

Net Gains through Activities

Years back I visited a community to inquire about leasing an apartment yet no units were available. After learning I was new to the area, the friendly leasing agent recommended a certain community, “because they have an activities program which is a great way to make new friends.” I took her suggestion, signed a lease at the property, and because of their activities and my new friends signed two renewals.

There are two business reasons to do activities: market the property and build community. Stated another way, activities can close leases and gain renewals. Keep in mind both sides, and avoid the mistake of evaluating programs solely on participation. Attendance in programs impacts renewals yet overlooks how many new leases were obtained as the result of having a certain program – also important.

Realize the true costs of having recreational facilities. Two tennis courts cover approximately 12,000 square feet of real property. Not counting the land two lighted courts cost approximately \$50,000. Who can afford to have that much value just sit? Tennis courts are like fitness centers – without staff they frequently become white elephants.

Here are my top 10 ingredients to successful activities programs.

1. Get the right staff. Your Tennis Pro or Activities Director should be able to inform, teach and entertain. Certifications and athletic ability are necessary, yet people skills and character are more important. Organizational and administrative skills are essential.
2. Take care of your facilities. Amenities need to evoke good feelings – one of the reasons people buy (and participate). Systematically replace worn nets, burned-out lights and remove debris for safety. These are easy to do and have big returns.
3. Actively promote. Word-of-mouth promote your activities through your entire staff. Flyers and newsletters are okay yet no substitute for someone talking. Hence, your team needs to be trained to pitch activities in presentations and informed about upcoming events. Invite the Pro to monthly staff meetings, and make her feel like a part of your team.
4. Systematically involve new residents. I suggest a call-to-action flyer in every move-in packet which new residents can convey their interests and submit to the Activities Director. Ask new residents if they would like to be contacted by the AD.
5. Deliver programs that reflect different interests. Some people want to make new friends, others want to compete and some like to learn. Develop programs that have social, competitive and instructional parts.

6. Add value with food and drinks. Eating and drinking are magnets for participation. Provide simple appetizers and non-alcoholic beverages at social events. Clean up after events without leaving a mess for the maintenance staff.
7. Have continuity with programs. Although no schedule will suit everyone, have programs on the same night, like Monday night football parties in autumn, and then rotate times about every 90-120 days.
8. Care to be involved. Success beings at the top, and the best programs have the managers involved to some degree. When the Pro calls show you care and communicate back. Successful programs are built on relationships which you cannot delegate.
9. Network with nearby businesses. Several businesses will be very interested in having your residents walk in their store or restaurant. Instead of just asking for hand-outs develop win-win situations, and you will find creative resources for food, drinks and prizes.
10. Recognize residents. Pros and Activities Directors should learn everyone's name, and introduce them to other people. Give simple prizes to winners and through raffle tickets – some can be from your networking partners. Take photos for your office scrapbook which you can show to prospects, and thank residents for participating.

The above items are a sure recipe for successful programs. Do activities very well, and they will be a reliable vehicle for closing leases and gaining renewals. Many owner/managers of apartments can copy what is repeatedly witnessed at single family homes – utilization of amenities sells real estate and builds community.

Christopher Hagman has an active real estate license and is a certified Fitness and Tennis Professional. For many years he has developed fitness, tennis and activities programs for clubs and communities. He is President of Atlantic Recreation, and you can contact him at chris@atlrec.net or 404-307-4893.