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Newcomes need a 'conduction'

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BY DAVID MACK - Special to the Sun-Times

Most new board members are not prepared for all the various responsibilities, in the view of Chris Evans, president of Vanguard Community Management in Schaumburg.

But it isn't just individuals assuming the role of board member for the first time who often lack the know-how to do the job adequately. Sometimes it is whole boards. In a lot of cases, these owners have never lived in an association setting. They may start out with false impressions.

"They've been told that everything will be done for them, but they soon are disappointed to learn that it is a board that is ultimately responsible to run the association," said Shirley Feldman, founder of Chicago-based Association Advocates Inc., a board training organization and consulting firm.

She added that real estate brokers and agents are often to blame for this ignorance. "It starts with the Realtors. We are now training Realtors to help them better educate their clients," she said.

Even the board of a new, larger association that has retained capable professional management should be trained to know about its responsibilities.

A board may develop "a false sense that if a building has professional management, then the board needs to do nothing," said Angela Falzone, a consultant with AAI who has 30 years experience in property management.

"It's still the board's job to ensure that management is guiding them correctly," she said. "Unfortunately, we are finding that some companies and managers are failing and putting the board and association at risk."

Evans has found that ignorance of the requirements and limitations of the laws and covenants has led new boards to attempt actions that exceed their authority. "Often, they are not aware of what the governing documents state, so they mistakenly believe they can do things they cannot do," Evans said.

"I have seen new board members get elected and then try to institute new policies for what the association will take care of for owners that it never had before," she said. This misapprehension can jeopardize an association's financial stability.

Next week, we'll continue subject of board member education.

Correction: The July 11 Condo Watch column had an incorrect name for the president of the 535 N. Michigan Condominium Association. The correct name is Brian Hopkins.

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