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PO Box 250800
Atlanta, GA 30325
P: 404.350.1192
F: 404.350.1193

Visit us at:
www.LJLa.com

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Is Your Community Ready for the *BEST* Annual Meeting

Has this happened to you? You send your annual meeting notice, prepare reports to present to your homeowners, prepare ballots, get ready for the association's most important event of the year, but too few people show up to establish a quorum. Or, enough show up to establish a quorum, but it's mostly those owners unhappy with everything. How can you turn this around? Consider a new approach to annual meetings. First, rename the event to get attention. How about Annual Celebration and Volunteer Recognition Meeting. (Ok, it's

Yes, your association can reach quorum for the annual meeting - and make it a fun, entertaining yearly celebration

really an annual meeting wrapped up in a fun event and you will include the annual meeting announcement in the package. Shh.... we won't tell.)

Now with a great new name, here is our Top Ten List of ways to make your

Annual Celebration (and *annual meeting*) successful!

- 1. If You Feed Them, They Will Come!** Whether it is BBQ, snacks or ice cream, providing something enjoyable for owners at the meeting literally puts a good taste in their mouths and makes the meeting feel more like a "party." This can help spark attendance and reduce the potential tension from any challenging business at the annual meeting.
- 2. Update and Educate.** As members arrive and check in, use the opportunity to verify association records and to gather and update email addresses for future communication. This is also an opportunity to provide a copy of the association's documents to owners who may not have them. While you could have a few paper copies available, consider loading all important community documents onto USB flash drives for a few

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Lazega & Johanson
LLC PO Box 250800
Atlanta, GA 30325
(404) 350-1192 Tel
(404) 350-1193 Fax
www.LJLaw.com

dollars each. Better yet, brand the drives with association's logo. Don't have a logo? Create one now.

- 3. Plan for the Future.** Invite your local City Council person or County Commissioner or Mayor to speak. Politicians often enjoy the opportunity to speak to community groups. This can be a win win – take the opportunity to educate them on your community (perhaps the needed repaving of a street) and, down the road, if a rezoning is filed for the property next door, you have a decision maker who is now more familiar with your community and its concerns.
- 1. Sign in and Sign up.** Use the social time as an opportunity to pitch members to join your committees and the opportunity to volunteer in an area where they have interest.
- 2. Yard Contest Leading Up to Meeting.** Announce a best yard contest where the top three best yards will be awarded a prize at the annual meeting. Use categories such as “best lawn” or “most improved.” Or, have other community contests (like a community logo design contest). Nothing like a little competition to get the creative juices going and the mulch spreading. Announce the contest well before the annual meeting to promote participation.
- 3. Door Prizes!** Need a little more carrot to draw members to attend? Consider a drawing where you have to be present to win and the prize is a home improvement gift card. Concerned about whether the board can provide prizes? Generally, the board of directors can use its reasonable business judgment to offer small incentives to encourage meeting attendance, promote yard improvements or otherwise benefit the community.
- 4. Rely on the Professionals.** Is there a special assessment, loan or large increase in the annual assessment that needs to be voted on? Invite a representative from the engineering firm, the construction company or other professional to speak at the meeting to educate owners on relevant supporting background.
- 5. Be Creative with the Agenda.** Send out the annual meeting agenda with the invitation and consider including creative topics such as: “*Do I really have to read the Covenants?*” or “*3 Sections of our Covenants that Help Increase Property Values.*”
- 6. Nobody Told Me There was Going to be an Annual Meeting!** Most association bylaws call for notice of the annual meeting to be sent by U.S. mail. If your goal is to get as many folks to attend as possible, consider also using social media and email. Also consider a sign at the community entrances for a few days or weeks before the annual meeting.
- 7. Stay Positive!** Some communities consider negative options like the “threat” of a large increase in the annual assessment to increase meeting attendance. But, these tactics are more likely to make people angry when they find out you were just crying wolf. Use positive messages. Even when your community needs to tackle tough issues, owners want positive messages showing that the board is leading the community to a brighter future.

Bottom Line - Bringing owners together to meet their neighbors can only strengthen the community and make it a better place to live! Good luck!



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