THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF BEING ON A CONDO BOARD

By Heather Cournoyer

It's been 10 long years for me as a member of the board of directors of Hargate Tower and I have witnessed the good, the bad and the ugly! Fraud, threats, lawsuits, inadequate funds, vandalism, water damage, noise complaints, evictions and more—that's the bad and ugly. The good is how we, as a board, managed to navigate through all of these issues. Before I tell you what our secret has been, let me share the specifics of our challenges.

In 2007, our highrise was one of many rental buildings in Edmonton that was converted into a condominium. The market was strong and so my husband and I bought three units in the building with the intention of riding the market and selling at a profit. Here's a tip: if there are commercial units in your building, check out who they are and if they will enhance the enjoyment of your home. The former commercial tenant was a nightclub that had many bylaw infractions over the years, leading to many headaches for the board. It has now been replaced by a very pleasant café.

In 2008, the market crashed. Our strategy changed from sell to rent. It was also then that the developer turned over the property and the board of directors formed and took over. The developer, as majority owner, was on the board along with other unit owners. He had hired a management company prior to the turnover and as new owners, we accepted a contract with them. The developer also committed money for the reserve fund, but after multiple promises, the funds never materialized. The board launched a lawsuit, which ceased when he declared bankruptcy. So now we had no reserve fund. Naturally, he was removed from the board and our first special assessment followed shortly after that. But without a reserve fund, banks were extremely reluctant to lend money to potential buyers and this was impacting the market value of each unit.

To top that off, we have had a total of three special assessments, the last of which is now financed. The owners were given the option of paying the special assessment or being part of the monthly payment plan. Needless to say, we weren't the most popular board with many of our unit owners!

Let's get back to the good. Over the past ten years, the board has worked diligently with a view to enhancing the building and making it a place where unit owners and tenants alike are proud to live. There have been multiple upgrades including new paint and carpets in all common areas, improved lighting, enhanced security, upgraded parkade, new and more modern laundry facilities and new elevators. We also have a healthy reserve fund.

Because of the improved look and security in the building, and the board's consistent application of bylaws and fines, the quality of tenants has definitely improved. It's important that if the units in the building are not owner-occupied, that landlords have a proper vetting system to ensure the enjoyment of other residents in their homes is not jeopardized. Now it's not uncommon for the both the condominium manager and the board members to receive emails congratulating us on the work we have done.

As promised earlier, here's what I consider our secret. My top ten list as to what makes our condo board great:

*We **represent all unit owners** as a whole. We are not here just for the benefit of our own units.*

*We **understand our responsibilities and obligations** under the Condominium Property Act and our own bylaws.*

*We have a **code of conduct** for the board in place that speaks to such things as self-dealing, confidentiality and decorum.*

***We manage the money!** You can't spend what you don't have. To remain attractive to owners, our condo fees have to be reasonable.*

***We communicate with our owners**. That means listening as well as talking. We use notices, emails, mail-outs, AGMs and Genie Pad.*

*We've developed a **handbook of policies and procedures** that is provided to all unit owners and tenants. It includes such topics as Communication Protocol, Move-In and Move-Outs, Pet policy, Rental Policy, Disaster Planning and Fines.*

*We **became a member of the Canadian Condominium Institute.** The benefits are endless!*

*We **encourage new members to join the board**. It adds fresh ideas and new perspectives.*

*We've **surrounded ourselves with experts** such as a lawyer, accountant, reserve fund study manager, appraiser, insurance broker and restoration company.*

*Last, but by no means least, if you are going to have a condominium management firm, **make sure you pick the right one**. It's not just about what you pay. It's about the experience, knowledge and services provided. We have used Progressive Property Management from day one and have never even considered a change. They don't just meet our expectations, they always exceed them.*

Being a volunteer on this particular board has certainly been a challenge, but it has definitely had its rewards. All unit owners now have a better investment. I've learned tons and made great friends along the way.

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