



# OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK

Opening the Door to Careers  
in Community Association Management

*A resource for job seekers at any stage of their professional lives*



## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION?

We get that question all of the time. Community associations are planned communities—think of condominiums, homeowners associations, and housing cooperatives. For many homeowners in community associations, their homes represent the single-biggest investment they will make in their lifetimes. That fact alone gives them a substantial vested interest in their community.

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGER?

A smart, talented, jack-of-all-trades (just like yourself) who is critical to a community's success. The job of the manager is part financial management, urban planning, facilities maintenance, community development, volunteer management, and project management. If you have excellent people skills, strong communication skills, and the ability to collaborate and solve problems, you have what it takes to succeed as a manager.

It sounds like a big job, but don't worry. Education and certification programs through Community Associations Institute (CAI) and the Community Association Managers International Certification Board (CAMICB) provide the training you need to build your resume and start a career in community association management.

## A GROWING CAREER FOR A GROWING INDUSTRY

Community association management is a young profession that has experienced staggering growth since its beginning just over 40 years ago. According to U.S. government reports, in 1970, there were approximately 10,000 community associations. By 2020, that number has grown to more than 350,000 community associations, home to nearly 74 million people. Housing construction statistics show common interest developments are the fastest-growing segment of residential home construction, and rapid growth is expected to continue. Those numbers impress us every day. Ready to get started?

## COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT...

### ... IS A WELCOMING PROFESSION.

Whether someone is entering the job market for the first time, looking to switch industries, or is an established professional seeking a career change, community management can be a good fit for individuals with varying knowledge, skills, and qualifications.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, people with a high school diploma or equivalent degree can pursue entry-level positions in community association management, and the profession requires less than five years of experience in a related occupation. Job prospects are even greater for those who hold both a college degree and a professional certification.

Professionals who previously worked in apartment management, hospitality and tourism, real estate, military, education, and more often have rewarding careers in community management.

### ... HAS PLENTIFUL OPPORTUNITIES.

Since the 1970s, growth in the community association housing model has been exponential. There are around 355,000 community associations in the U.S. as of 2020, according to estimates from the Foundation for Community Association Research. Roughly 4,000 new homeowners associations and condominiums are built each year—many needing professional management.

The demand for professional community management is outpacing the number of individuals entering the profession. Community association management companies are seeking creative ways to find talent and increase the pipeline of community managers.

According to a December 2020 survey of management company executives and hiring managers by the Foundation:

**| 97% | believe there is a shortage of community managers.**

**| 63% | report they have current openings for community managers.**

**| 59% | say they have between two and six open positions.**

### ... HAS A BROAD JOB MARKET.

Community associations can be found in the biggest cities to the most picturesque island getaways. California and Florida each have nearly 50,000 communities up and down their coasts, according to estimates from the Foundation. Texas, Illinois, North Carolina, and New York each have more than 14,000 associations. There are thousands of homeowners associations and condominiums in just about every state. International opportunities are available as well—from Canada and South America to the Middle East, South Africa, and Australia.



## COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT...

### ... OFFERS LONG-TERM JOB SECURITY.

Long-term job security has frequently been attributed to community management, especially during times of economic uncertainty. According to a December 2020 survey of community association managers conducted by the Foundation, nearly half say the perceived job stability was the main draw for entering the profession.

### ... IS KNOWN FOR ITS DAILY VARIETY.

Having multiple responsibilities, among other factors, is significant in community association managers' overall sense of satisfaction—and may contribute to longevity in the profession. According to the Foundation's manager survey:

- Solving problems is listed as the main contributor to job satisfaction by 84% of community managers, followed by variety in their tasks each day (73%), and helping people (72%).
- Community managers want to be able to improve the communities they serve, both in appearance (68%) and financially (64%).
- Sixty percent of those surveyed say that the opportunity to lead contributes to their overall satisfaction.

### ... HAS TREMENDOUS EARNING POTENTIAL.

Depending on years and type of experience, those new to the profession might start as assistant community managers or portfolio managers who oversee multiple communities with salaries that average \$52,000 and \$60,000, according to preliminary results from the Foundation's 2021 *Community Association Manager Compensation and Salary Survey*. Managers with more experience might move into on-site (\$78,000), high-rise (\$105,000), or large-scale community roles (\$138,500). Community association management company executives frequently earn more than \$100,000 annually.

Salaries and bonuses often depend on scope of responsibilities, years of experience, number of direct reports, performance, productivity, financial results, and professional designations earned.

Community association managers frequently start by earning the Certified Manager of Community Associations (CMCA®) credential from the Community Association Managers International Certification Board (CAMICB). These managers average \$87,500 annually.

Those who go on to achieve more advanced designations from Community Associations Institute (CAI) earn even more. Managers average \$95,000 with the Association Management Specialist (AMS) designation, \$116,500 with the Professional Community Association Manager (PCAM) designation, and \$155,000 with the Large-Scale Manager (LSM) designation.

### ... IS YOUR NEXT CAREER.

*Opportunities Knock* serves as a guide for those interested in learning about the profession and deciding if it's the right career path for them. Open the door to find an overview of the community manager's responsibilities, desired traits, and transferable skills.

Job seekers also will find a collection of profiles of community managers who have successfully transitioned from other industries and backgrounds.

In addition, community association volunteers sometimes jump to the professional side of the community. Those considering that change can learn about what it takes in "Training Ground," an article reprinted from *Common Ground™* magazine, the flagship publication of CAI (see p. 14).



## JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

A community association manager's role is to implement the policies set by the board of directors, oversee operations, services, and programs as laid out in the contract with the association, and provide information and advice to assist board members in their decision-making.

There are a few general areas in which community association managers perform tasks. Managers of small associations may only perform some of these functions while large-scale community managers may perform all of them with the help of staff members.

### FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

- Bill and collect assessments.
- Pay bills.
- Prepare the payroll for on-site personnel.
- Draft financial reports and budgets.
- Maintain and monitor reserve study and reserve funding plans for community property.
- Maintain financial records.
- Prepare, implement, and oversee the association's annual budget, subject to the board's approval.
- Keep the board regularly informed of the association's fiscal, financial, and operational health.

### ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES

- Organize and attend annual meetings, board meetings, and committee meetings.
- Maintain the membership roster, records, and files.

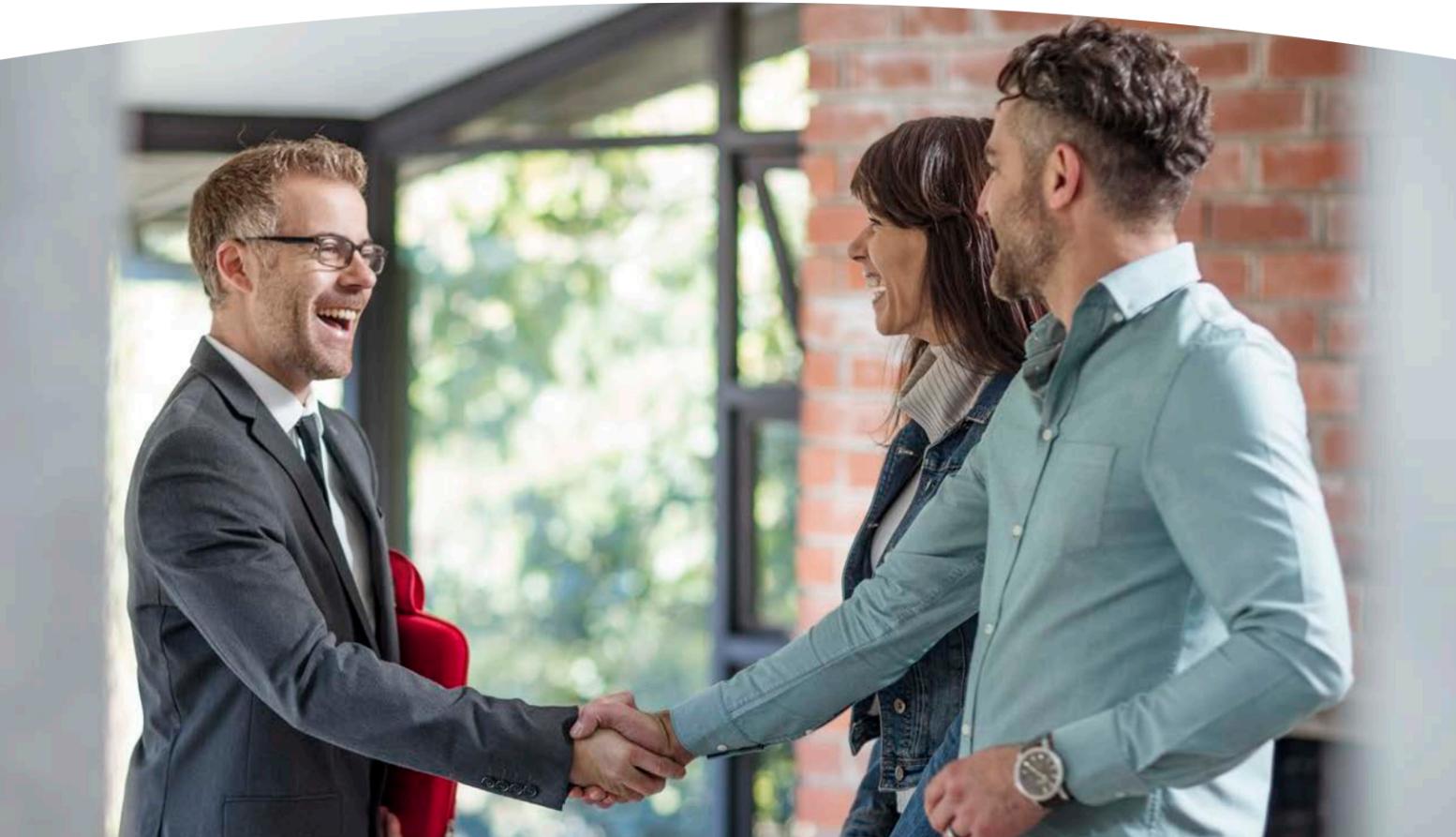
- Prepare and process home resale information.
- Draft and distribute resident information packets.
- Write, prepare, and distribute the printed or electronic newsletter and special mailings.
- Conduct community relations.
- Prepare board orientation packets.
- Review standard operating procedures.
- Conduct an inventory of association property.
- Provide after-hours response and emergency service if there is a threat to life or the association property.
- Record and process work orders.
- Assist the board in the hiring, firing, and supervising of on-site personnel and service providers.
- Negotiate all association contracts, subject to the board's approval.

### BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND GROUNDS UPKEEP

- Oversee building maintenance such as managing and monitoring a plan that includes regular cleaning, plumbing, and painting.
- Coordinate grounds upkeep services including landscaping, maintenance of recreational facilities, snow removal, trash collection, and street sweeping.
- Provide periodic grounds inspection reports.
- Monitor the work of on-site employees and service providers who often perform these services.
- Ensure compliance with architectural guidelines and design covenants.

A COMMUNITY MANAGER'S LIST OF RESPONSIBILITIES CAN BE EXTENSIVE, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN ASPECTS THAT ARE OUT OF THEIR SCOPE OF AUTHORITY. HERE IS WHAT ASPIRING MANAGERS SHOULD KEEP IN MIND ABOUT THEIR ROLE:

- The manager is trained to deal with conflict but typically will not get involved in homeowner disputes unless association rules are being violated.
- While the manager works closely with the board, he or she is an advisor—not a member of the board.
- The community manager is available to residents and can answer questions, but he or she is not the board's information officer.
- The manager is responsible for monitoring service providers' performance but not supervising them. Any issues will be brought to the board by the manager to decide how to proceed under the terms of the contract.
- The manager inspects the community regularly but cannot be expected to catch every maintenance issue.
- The manager does not set policy. That is done by the board of directors.
- The manager has a broad range of expertise and may offer opinions but will not give technical advice in areas where he or she is not qualified.



### DESIRED SKILLS AND QUALITIES

The best community association managers possess a robust skill set to help them succeed in their role. They have excellent relational skills as they work closely with residents, board members, and business partners, are able to communicate effectively, demonstrate attention to detail, and thrive on a variety of tasks.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists some important skills that community managers should have to excel in their work:

**COMMUNICATION.** Managers must understand contracts and real estate documents to clearly explain the materials and answer questions raised by residents or board members.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE.** Managers must provide excellent customer service to keep homeowners happy and expand their business with new clients.

**INTERPERSONAL.** Because community association managers interact with people every day, they must have excellent interpersonal skills.

**LISTENING.** Managers must listen to and understand residents to meet their needs.

**ORGANIZATIONAL.** Managers must be able to plan, coordinate, and direct multiple service providers at the same time, often for multiple properties.

**PROBLEM-SOLVING.** Community association managers must be able to solve a wide variety of problems between residents, homeowners, and board members and know when to contact experts for help.

In addition, exhibiting certain qualities can help job seekers stand out to employers, whether it's a community association management company or a board of directors. In a 2016 Glassdoor.com article, career counselor Heather Huhman notes that the most valuable qualities for any professional are integrity, leadership, likability, flexibility, and coachability.

**INTEGRITY.** This means being able to take accountability and owning up to mistakes. During a job interview, speak briefly about a past defeat but elaborate how you recovered from the setback. Taking ownership for previous mistakes and communicating how you resolved an issue demonstrates problem-solving skills.

**LEADERSHIP.** Employers value workers who serve as an inspiration to others and are able to lead effectively. Beyond stating that you're a team player, talk about a project that you directed or a time when you stepped up to lead. Show evidence or data to back up your statements and include references who can vouch for your leadership qualities.

**LIKABILITY.** Positive relationships at work—especially with coworkers—can be beneficial to your likability. As with leadership qualities, having references to vouch for your friendly demeanor can help you stand out as an ideal candidate.

**FLEXIBILITY.** Sometimes it's important to step up and lend a hand to help meet a crucial deadline or achieve an important goal. Draw attention to a time when you worked on a task or project outside of your job description or when you took on additional responsibilities.

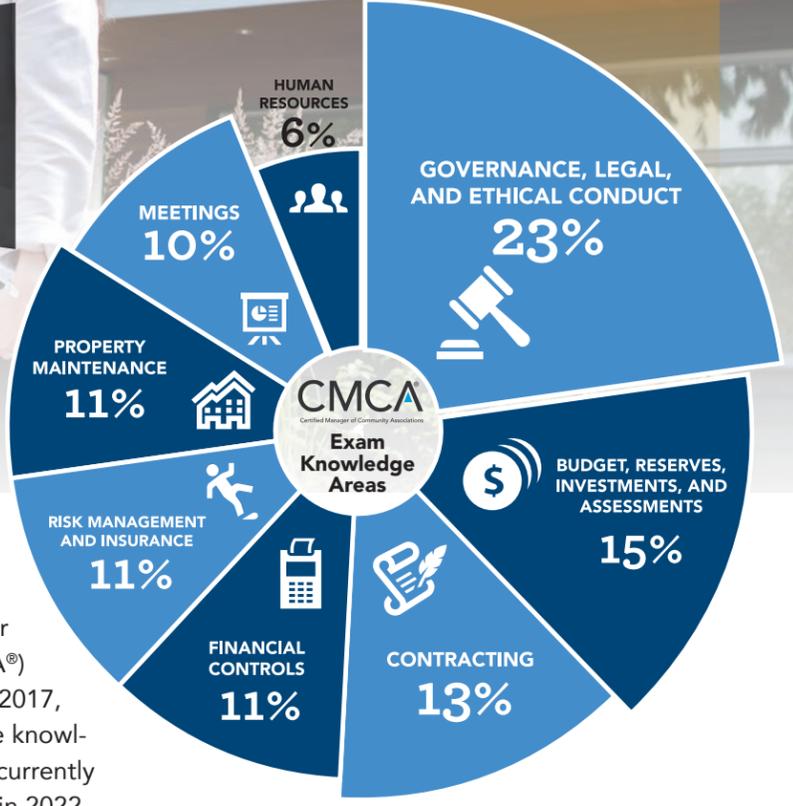
**COACHABILITY.** No matter the job, it's important to show a willingness to learn and build upon your knowledge, skills, and qualifications. If you've sought continuing education or professional development opportunities, that can show your employer a desire to improve and grow in your potential role.



Managers who obtain CMCA certification can expect to earn 20% more than noncredentialed community association managers.

## SETTING THE STANDARD FOR THE PROFESSION

Every three to five years, the Community Association Managers International Certification Board (CAMICB) conducts a job analysis that examines the current state of the community association management profession around the world—the responsibilities of a professional manager and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to fulfill those responsibilities. The job analysis helps define the knowledge areas required to perform successfully as a community association manager and provides a benchmark for updating the exam blueprint for the Certified Manager of Community Associations (CMCA®) exam. The most recent CMCA job analysis, conducted in 2017, identified more than 100 relevant tasks organized into the knowledge areas represented in the figure at right. CAMICB is currently conducting a new job analysis, scheduled for completion in 2022.



» The full list of relevant tasks may be found online in the [CMCA Handbook](http://www.camicb.org). [www.camicb.org](http://www.camicb.org)

### OBTAINING THE CMCA CREDENTIAL IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3!

COMMUNITY MANAGERS INTERESTED IN OBTAINING THE CMCA CREDENTIAL CAN DO SO BY FOLLOWING THESE THREE STEPS.

- STEP 1** Fulfill at least one prerequisite requirement:
  - OPTION 1: EDUCATION.** Complete and pass one prerequisite course on community association management.
  - OPTION 2: EXPERIENCE.** If you have at least five years experience as a community association manager, you may receive a one-time waiver of the prerequisite course. The experience must be as a community association manager—not as an assistant manager. If you do not successfully pass the examination the first time, you will be required to take the prerequisite course prior to retaking the examination.
  - OPTION 3: LICENSE OR CREDENTIAL.** Hold an active Arizona CAAM, California CCAM, Florida CAM, Illinois CAM, or Nevada CAM
- STEP 2** Complete and submit the online application for the CMCA examination.
- STEP 3** Successfully pass the CMCA examination.

## MAKING THE MOVE TO COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

Are you coming from a different field or career and aren't sure which attributes are transferable to community association management? Below is a list of professions and industries with skills or traits that can benefit you on your path to entering the profession.

### APARTMENT MANAGER

- Effective communication
- Responsive customer service
- Exceptional organizational skills
- Budget management
- Marketing expertise
- Multitasking
- Builds and maintains interpersonal relationships
- Critical thinking
- Approachableness
- Proper time management
- Computer literacy

### HEALTH CARE

- Critical thinking
- Effective communication
- Attention to detail
- Builds and maintains interpersonal relationships
- Ability to lead
- Technical knowledge
- Flexibility
- Active listener
- Coordination and collaboration
- Good judgment
- Informed decision-making

- Ambition
- Responsiveness
- Problem-solving
- Flexibility
- Active listener
- Exceptional organizational skills

### RETAIL/COMMERCE

- Responsive customer service
- Effective communication
- Cultural and commercial awareness
- Working under pressure
- Teamwork
- Proper time management
- Problem-solving
- Initiative
- Attention to detail
- Responsibility

### ASSOCIATION BOARD LEADER

- Nonprofit leadership
- Effective communication
- Financial understanding and oversight
- Community outreach
- Initiative and determination

### HOSPITALITY/TOURISM

- Responsive customer service
- Cultural awareness
- Effective communication
- Multitasking
- Strong work ethic
- Multilingual proficiency
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Attention to detail

### STUDENT

- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Coordination and collaboration
- Leading by example
- Adaptability
- Initiative
- Effective oral and written communication
- Information analysis
- Curiosity and imagination

### EDUCATION/TEACHING

- Sociable
- Ability to lead
- Exceptional organizational skills
- Respectfulness
- Teamwork
- Effective communication
- Adaptability
- Builds and maintains interpersonal relationships
- Creativity
- Self-evaluation
- Patience
- Emotional intelligence
- Confidence
- Dedication
- Sense of humor
- Approachableness

### MILITARY

- Effective communication
- Flexibility
- Efficient planning
- Problem-solving
- Technical knowledge
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Ability to lead

### REAL ESTATE

- Effective communication
- Integrity and ethics
- Negotiation capability
- Familiarity with applicable laws and regulations
- Persistence

### TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER

- Customer support
- Critical thinking
- Proper time management
- Troubleshooting capability
- Reliability
- Project management
- Exceptional organizational skills
- Effective communication

PROFILES OF SUCCESS

Many community association managers successfully transition into the profession from other careers, industries, and backgrounds. Whether they served in the military, were educators, practiced law, or were involved in hospitality work, these individuals bring necessary skills to their work with community associations.



**MILITARY SERVICE**

**EDWARD D. THOMAS, CMCA, AMS, PCAM**, CEO of Property Management People in Frederick, Md., served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1969. He worked as an air traffic controller with the Federal Aviation Administration before starting a real estate brokerage company in 1981, which eventually morphed into his community association management company.

He says that military service, from basic training to field operations, draws similarities to community association management. "The military forces compliance or you're discharged. There's structure. You must follow and obey rules, be a team player, communicate, compromise, and build trust with others in your platoon," notes Thomas. "Leadership, trust, and respect are valuable skills and traits that I learned in the Army that I apply to my everyday duties today."



**MILITARY SERVICE**

**STEVEN Y. BRUMFIELD, CMCA, AMS, PCAM**, vice president and national director of the community association group at Toll Brothers Inc. in Horsham, Pa., served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1989 to 1996.

A career in community association management is a good fit for people with a military service background because it offers job security, says Brumfield. "The community association industry is not as affected by cycles in the economy as some (other fields)," he notes. "It needs people who are predisposed to successfully working with people under challenging circumstances."



*"(Being a community manager is) both predictable and surprising at the same time. It's challenging and personal work, and I love that there's always an opportunity to make a positive impact on someone's day."*

—LATONYA YOUNG-CLAYBORNE, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, A MANAGER IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

**NONPROFITS**

**LATONYA YOUNG-CLAYBORNE, CMCA, AMS, PCAM**, a manager in Washington, D.C., worked for charitable organizations such as United Way of America and Gifts in Kind America (now Good360) and planned fundraising events for the American Diabetes Association and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society before entering the community association management profession.

Young-Clayborne says she enjoys that her job brings something new every day, but also that there is consistency and routine. "It's both predictable and surprising at the same time. It's challenging and personal work, and I love that there's always an opportunity to make a positive impact on someone's day."



**MILITARY SERVICE**

**MICHAEL E. PACKARD, PCAM**, senior vice president of Associa in Carlsbad, Calif., served as a captain in the U.S. Air Force for four years during the Vietnam War and is a recipient of the Bronze Star Medal. Veterans are trustworthy, have a great work ethic, understand the importance of public service, and are able to adapt to changing situations on the fly, says Packard. "They are commitment-oriented and unlikely to jump from job to job, leading to lower turnover for potential employers," he adds.



**COUNSELING**

**YOHANNA LAROCHE, CMCA, AMS**, is regional vice president with Sentry Management overseeing community associations in Charleston and Hilton Head Island, S.C., and Savannah, Ga. LaRoche, who has degrees in psychology and counseling, worked as a rehabilitation counselor for a company that provided support to people with developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, and substance abuse issues before joining Sentry Management as a community association manager in 2009. "Her background brings a certain calm to a very hectic industry, and that calm sets the tone for her office," says Bradley Pomp, Sentry Management president.



**SECURITY**

**CAT CARMICHAEL, CMCA, PCAM**, from San Clemente, Calif., has been serving the community association profession for three decades, both as a management company executive and as a financial services professional. She was CAI's 2019 president and now operates Strategy 1 2 3, a consulting business that leads management companies through succession planning, mergers, and acquisitions. Carmichael hadn't always planned to dedicate her career to community associations; she graduated from the University of California, Irvine with a degree in criminal justice and wanted to become a federal law enforcement agent.

Carmichael's first job was with a private security firm, where she managed security officers for a gated community called Huntington Landmark in Orange County, Calif. After some experience with the 24-hour nature of security, she decided she wanted a business focus, so she became a community manager trainee.

Now, Carmichael is a champion for the next generation of professionals serving associations. "Executives tell me finding new talent is their biggest challenge," she says. "Community associations are a true economic engine, and there's a need for talent at all levels."

She loves the complex problem-solving nature of the business and says it's incumbent on a manager to help communities achieve their vision. "Every one is like a puzzle, and the pieces are the members of the board, the homeowners, and the business partners who serve them," she says.

When newcomers to common interest communities join the field, Carmichael recommends that they step away from their email, solicit feedback, and get involved. "You cannot manage a property from a desk. You have to be in a community to understand what drives it," she says.



**DEVELOPMENT**

**PEPE GUTIÉRREZ** is CEO and founder of MegaFincas, a management company in Alicante, Spain. He initially worked for a developer and enjoyed the frequent contact with the community association management world, which led to him entering the profession more than 35 years ago.

He sees community association management on the path of continuing growth in his native Spain and other countries as well. "With the support of other community management professionals and by learning new techniques and best practices, the service we provide can only improve."





**MILITARY SERVICE**

**ROBERT A. FELIX, CMCA, PCAM, RS**, president of Verity Property Management in Boise, Idaho, served in the U.S. Air Force. In the 1980s, he applied for an on-site community association manager position at a small resort community while enrolled in college, which helped him finish his education.

With a bit of dedication and after being shown a clear pathway for professional development by CAI, he has enjoyed a rewarding career in community association management for more than three decades. He provides an extensive level of services beyond management to his association clients.

His advice for new managers is to understand, measure, and manage expectations from community association boards and residents. "We give a lot of service away in our industry, and we need to practice saying to our clients, 'Sure, we can do that, and this is what it costs.' "



**LAW**

**TEYRA EHLERS, CMCA, AMS**, founder and CEO of Administra PTY in Panama City, Panama, decided to pursue community association management after serving on the board of her condominium and seeing an opportunity to improve upon the service. A lawyer with more than 20 years of experience in property law and real estate, she entered the management field in 2011 and founded her own company in 2017.

Her advice for those who are new to community association management is to learn to communicate effectively with board members, residents, and service providers; stay up to date on all laws and regulations relevant to community associations; and have an understanding of accounting, real estate, finance, law, customer service, and architectural design. "We're not expected to have a bachelor's degree in all the aspects related to community associations, but we need to be able to sit down with a board of directors and speak on every issue and every matter that affects a community."



**EDUCATION**

**T. PETER KRISTIAN, CMCA, LSM, PCAM**, general manager of Hilton Head Plantation Property Owners' Association in Hilton Head, S.C., started working as a high school teacher and then a special education teacher before switching to a career in community association management. He says that the techniques he learned in teaching have been beneficial both in providing service to residents and listening to the board empathically to try to steer them in the right path in their decision-making.

As a community manager, he notes that the biggest challenge is frequently dealing with a diversity of opinions. "There's always a dissenting side, and you have to be careful not to take the bait and have someone try to get under your skin. No matter how divisive someone may seem to be, you are the professional and you need to be nice," says Kristian. "Even though they're disagreeing with you, and you may disagree with them, you listen to their side."



**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

**JEEVAN D'MELLO, CMCA, AMS, LSM, PCAM**, CEO of Zenesis Corporation in Dubai, initially worked in roles offering IT solutions at a Dubai-based international bank and later a global economic research and consulting firm before entering the community association management profession in 2002 as senior director at Emaar Community Management, AAMC, in Dubai. During his tenure, which included a position as chief customer and community officer, he managed a total of 35,000 units across some of the city's most iconic and luxurious towers, including the Burj Khalifa.

"The exciting thing about our profession is that there's never a dull moment. Every day provides new challenges. It keeps me alert," says D'Mello. "There's always a situation to resolve, a crisis to manage, or a customer to be served. This profession is very fulfilling because you can really be of service to people by taking care of one of their most precious assets: their home."



**DEVELOPMENT AND HOSPITALITY**

**KATHRYN C. DANELLA, CMCA, LSM, PCAM**, a past president of CAI, and general manager of Boca Pointe Community Association in Boca Raton, Fla., for more than three decades, started as an administrative assistant for the developer and was urged by the board to stay as manager after transition to homeowner control. The community sits on 1,000 acres and includes 4,000 residences in 28 villages, a country club, athletic center, shopping center, and two places of worship.

Danella felt prepared for community association management after balancing a lot of projects, egos, and tasks while working as an executive assistant for Hyatt Hotels. "Hotels and communities are all about managing people, a lifestyle, and a property. The only difference is associations don't have the power to evict a resident," she says.

**RECREATION**

**CATHERINE FULKERSON, CMCA**, founder of Points North Strategies and former chief executive officer of Reston Association in Virginia, began her career at the master-planned community in 1991 as a tennis program assistant. She had tired of refolding sweaters at a department store and thought she could put her education and love of tennis to use. She steadily climbed Reston's ranks thereafter, holding assistant and managerial positions and a role as director of administration, member services, and IT. She was named acting CEO in 2013 before earning the permanent role.

When Fulkerson started the tennis program job, she had no intention of sticking around for long. "I thought this would be a stop gap until I completed my master's degree in Civil War history—another one of my passions. I thought I would enjoy working at one of the battlefield parks," she says.

Fulkerson believed in what she was doing and saw opportunities to make things better. "I had, and still have, a tendency to raise my hand and say, 'I can do that,' or 'I think I know how these processes can be improved.' I ended up creating new job duties for myself that led into new positions," she adds.

After attending a couple of Reston board meetings, she realized that community associations are one of the purest forms of democracy. "It went to everything I studied and was impassioned with in college," Fulkerson says.

She advises young professionals to take advantage of the learning opportunities at CAI. "Our industry is blessed with professionals who are willing to share their knowledge and experiences to help you make the most of what you are doing," Fulkerson says. "Put into practice what you learn and never stop enhancing what you know."



**DEVELOPMENT**

**ELAINE WARGA-MURRAY, CMCA, AMS, PCAM**, CEO of Regency Management Group in Howell, N.J., is no stranger to carving her own path in more than 30 years in community association management. Before entering the profession, she produced instructional videos for managers while working for a large developer, an experience that motivated her to become a CAI member.

In 1984, Warga-Murray became the first woman in New Jersey to receive the Professional Community Association Manager (PCAM) designation, and she is also one of the first managers to obtain the Association Management Specialist (AMS) credential. She founded her first community association management firm, E.W. Murray Associates, in 1986. Throughout her career, she has sought to empower women in the industry, and she pays her knowledge forward as a long-time CAI faculty instructor.

Warga-Murray believes in the power of mentorship—both giving and receiving it. "If I had not been mentored, I would not have pursued community association management. I acknowledge my responsibility as a mentor to everyone that I employ," she says.

She recommends all new community managers find someone they admire or who is willing to help them achieve their career goals. "Most managers feel that just having a designation is good, but you need to have a career path and develop leadership skills so that you can be your own entrepreneur," she says.



**EDUCATION**

**JAMES H. DODSON IV, CMCA, AMS, LSM, PCAM**, a CAI president and former executive director at Ewa by Gentry Community Association in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, worked for more than 40 years in community association management. A former high school and college teacher, he switched careers in 1976 and founded his own management company in 1981, later selling it to focus on managing large-scale communities.

"When I started managing community associations, nearly everybody we hired was unfamiliar with them. For many young people or retirees, it was an opportunity to try out a new career," says Dodson. "Over the past 20 years, legislative changes have created the face of community management, and it's no longer an entry-level position with training provided by companies. Now, they often hire someone who can hit the ground running."

Dodson believes community association managers should have a willingness to continue their education, the ability to listen, and, most importantly, be able to hone their communication skills to express themselves clearly and precisely.



*"There's always a situation to resolve, a crisis to manage, or a customer to be served. This profession is very fulfilling because you can really be of service to people by taking care of one of their most precious assets: their home."*

—JEEVAN D'MELLO, CMCA, AMS, LSM, PCAM, CEO OF ZENESIS CORPORATION IN DUBAI

Some community association board members are finding a new career in community management, but the transition isn't without a learning curve.

Reprinted with permission from *Common Ground*™ magazine, the flagship publication of Community Associations Institute. Article originally published in the September October 2012 issue.

ASK A DOZEN professional community managers how they each came to the business, and you'll get 12 different answers; their previous professional backgrounds and paths to this field will be as disparate as industrial engineering, insurance sales and software development. No matter what their prior careers, however, few managers understand association needs as well as those who come from the ranks of board members.

Some get the idea to go professional after observing how managers they've worked with handle boards and homeowners. Others are recruited by management company executives who have seen firsthand their leadership qualities.

A fundamental understanding of bookkeeping, human resources practices, and basic leadership techniques can be indispensable to anyone who transitions to association management, but the move from board member to manager isn't as easy or seamless as many expect.

**TAKING THE LEAP**

Michael Crew, CMCA, PCAM, started Homeowner Management Services (HMS) in Atlanta nearly 20 years ago after briefly serving as his association's board treasurer.

"At that time in my career, I was looking for some business opportunities outside of my corporate life," says Crew, who has a degree in industrial engineering and worked in manufacturing, information systems and corporate marketing. "I started looking into what (association management) would take. I had this little epiphany one day and said, 'Gosh, I can do this.' I opened the business—although it sounds kind of corny—literally in my living room on a table and with one file cabinet."

HMS now has a staff of 10 that manages more than 90 communities and steadfastly encourages board training.

Larry Pittman realized his condominium association in Panama City Beach, Fla., needed a management change shortly after being elected board president. "We were literally broke," he says. "No money in the bank and no major vendor would provide service for us, because so many of them hadn't been paid." So Pittman and fellow board members fired the on-site manager of 18 years and hired a new management company.

After working with the new company on several improvement projects, Pittman indicated that he intended to get Florida's state community association management license so he could be "a better board member." At the same time, he also told the company's CEO he was interested in a management job. Within a few months, he was offered an on-site position near his own condominium.

"I jumped into it and liked it," says Pittman. "Six months later, our board decided to change management companies, and the agreement they had with the new management company—unbeknownst to me—was that I would be the manager." Within two years, he founded Pittman Management Services.

**ANSWERING THE CALL**

Some management companies, including McShane and Associates in West Bloomfield, Mich., actively recruit board members.

Lloyd Silberman, CMCA, AMS, treasurer of his association board in Michigan, never considered community management as a profession until Bill McShane, head of the company that managed Silberman's community, suggested it.

When McShane learned Silberman was looking for a part-time business opportunity, he asked Silberman to give management a try. "Bill told me, 'What you've learned as a board member and president of your association is perfectly fine to get you started, and the rest you'll pick up as you go,'" says Silberman, who started as part-time manager for three communities.

Today, Silberman is president of McShane and Associates, and McShane himself is semi-retired.

McShane has recruited several other volunteer board members to work for his company, intentionally seeking "seasoned," civic-minded, mid-career association leaders who are looking for a career change. In particular, McShane looks for "the people who step up, the multi-taskers." Out of a hundred board members, he says there might be three who are good manager candidates.

Donna Brown was a board member at Hilton Head Resort/Four Seasons Center for five years—four as president—while the 468-unit, 10-acre community was undergoing an \$8.9 million renovation. A month after her term expired, the community's manager resigned,

and the management company asked Brown if she would take the job. "I probably knew the property better than anybody else," she says. Ultimately, the community hired Brown to work directly for the association rather than through the management company.

**PREPARING TO MANAGE**

"Basic management is basic management," says Pittman, who is retired from his own insurance company.

Brown, who has an accounting background and worked in a variety of businesses before becoming a community manager, agrees. "My background was so varied that it was really beneficial," she says.

Crew has found his analytical and marketing experience particularly valuable when it's been necessary to achieve consensus in an association about amending bylaws or levying a special assessment.

But like many who are new to the profession, Pittman also admits there was a large learning curve. "I had to really, really put (in) a lot of hours," he says. Called upon to understand quickly the mechanics of high-rise building systems, like elevators, cooling towers, and plumbing, not to mention pavement and pool maintenance, Pittman immediately established a network with other nearby on-site, high-rise managers to get up to speed.

"Seeing things from the perspective of a manager is a whole different thing," adds Silberman. "I really didn't have a full appreciation for everything that the management company does—the behind-the-scenes side of it."

Crew candidly admits he thought he understood what was necessary to operate a homeowners association, but quickly discovered that wasn't the case. "There was a lot more to know," he says.

Board members usually are focused on property operations and maintenance, but Crew says managers also must be cognizant of myriad federal and state laws, county regulations, local statutes and the nuances of association insurance, contract law and negotiation.

"Anyone who's been in our industry for very long knows the level of complexity that confronts associations," he says. "(It's) much more complicated ... than the average homeowner recognizes. We have

this tendency to oversimplify what really is a very complex organizational structure."

Crew says it's taken him years to learn everything and believes there's more to learn every day—even after 20 years in the business. "It's part of what makes our industry interesting and challenging," he says.

**FOR THOSE CONSIDERING IT**

"The first thing is to really examine why you want to do it, because it is work," says Pittman, who emphasizes the value of homeowner committees and board involvement to anyone pondering professional management.

Crew believes it takes a unique personality to be a manager because most homeowners are unaware of—or rarely acknowledge—what managers do for their communities. He adds that where most professionals answer to only one boss, managers are accountable to several individuals. "Even if you're just a small company, and you have five clients, you basically have five bosses. And they don't have any visibility of each other," Crew says.

Brown says she is more involved now in the day-to-day details than she was as a board member. Her role as a volunteer was "seeing the bigger picture" and long-range planning. She hopes to bring some of that experience to management. "My role (now) is to educate (board members) and present as much material as I can for when they're making some of these major decisions," she says.

David Caplan, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, principal of Community Association Management in Pikesville, Md., and a member of CAI's Board of Trustees, cautions any board member considering a management position that such a move can be very humbling. "You're going from being the client—where you're almost never wrong—to being a vendor who can be replaced at the drop of a hat."

He adds, however, that if a board member has a genuine desire to see communities thrive and is willing to give up the time necessary to learn how to make that happen, then he or she "has a decent shot at being a successful manager."

There are thousands of details involved in association management, and managers have to handle about 95 percent of them just to stay in business, says Silberman. "The difference between the really good companies and the (others) is how much of that last 5 percent you get right."

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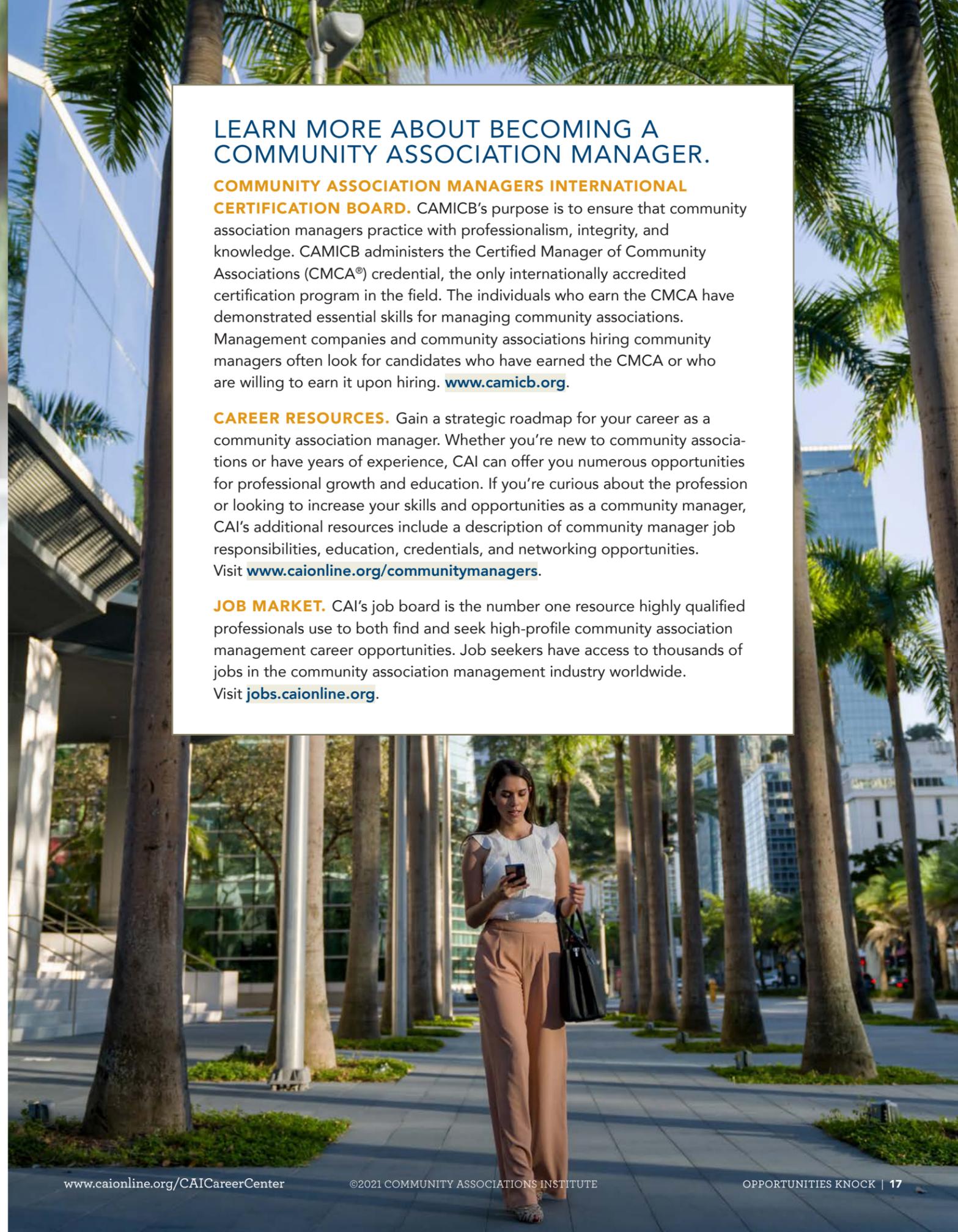
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**Opportunities Knock: Opening the Door to Careers in Community Association Management**

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Since 1973, Community Associations Institute (CAI) has been the leading provider of resources and information for homeowners, volunteer board leaders, professional managers, and business professionals in the more than 355,000 homeowners associations, condominiums, and housing cooperatives in the United States and millions of communities worldwide. With more than 42,000 members, CAI works in partnership with 36 legislative action committees and 63 affiliated chapters within the U.S., Canada, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates as well as with housing leaders in several other countries, including Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. A global nonprofit 501(c)(6) organization, CAI is the foremost authority in community association management, governance, education, and advocacy. Our mission is to inspire professionalism, effective leadership, and responsible citizenship—ideals reflected in community associations that are preferred places to call home. Visit [www.caionline.org](http://www.caionline.org).

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