

Published on HamptonRoads.com | PilotOnline.com (<http://hamptonroads.com>)

Do you know how to be a good neighbor?

Toni Guagenti
Special to The Virginian-Pilot

Pierre DeBaun had some reservations about moving into an apartment after remembering how it was to live in one outside New York City years ago.

Noisy. Unpredictable neighbors. Parking headaches.

But he decided to try it again in June and moved into The Cosmopolitan, a 14-story building in the heart of Virginia Beach's Town Center.

Now, he sings praises for the 342-unit building with its concrete floors and ceilings, friendly neighbors, myriad amenities and staff. Plus, parking isn't an issue. "I don't want to sound like a paid shill," said DeBaun, who sells dental supplies and equipment, "but I love the place."

DeBaun's excellent rating of his home isn't by luck.

Around Hampton Roads, property managers say communication and rules are keys to ensuring that residents enjoy where they live, even if they're in close proximity to hundreds of other people. "Neighborly" shouldn't be a taboo word.

In addition, multi-unit complexes are on the rise in Hampton Roads, making it important that new residents know the rules and etiquette of living among your neighbors.

Places like The Cosmopolitan give new people moving in a "resident handbook" to make they understand the community etiquette, said Amanda Dexter, the building's property manager.

The community also provides a pleasant living experience by dedicating a pet-friendly elevator, offering set move-in times for personal elevator usage and hosting monthly socials for neighbors to get to know one another.

At Colony Point Apartments off Little Creek Road in Norfolk, Jill Davis and Kristen Hogan help residents go over the 43-page lease with a fine-tooth comb. The lease is the "gospel of Colony Point," said Davis, its community manager.

Policy explanations and community and neighbor expectations are important, Davis said recently from a cozy leather chair in the community's Information Center.

Plus, Davis said, Colony Point, with 344 units, is a "real community," which means that people shouldn't expect to come home and not be involved in where they live. That's why the staff promotes getting to know your neighbors with icebreaker get-togethers, pool parties and friendliness.

Colony Point resident Jennifer Watson appreciates the openness of the community.

"I know it's old school," Watson said, but "I want to know everybody."

Watson even makes a loaf of bread for her neighbors to break the ice and get to know them.

It's paid off. When she locked herself out the other day, her neighbor asked her to come over and wait until she could get in. Her upstairs neighbors even offered their spare bedroom after her apartment flooded during November's nor'easter.

"I've lived places where neighbors aren't so considerate," she said. But at Colony Point, "she loves knowing her neighbors."

So what do neighbors do that is inconsiderate of others?

"Parking, dogs, trash," said Walter Campbell, vice president of The Community Group, which manages more than 60 associations - some 9,700 units' worth - in Virginia Beach.

Parking in another person's spot, not cleaning up after one's dog and either creating trash in the community or leaving outside the Dumpster irk residents, Campbell said.

Donna M. Bodony, a Community Group association manager who is responsible for eight condominium associations, hears those types of complaints, in addition to noise issues, almost on a daily basis.

That's why the three C's - communication, cooperation, consideration - are imperative to multi-family, she stressed.

"When you're in a community like that, you have to be together with people, if not, why are you living there?" asked Teresa Harper, president of Driftide Association I, off Military Highway in Virginia Beach.

Harper, a Driftide resident for 12 years, said being a good neighbor is about taking responsibility and caring for your community.

She conceded that isn't always easy with some neighbors, but that's why rules exist, especially in condominium associations in which a board makes sure those regulations are adhered to.

As Bodony said, most issues, such as noise complaints and parking problems, are taken care of through communication, including letters, phone calls and e-mails, but sometimes the board has to get involved. If that doesn't work, in other cases, the problem is handled through the court system.

As with most multi-family living situations, residents have an outlet for complaints.

At one of the properties managed by S.L. Nusbaum Realty Co. in Norfolk, for example, a resident was surprised that she could send a letter of complaint when her neighbor was playing his music too loud, recalled Caroline L. Forehand, Nusbaum's multi-family marketing director.

"A lot of times the resident doesn't know they're causing an issue until somebody tells them," she

said.

Forehand said Nusbaum has seen a rise in the number of apartment complexes the company manages in the last five years.

"In the last five years we have developed or obtained management of 17 apartment communities in our Hampton Roads market, totaling 4,018 units or approximately 10,045 residents," Forehand said.

The company also has four communities in various stages of development, with about 549 units that will house 1,400 residents.

Many of these places are in town-center developments, close to work, shopping, dining and entertainment, Forehand said.

That's what people like Pierre DeBaun enjoy about where they live. He's happy at life with hundreds of other residents at The Cosmopolitan.

"I'm not going to be moving anytime soon," he said.

Toni Guagenti, tguagenti@cox.net

Source URL (retrieved on 02/26/2010 - 00:17): <http://hamptonroads.com/2010/02/do-you-know-how-be-good-neighbor>