

Statewide HOA organization offers resources for community management

By Clint Thomas Daily Mail WV - Charleston Gazette
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Kevin Cheshire, president of the Forest Park Homeowners Association, is seen at the entrance of the Poca subdivision. Forest Park joined the West Virginia Organization of Home Owners Association for its educational and networking opportunities.

ROBERT SAUNDERS | Metro



Briscoe

Ten years ago, a group of commuters traveling aboard a train in Jefferson County started sharing their various concerns with owning homes in a common-interest community managed by a homeowners association, an HOA.

Among those commuters was Nance Briscoe, who is now the membership chairperson of the Charles Town-headquartered West Virginia Organization of Homeowners Association, a nonprofit organization rooted in those casual commuter conversations.

The member-led WVOHOA crystallized with a small group of Jefferson Countians who began hosting self-help workshops and seminars on more effective management of common-interest communities. Word and interest spread through surrounding counties.

“Most cities and towns have zoning requirements that prohibit homeowners from making unrestricted changes to their houses. Most communities, however, have no power to require homeowners to keep their lawns well manicured or repair broken steps or walkways,” Briscoe said.

“While the state of West Virginia mandates that subdivisions have an HOA to oversee the day-to-day issues of caring for the common areas of the community, precious little help is offered in the basics of responsible management.

“Our organization was developed to simply understand where to go for assistance in helping HOAs,” Briscoe said.

The WVOHOA’s online, frequently updated library of seminars and workshop videos is designed to supply answers to a myriad of HOA-related questions. The WVOHOA also reaches out to local and state legislators to express its members’ concerns and questions, Briscoe added.

“I’m trying very hard to participate with the West Virginia Commission on Uniform State Laws,” she offered as an example.

“Although we never provide legal counsel, we do give information to increase our membership’s knowledge of legal issues,” she said. “None of us are lawyers, although some of our members are lawyers. As a nonprofit, we do not endorse businesses, lawyers or legal counsel, and we cannot be affiliated with any political party or politicians, but that doesn’t stop us from speaking to those who are in the Legislature. As long as we share information to increase knowledge, we’re OK.”

Topics professionals and seasoned community managers address in the monthly, online seminars and workshops include how an HOA can meet the legal requirements of a nonprofit corporation, how to collect the necessary funds for maintenance and support of the common assets of the association, how to staff a board of directors and long-range planning issues.

“In some workshops, lawyers come in and give professional advice,” Briscoe said. “Sam Byrer, an arbitration and mediation lawyer here in Charles Town, recently spoke. It was profound what he had to say on how to solve nasty issues in an HOA.”

Since its statewide launch in January, the WVOHOA has acquired 11 members and two in the process of joining, at press time, hailing from Berkeley, Putnam, Hampshire, Jefferson, Pocahontas and other counties.

Sam Collins, general manager of the Silver Creek Unit Owners Association, the largest of more than 20 HOAs at Snowshoe Resort in Pocahontas County, said the WVOHOA is providing a long-needed service and voice, which impelled Silver Creek’s membership.

“We’ve been searching out ways to get organized for several years so we would have a political voice at the state level,” Collins said.

“We’re proud to be the first condo association in the WVOHOA,” Silver Creek Unit Owners Association Board President David Christopher added. “We hope to appeal to other condo associations around the state.”

The Putnam County-based Forest Park Homeowners Association is one of the newest members of WVOHOA.

Containing 175 homes on 180 lots in Poca, adjacent to the Scarlet Oaks Country Club site, the Forest Park subdivision became the property of its HOA 40 years ago, said David Crum, vice president of the Forest Park HOA board.

Crum said he and Forest Park HOA Board President Kevin Cheshire were searching online for information several months ago, and “we came across the [WVOHOA] first and signed up.

“I have nothing but wonderful things to say about Nance. Their top-notch organization has been very helpful to us,” Crum said.

Cheshire, who has been president of the Forest Park HOA since 2009, said most of the issues his HOA deals with are related to member dues, roadwork and drainage.

“We had a small bout a while back with ATVs going crazy there at all hours of the night and had to petition Putnam County to get that stopped,” Cheshire said. “But the biggest thing is the roadwork and drainage. So many subdivisions have been there quite a while and the drainpipes end up collapsing.”

Cheshire was also effusive about the connections the WVOHOA is providing for Forest Park.

“Before we even joined the WVOHOA,” he said, “we were looking into bylaws for other HOAs to see how we compared and how they were doing things,” he said. “That’s how we found Nance and her website. She’s a tremendous lady with a wealth of knowledge on a lot of stuff, and she’s put together a great organization to help us.”

Briscoe said the all-volunteer WVOHOA, which offers business and individual memberships, is still educating itself in its expanding mission and membership base. “We’re all learning and learning from each other,” she said.

“It’s not just mowing your own little piece of dirt here; it’s taking care of your community, and your community is your HOA,” Briscoe said.

Inquiries about the WVOHOA and information regarding membership and online and other services can be directed to info@wvohoa.org.

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