



A Complete Guide to Welcome Packets

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You just moved into a community association and, of course, have a lot to organize and even more to question. Believe it or not, for many homeowners the first piece of correspondence they receive from the association is the notice of a maintenance assessment, violation letter, or even a past due statement. Obviously, this can start things off poorly!

Instead, homeowners should be greeted with a welcome packet.

A welcome packet, sometimes called a homeowner's manual, should be the first communication a new homeowner receives from the condominium or homeowners' association. And when properly prepared, it sets the tone for a successful relationship.

Associations need to greet new homeowners in a positive and helpful manner in order to create a neighborly atmosphere where there is harmony and a sense of community.

The welcome packet should have a number of helpful components for the new owner, organized in a format that provides the necessary information from the association, as well as useful information about additional resources.

The first page of the packet is typically the notification and greeting officially welcoming the new owner as a member of the community. It is signed on behalf of the association, its board of directors, or in some cases, the management company. It's important at the front of the manual or packet to explain that within the guide, the owner will find information regarding maintenance, association responsibilities, unit owner responsibilities, important phone numbers and answers to frequently asked questions.

The guide may next outline “who” and “how” to contact those responsible for handling homeowner issues. For instance, the name and number of the management company, office hours, and an emergency number are all important. Communities may also provide gatehouse numbers, as well as a means to reach the doorman or concierge.

Some clarification of maintenance issues and a general outline of “who is responsible for what” are helpful at this point in preparation of the packet. An explanation of the obligations may identify that the responsibility for the lawn and common area maintenance, lake maintenance, security and cable television are all included in the monthly or quarterly assessments.

The packet may also identify “amenities and facilities” available within the association such as hours of operation for the pool and recreation center, as well as where an owner may obtain access passes, keys and parking permits.

Services and utilities are always items that need clarification, and a helpful chart to make the task of set up easier. Phone numbers and contact information for electricity, telephone, cable, water and sewer, garbage pick-up, mail delivery and newspapers are certainly necessary for the startup of any new household.

Next among your listings may be the names and phone numbers for the local service providers in the area. Shopping locations like supermarkets, malls, movie theaters, personal service providers such as dry cleaners, a locksmith and photo store will be helpful. The list of service providers may also include hospitals, pharmacies, houses of worship, and local cab or limousine services.

Rules and Regulations are another important section to include in any welcome packet so that new owners and residents are informed (hopefully, in a positive manner) of the guidelines which they will need to live by to function well within the community. Here, one may find where and when deliveries may be made, pet restrictions, parking requirements and structural issues just to name a few. The success of a community association is dependent upon one's willingness to cooperate and be respectful of neighbors.

Last, but not certainly least, a thorough welcome packet should contain a “forms” section. Here, for the residents' convenience, you should include the necessary forms used to operate the community. These forms may include unit owner access authorization forms, emergency information forms, pet registration forms, architectural request forms, and committee sign up forms - - just to name a few.

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A quality welcome packet will provide the new owner with a tool to more quickly become a productive member of the community and will help in the transition from outsider to participant. Associations that proactively communicate with their members have a much better opportunity to build support for future board participation and ensure a team approach to maintaining real estate values in the community. And most importantly, it's the neighborly thing to do!

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