

W.Va. HOA group has origins in Berkeley County

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West Virginia Organization of Homeowners Association officers Nance Briscoe, left, and Phyllis Smock were part of the original group that formed in the Eastern Panhandle as housing subdivisions began to increase in Jefferson and Berkeley counties. It now is a statewide organization, and also has received recognition in locations such as northern Virginia. [By Jenni Vincent](#)

MARTINSBURG, W.Va. — Volunteers Phyllis Smock and Nance Briscoe have spent more than a decade educating people about what it means to be a homeowner in the growing number of housing developments being built across the Eastern Panhandle.

In the beginning, the effort centered on Jefferson County before spreading to Berkeley County since that was where the most local growth was occurring.

The collective effort, which included several other local residents when the organization was formed in 2008, has grown into the West Virginia Organization of Homeowner Associations Inc.

The group, which has a website and sponsors educational seminars for homeowners' association property owners, is reaching people across West Virginia, as well as in neighboring states, such as Virginia.

The information helps people understand HOAs and their role in accomplishing neighborhood goals.

“Basically, people didn’t understand what it meant when they were purchasing a home in a homeowners’ association community. They had no idea what it meant to them, either individually or as a member of the community,” said Briscoe, who lives in Jefferson County’s Cloverdale Heights subdivision.

“Unfortunately, that’s still very common now.”

Living in a homeowners’ association community means that residents are collectively responsible for many of the duties that otherwise would be done by a city or county government, Briscoe said.

“We’ve got 137 lots in our development, and we have been self-managing since the moment the developer left,” she said. “We have worked really hard.”

Many homeowners’ association board members are doing the best they can, but aren’t usually experts on what the job entails.

“It is a major responsibility of overseeing something like roads, and especially when you come to realize the assessments that have been collected aren’t enough to do that work,” Briscoe said.

Smock, a Berkeley County resident who lives in the Stonebridge community, said people tend to focus on other things when purchasing a home.

“I guess it’s natural to focus on your beautiful new home, and that’s the original priority. But soon, reality happens, and people don’t have an idea of what an HOA is, how it operates or will impact them,” she said. “They are impressed when they see a community swimming pool, but have no idea who will maintain it or how much that will cost. And that’s only the beginning of having a lot to learn.”

For example, planned-unit-development paperwork is vital “because it is an agreement to pay the assessments and abide by the covenants, but maybe they didn’t even read it,” she said, recalling a man who got upset when homeowners’ association rules prevented him from installing a 20-foot-tall flagpole in his front yard.

The organization strives to educate homeowners, and always is looking to help more associations, she said. Upcoming meeting dates are Oct. 16 and Nov. 20 at 7 p.m.

Meetings and other events are held at Hospice of the Panhandle at 330 Hospice Lane in Kearneysville.

For more information or to view educational videos on topics ranging from taxes to collections procedures, go to wvohoa.org.