



WRITING PROFESSIONAL LETTERS

We run our own association (34 units). We are looking for help in writing professional-sounding letters to owners to address violations of various issues. Do you have templates or suggestions where we could find these types of letters? - Mary

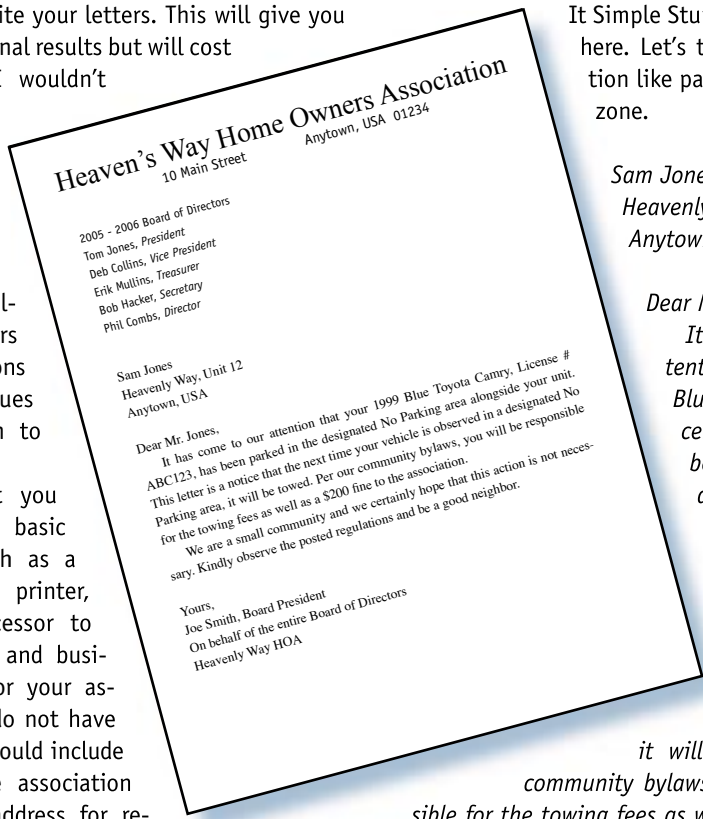
Communicating effectively and

professionally with association members is a challenge for all associations, especially smaller associations with limited resources of time, money and ability. You could hire an attorney or other business professional to write your letters. This will give you the most professional results but will cost a premium, so I wouldn't recommend it for a 34-unit association. Here are some low-cost, no-cost ideas to help you add professionalism to your letters regarding violations or any other issues important enough to write about.

Assuming that you have access to basic writing tools such as a computer and a printer, use a word processor to create letterhead and business envelopes for your association. These do not have to be fancy but should include the name of the association and a business address for return correspondence, which may be the property management company address. You may also wish to include the name of your board of directors, property manager, etc. The idea is to create a letterhead that is informative and professional looking.

Professional letterhead sets the tone for professional correspondence. Once you have decided on the letterhead, move on to the body of the letter. Begin by addressing the resident and hom-

owner. If the party you are writing to is a tenant, this is a great way to alert the landlord as well. It's best to simply state the problem without "vilify" the violator." This is not a personal attack; it's an attempt to rectify a violation. The KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) principal applies here. Let's take a common violation like parking in a no parking zone.



*Sam Jones
Heavenly Way, Unit 12
Anytown, USA*

*Dear Mr. Jones,
It has come to our attention that your 1999 Blue Toyota Camry, License # ABC123, has been parked in the designated No Parking area alongside your unit. This letter is a notice that the next time your vehicle is observed in a designated No Parking area, it will be towed. Per our community bylaws, you will be responsible for the towing fees as well as a \$200 fine to the association.
We are a small community and we certainly hope that this action is not necessary. Kindly observe the posted regulations and be a good neighbor.*

*Yours,
Joe Smith, Board President
On behalf of the entire Board of Directors
Heavenly Way HOA*

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and usage of swing staging? And if swing staging is required, what type of roof access is available? Is special rigging required due to unusually designed roofs, overhanging glassed areas, etc.?

For an area that is 25 feet high, for example, the contractor using the proper ladders, or ladderjacks and walk boards, which allow the contractor close and directly visual access to the painted areas, should charge more than the contractor planning to use long extension poles attached to a roller. A painter standing on the ground can't do as good a job as one looking directly at the wall surfaces. What if there are cracks requiring attention that can't be seen from the ground?

Items as basic as the type of roller and brushes make a difference in a finished product. An inexpensive paint roller does not put on the paint evenly and will spatter and "spit," resulting in a messy job. Poor quality brushes leave a far rougher and uneven looking finish.

However, even the best-quality materials will not produce the long-term results you've been promised if they are improperly or inadequately applied.

EXPERIENCED CREW SUPERVISORS

Top-quality contractors pay for top-notch, highly experienced supervisors to be present at all times on all jobs. First and foremost, each crew must have an experienced foreman or crew chief. This is a person who is knowledgeable about your contract specifications and works directly on-site daily, directing the painters and acting as the primary on-site liaison with the customer.

Additionally, it is important to have an operations manager and/or the contractor himself/herself spot-checking on a daily

basis. Extensive supervision coupled with top-notch workers, material and equipment is very important to achieving the desired results the first time around.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication is paramount. If the customer has a question that, for example, the crew chief cannot answer, calling the contractor's "office" and listening to an answering machine – during working hours – can be very frustrating. This lack of direct, efficient communication may slow down the job or cause costly mistakes that could have been avoided. A professional contractor should maintain a fully staffed office, always providing a person for the customers to speak with during working hours. If that person cannot offer sufficient answers, then, with today's cellular technology, someone who does have the appropriate answer should be accessible in a relatively brief period of time.

NEATNESS

Another basic item to be considered is the proper storage of materials and equipment on the job site, in addition to the necessary clean up at the end of each day. Most customers don't want 500 gallons of paint buckets, drop cloths, old tape and paper tools, etc., kept in a laundry room or on their lawn or parking lot. The professional contractor supplies a neat and clean storage trailer to be left on-site for the duration of the job in pre-agreed areas. Then at the end of each working day, storable equipment and materials are returned to this trailer.

In this example, the problem is addressed, a resolution is offered and professionalism is maintained. Once this letter is sent, a precedent is set and a template is in place for future violators of this particular rule. Over time, you will build your own library of such letters and will be able to address any violation quickly, efficiently and professionally.

The Community Associations Institute (CAI) does offer a bookstore with a variety of relevant publications. Visit them online at www.caionline.org and follow the link to their bookstore. You can also contact the state or regional chapter of CAI to network with

local leaders who share your problems and may even be able to share their solutions with you. You may be able to modify one of their letters to suit your own needs.

Rest assured that once the first professional letter is generated, the subsequent ones will be much simpler. The simple addition of basic but professional looking letterhead will help set the tone for your message and you can be assured that it will be better received than past efforts. Good luck!

Bob Gourley is one of the founders of MyEZCondo. He also serves as board president of Captain's Walk.