also. We've got a good team and they all work well together. It's less expensive than when we contracted it out, and we save money when we don't have to call in contractors for minor repairs," Bobbie reports.

The current economy has not escaped their notice. The main effect, according to Bobbie, is, "It made us plan. When prices were up, we had some speculators come in and buy, and those are the ones where we have had some foreclosures. We never had a bad debt line item before, and now we do. We checked with the bank about opening a line of credit. But, we were able to cut back on some items and save money on insurance so we were able to lower maintenance fees this year. We went with a new company and were able to save about \$60,000 on insurance."

Bobbie says, "We may be the oldest community in the area, but we're the most elegant." Add to that the civic involvement of the residents and a safe, secure environment and you have a recipe for excellence—this year's Community of the Year. ■



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