

Residential Resource

November 2004

Highlights of this Issue!

President's Message	2
Welcome New Members	4
"But I Gave You Instructions!" Guidelines for Delegating Effectively	6
Ambassador Program	7
Baltimore Convention 2004 Yields Bushels of NARPM Benefits	8
Your Genius Work—as a Property Management Professional	10
Meet Your NARPM Leaders	12
Five-Star Articles	13
That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles ...	14
Plain English?	16



The Mission of NARPM is to support professional and ethical practices of rental home management through networking, education, and certification.

Online Payments: Caveat Emptor by Ryan Gilbert

In order to maximize the benefits of advanced Internet technologies and integrated property management solutions, many property managers are considering services that enable the online collection of rent and related service payments.

Online rent payment is an often requested tenant amenity, offering tenants the convenience of multiple payment options and participation bank reward programs every time they pay their rent. Managers benefit from next-day funds availability, integrated data reporting and reduced administrative burdens.

However, Buyer Beware: Do not select online payment solutions that do not comply with local real estate laws, credit card association rules, and common sense best practices.

NEVER LOSE CONTROL

Recently, third-party service providers have offered services that clear credit card and check payments for real estate managers on an aggregate basis, through a single account controlled by the service provider. Once the funds have cleared and are deposited in the service provider's accounts, the service provider will transfer funds to the manager's trust account.

This service model is not compliant with real estate management legislation in most jurisdictions, because the managers do not control the processing accounts and loss of control is considered to be a breach of trust account compliance. Additionally, all trust-related accounts must be clearly described as such in banking records.

CHARGE THE SAME CONVENIENCE FEE FOR ALL ONLINE TRANSACTIONS

The credit card associations, Visa and MasterCard, enforce a wide range of regulations on card-accepting merchants through member banks that

offer credit card processing services. Failure to comply with association rules can result in fines and the termination of processing privileges.

In an attempt to offset the costs of processing online transactions, certain managers seek to charge tenants convenience fees. Such fees are generally compliant with association rules when the fee is imposed on all like transactions regardless of the form of payment used, and the fee is a flat or fixed amount regardless of the value of payment due.

MAINTAIN A SECURE DATA ENVIRONMENT

Property managers are privy to sensitive personal information obtained from prospects and tenants. Ensure that your technology providers and managers maintain secure network infrastructure, back-up data and adhere to security standards for the payments industry.

Visa and MasterCard both maintain data and transaction programs that define security standards for cardholder data storage. Visa's program is the Cardholder Information Security Program (CISP) and MasterCard's program is the Site Data Protection Program (SDP). All online merchants must comply with these programs in order to safely conduct business using credit card association infrastructure.

A COMPLIANT APPROACH

The only approach that is generally compliant with real estate law and association rules is the independent merchant account model which provides that each real estate manager is enrolled for an identifiable, separately managed and supported merchant account at a bank offering merchant processing services.

continued on page 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Fellow NARPM Member:

I recently awoke one morning to watch the sunrise over the beautiful harbor of Baltimore, MD, and as it traced a glimmering path across the water, I was overcome with gratitude for the moment. It seemed so amazing to be there amongst many of the best property managers in the country, to be in the heart of much of our national history in such a beautiful city, to be adjacent to our capitol while our presidential election unfolds with such drama and to be awaiting the best party NARPM knows how to throw year after year—all set in this land that yields us opportunities not found anywhere else in the world. How thankful I was!

If I could have been granted one wish this year, it would have been to have all 1,800 of you there with us in Baltimore. What a convention we had! The general sessions were filled with nationally known speakers covering a wide variety of topics such as the generational differences in the workplace, the morality of honesty as a business ethic, the fun and ease with which one can gain national attention in the media, how fair housing can be a game show and many more. Networking ruled as luncheons were relegated to table topic discussions, which were then shared with the room. Workshops were tracked for ease in selection and the choices exceeded 40 different ones. The President's Tour was hilarious—riding on the Duck throughout the city, right into the harbor, and then back out to Fort McHenry. Our evening out Thursday was a crab-crunching frenzy enjoyed by all and our last night gala was so colorful with music, great food, and a wonderful surprise for me: a beautiful portrait created by our own, Audrey Cooper, MPM®.

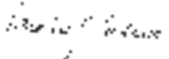
NARPM means education, certification, and networking, which are always the hallmarks of our national convention. We recognized more RMP®s and MPM®s and continued on the process by offering five designation classes at different times during the convention to allow attendees flexibility in travel times and durations of stay. The association continually works to improve our national convention in direct response to members' comments and requests. Each evaluation is carefully read and tabulated for changes in the following year. Wait until you see what awaits you next year in Salt Lake City!

One of the steps in the strategic plan this year was a marketing effort to increase NARPM's brand awareness in the marketplace. The marketing committee has selected a firm, Empire Communications, to represent our interests. The owner of that firm, Les Loggins, attended the convention and met with a number of leaders and members to get a good feel of what specific plans can be incorporated to the maximum benefit but at the least cost to our association. Look for some of these steps in the next few months and see how they affect your bottom line.

Another change this year was the selection process of our National board of directors. We have aligned the election with the term now so we no longer conduct the actual vote at the convention. Instead, your nominating committee was actively interviewing candidates there and meeting to select a new slate, which was revealed after the convention. You are now being asked to vote electronically to approve the proposed slate. Consider serving on the board in the future, as it is an immensely rewarding process.

My year is beginning to wind down and I am very excited watching your new president, Marc Banner, MPM®, begin the planning for his year as your leader. He has a wonderful theme, team, and plan. I will feel good passing your interests into his capable hands.

Until then, it has been wonderful "Opening New Doors" together and watching the incredible view beyond!



Andrea G. Caldwell, MPM®
President



NARPM President
Andrea Caldwell



A portrait of Andrea painted
by member, Audrey Cooper,
MPM®, and presented to
Andrea at the convention.

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Caveat Emptor

continued from page 1

This model ensures that rent payments and related funds are paid into accounts controlled by real estate managers themselves and not commingled between unrelated management firms or with nontrust funds. Managers can also decide what fees to charge tenants and other parties, and have unhindered management control over credit card and electronic check funds.

Compliance allows property managers and tenants to benefit from the consumer and banking protections provided by Federal and state regulations governing the banking and real estate industries, as well as the FDIC insurability of the processing bank.

Do not risk processing your payments through the accounts of third-party collection services that collect payments on behalf of multiple customers in a single merchant account that they control. Your relationships, reputation, and professional licenses will be jeopardized in the event of default by these third parties, in addition to possible contravention of laws.

Ryan Gilbert is a member of the State Bar of California and a principal of PropertyBridge LLC. The content of this article does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied on as such. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be obtained. Ryan may be contacted at ryan@propertybridge.com.

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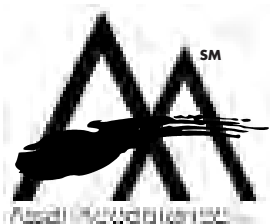
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NEW MEMBERS

Welcome new NARPM members! The following is a list of new members who joined NARPM from August 1 to August 31, 2004.

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March 2005	January 15, 2005
April 2005	February 15, 2005

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“But I Gave You Instructions!” — Guidelines for Delegating Effectively

by Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC

“Wrong! It came back wrong again. I told Pat I wanted this typed in rough form and it was given back to me single spaced instead of double. What’s wrong with Pat?”

Does this sound familiar? Have you ever delegated a task only to have it returned differently than you expected? I have. Too many times.

What I have learned, regretfully, is that the reason many of my tasks are returned wrong is that I gave the instructions wrong. Either they were incomplete or misleading. I assumed the delegatee knew what I meant, and I had not confirmed the understanding.

Sometimes staff members are timid about admitting when something is unclear or feel they know what to do. The following are guidelines I’ve developed from my own experience as well as from others who have learned how to delegate the hard way.

1. Do not fall into the “I can do it quicker and better” syndrome. If you do, you are not managing. You will stay stuck in a rut and keep your subordinates in a rut, too.
2. Clarify the task in your own mind. Visualize what the finished task/product would look like. Many times supervisors are disappointed with the work their subordinates return to them because the supervisors themselves were not clear on what they wanted.
3. At first, write an outline or sketch of what you want. You may feel silly, but you will find it helps clarify your wants. Soon you will be verbally expressing what you want more clearly.
4. Do the task in your mind—walk through the various steps. This way you will know to point out specific details that your delegatee may not know about.
5. Enlist your delegatee’s help. Tell her you’re improving your skills in giving instructions and would like her assistance.
6. Have him write out the instructions you give verbally. Ask him to repeat what he heard so you can make sure you’re being clear. Do not just ask him to repeat what you’ve said—you will sound condescending.
7. Do not be a perfectionist. If you get back work that is different than you expected, discuss the problem so you can fix the misunderstanding. If the work is acceptable, say, “This is fine for this time, however, next time I would like it done this way.” Having someone continually redoing acceptable work so that it’s perfect is demoralizing, frustrating, and a waste of time.
8. Write out instructions if the delegatee is not available for discussion, has a language barrier, or forgets easily.
9. Put a due date and time on your requests. If it is not possible to complete the task within the deadline, the delegatee must get back to you and renegotiate the time or have you give the task to another person.
10. Log tasks on an Assignment Tracking Sheet listing what was assigned and when it is due. Keep copies of instructions/due dates so things will not fall through the cracks.
11. Follow-up. Agree on check-in points. If your delegatee was given a week to complete a task, check in with her in three days. Ask: “How are you doing on X?” Rather than “Have you finished yet?” The latter puts her on the defensive and raises pressure. You can catch potential snags in the task by checking early.
12. Acknowledge good jobs, no matter how small. Work on improving bad ones. Ask, “How can we make sure this is done on time next time?” Form a team with your delegatee.
13. Allow him to use his own method after you trust the delegatee. You should care about the results, not the method. If you do this, your people will be more productive and creative and have more self-respect.

If you have the patience to follow these guidelines, your staff member will feel better about him/herself, and you will get more accomplished and reduce your chances of a heart attack. It is not easy, but it’s worth the effort.

Copyright 1988, Morgan Seminar Group. Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, is a dynamic speaker and seminarist. She is the author of four books, TurboTime: Maximizing Your Results Through Technology, Calming Upset Customers, Life’s Lessons: Insights and Information for a Richer Life, and Professional Selling. For information on her speaking services, books, and tapes contact her at 1440 Newport Ave., San Jose, CA 95125, 408/998-7977, 800/247-9662, fax: 408/998-1742, rebecca@RebeccaMorgan.com, www.RebeccaMorgan.com. Please contact Rebecca for permission to reprint or repost this item.



Ambassador Program 2004

The Ambassador Program was designed a few years ago to reward our current members for referring new members to our organization. Who better to spread the word of the benefits of NARPM than its members? If you refer five new members in one year, you will receive an award certificate that may be used toward your next year's dues or for events for the coming year. When you achieve ambassador status

and receive your \$195 NARPM credit, it can be used toward your annual dues or registration at a NARPM National Convention. It is flexible! Just follow the simple steps outlined here:

- ★ Call NARPM Headquarters at 800/782-3452, and request membership application forms. Headquarters, upon request, will mail the application directly to the prospective member but will not fill in the "referred by" line.
- ★ The 12-month period to obtain the five new members starts the day the first new membership application is processed by headquarters.
- ★ When Headquarters receives the fifth new membership application, an Award Certificate will be issued and dated. A recognition certificate will also be issued, and you, as the "Ambassador," will be recognized in the *Residential Resource*.
- ★ The Award Certificate can be used to pay NARPM annual dues, or like amount can be applied toward National Convention.
- ★ It must be used in full at the time of use and attached to your dues or registration for Convention. The value of the Award Certificate is equal to what the national dues were at the time the Award Certificate was issued. It also must be used within 12 months of the issue date.
- ★ A member can earn more than one Award Certificate per 12-month period.

AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

August 2004 New Members

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Kendric Wong
Terri Dunevant
Deanna Hansen
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For more affiliate information, please visit the NARPM Web site www.narpm.org.

Baltimore Convention 2004 Yields Bushels of NARPM Benefits

by Rose Thomas, MPM®

Convention mornings in Baltimore were “beautiful...with the sun rising over the harbor, shining like a red ball,” President Andrea Caldwell, MPM®, told me. And, as her comment implies, we had fine weather and lovely views at the 16th Annual National Convention in Baltimore this September 22–24. In addition, we were blessed with a great crew of attendees, including many enthusiastic first-timers. I agree with Past President Mark Kreditor, MPM®, who felt it was “so refreshing to see new members participating and the younger leadership stepping up.”

The Convention’s educational programs were hailed by many including Beverly Browning, MPM®: “the workshops were awesome...I did not want to miss any, and every one that I attended was phenomenal.” A member from Washington State commented on the high quality of the Workshop Leaders’ presentations, as well as their generosity in sharing their forms along with their knowledge. And workshop tracks, first introduced at this Convention, were well received. As Michelle Horneff-Cohen, RMP®, said, “the tracks enabled members to choose training that met their level of expertise.”

As for the General Session Speakers, Sylvia Hill, MPM®, notes that her company has already passed on to her staff knowledge gleaned from Cam Marston’s presentation, *Four Generations in the Workplace*, “slanting it toward better understanding the needs of our owners and residents.” Others commented on the welcome diversity, originality, and timeliness of speakers’ topics.

The physical flow of the convention was also noted as a plus. For example, passing through the Trade Show on the way to general sessions made it easy to stop and chat with the vendors—or pick up a complimentary bottle of water from the convention sponsor RentClicks. Many were pleased with the excellent service provided by Hyatt employees as well as with the Hyatt’s location in the lively heart of Baltimore. Some

expressed their appreciation for the ease and relative low cost of traveling to the area, as well as its convenience to Washington D.C.

I’m most pleased to say that this year’s Charity Event, the Silent Auction, was a great success. Through the generosity of donors and Convention attendees we raised \$3,315, which we proudly donated to the Chesapeake Habitat for Humanity. Thank you to one and all who contributed to this especially meaningful success.

As for convention special events, the President’s Tour, Ride the Ducks, was truly “ducky.” And, Thursday’s Crustacean Celebration brought us bushels of fun, crabs, and other Maryland delights, as well as music and great company. On Friday night, the Star-Spangled Gala was a galaxy of good cheer.

Happily, many expressed sentiments about convention similar to those of Wendell Davis, MPM®, who said simply: “the 2004 Baltimore Convention was one of the best conventions I have attended.”

The most satisfying comment of all came from first-time attendee Cathy Matthews who traveled from Hawaii to attend: “I felt very at ease and welcome throughout the convention, even though I knew next to no one when I arrived.” Her remark is so satisfying, because when members feel comfortable and welcome, they are able to make the most of the educational and networking opportunities convention affords. And if and when this happens, they then understand and become part of fulfilling NARPM’s mission.

In addition, we received some suggestions that we will gladly consider when planning future events.

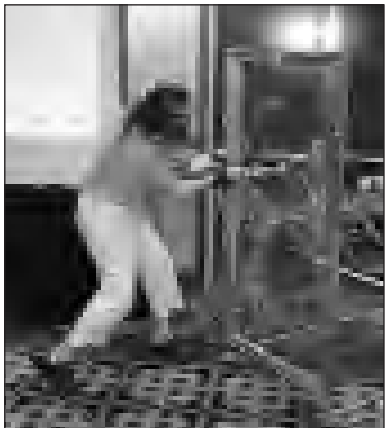
From glowing dawn to glittering dusk, many new doors were opened in Historic Baltimore. Thanks to one and all who participated and to those who worked so hard on this convention!



All enjoyed the Welcome Reception and opening of the Trade Show with great food and incredible affiliates demonstrating their products and services.



The NARPM 2004 Board of Directors was Opening New Doors in Baltimore! (back row/left to right) Directors: Robert Winger, MPM®, Bill Jackson, RMP®, David Holt, MPM®, Erika K. Green, MPM®, Betty Fletcher, MPM®, and Luke Kaufmann, MPM® (front row/ left to right) Executive Committee: Christopher Hermanski, MPM®, Past President, Rose Thomas, MPM®, Vice President, Marc Banner, MPM®, President-Elect, Andrea Caldwell, MPM®, President, Wendell Davis, MPM®, Treasurer, and Karen Carlson, MPM®, Secretary



First time convention attendee, Julie Pogue (Support Staff member), tries "opening new doors" while attending her first workshop, "How to Protect Your Windows from Today's Common Threats."



Congratulations to the 2004 winners of the Chapter Excellence award! We hope to see these and more chapters on the marquee in 2005.



"Fast" Eddie Davis, MPM® got crackin' at the Crustacean Celebration, the off-site event.



Congratulations to LandlordSource.com for being chosen as NARPM's 2004 Affiliate of the Year! (left to right) Jean Storms, MPM® and husband, Lee Storms



Bev Banner (left) of Professional Office Services of ID, Inc. discusses unique filing system options with Betty Fletcher, MPM® (right).



Congratulations to the King County, WA Chapter for being recognized as NARPM's 2004 Chapter of the Year! (Chapter members in photo are (left to right): Bill Jackson, RMP, Kathleen Bernritter, Suzanne Cameron, MPM®, Carrie Fjeld, and Dave Poletti)



Networking luncheons were all the rage as various current hot topics were discussed and shared with the attendees.

Your Genius Work—as a Property Management Professional

by Ernest F. Oriente, The Coach

Do you know what genius work is? As a leader within your property management company, are you spending today doing genius work—the kind of work that is the most valuable and best use of your time? Genius work can be defined as a peak performance state-of-mind. This means that when you are immersed in the genius work you most love and you are working on the projects that require your maximum attention, the results will be world-class! Doing genius work also means that you are focusing on the activities and the action steps that will deliver high-impact results, on both a professional and personal level. In this article, we are going to explain how to clear the time and space so genius work can become part of your every day!

DEFINING GENIUS WORK

“If I could only focus on two key areas today, what would the most valuable and best use of my time be?” This is the easiest and fastest way to define genius work. As an executive in your property management company, genius work might include an important interview to hire a new marketing director, a presentation to your board of directors on your financial performance or meeting with an H/R Director of a new company relocating to your city. Here is the key principle regarding genius work: your genius work can only be done by you.

TIP FROM THE COACH

On a personal level, the same principles of genius work still apply. For instance, only you can attend your child’s school play, be on the side-

lines of an important soccer game or meet with your CPA to review your taxes. Think about your life—and make a small list of the most important areas regarding your family, your spouse, your health and your spiritual beliefs. This list should only include the areas that are the top priorities in your life and are the activities you will always do or participate in, no matter what. Now, continue reading this article as we explain how to clear the time and space on a professional and personal level, so you can focus on your genius work.

DEFINING “I WISH” PROJECTS

Once you have made a list of the professional activities that you consider genius work, make a list of every activity and/or project you are working on this week and month. Then, split this list into two separate lists: an “I Wish” list and a “Delegation” list. Your I Wish list is best explained as the activities/projects that require your attention, but could be done by someone else if you spent 30–90 minutes to show this person the necessary steps. For instance, your genius work might include an important final interview for a new employee who wants to join your property management company. The I Wish step would include having first and second interviews done by others within your company and showing your assistant how to do reference checks. When working with our property management clients, their I Wish list is always a large and long list. During our weekly coaching calls, we focus on removing every single activity/project on their I Wish list, so they can gain an additional 10–20 hours per week of free time to spend doing the things they most love.



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Some clients are now taking monthly vacations, some are semiretired and others are spending more time with their families.

TIP FROM THE COACH

On a personal level, the principles of an I Wish list also apply. For example, within reason most people could do their own taxes each year. Using the I Wish principle, you might instead spend a few hours organizing your tax information and then invest 60 minutes with your CPA so your taxes can be expertly completed. Remember, your I Wish list is where you spend most of your time and energy. If you could eliminate everything on your I Wish list...how would you spend 10-20 free hours per week?

DEFINING DELEGATION WORK

Delegation work is the easiest to explain. These are the activities/projects that can quickly be completed and only require 30-60 seconds of explanation. For example, your assistant can make copies of a presentation you are giving, your marketing director can bring the results of your advertising to your next executive meeting or your secretary can make a call to have your copier repaired. These are all one-step requests and can be easily delegated to those who work on your team.

TIP FROM THE COACH

On a personal level, the same delegation principles apply, as you can buy a great life. For instance, you can hire a person to clean your windows, shop for your groceries, buy birthday gifts, come to your home/office to detail your van or even take your car to be repaired (and wait for it to be finished). Yes, it does take extra income to have these services provided. Here is the key principle—if you follow the

steps in this article regarding delegation and your I Wish list you will have more time to focus on your genius work, which will provide the income for you to buy a great life. In addition, you will have more time to spend on the things you love doing the most!

Ernest F. Oriente, The Coach, is the founder of PowerHour® a professional business coaching/recruiting service and the author of SmartMatch Alliances™. He has spent 14,760 hours [since 1988] delivering customized training, by telephone, in leadership, tradition/Internet marketing and sales for property management companies, apartment locator/corporate housing services and multihousing sales/service companies worldwide. PowerHour® specializes in global distance learning by telephone, using their state-of-the-art conference call system for interactive and dynamic TeleForums. Twice-monthly TeleForums link 10-100 executives/professionals/individuals who are geographically dispersed, in a time efficient and profitable format. PowerHour® is based in Park City, UT. Contact The Coach at 435/615-8486, by e-mail at ernest@powerhour.com, or visit the TeleForum Web site at www.powerhour.com.



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Meet Your NARPM Leaders



Karen Carlson, MPM®, CPM®, is the 2004 Secretary of the National Association of Residential Property Managers (NARPM).

Ms. Carlson is president of Property Management Experts, located in Stockton, CA. The firm manages all types of residential homes including single-family, small multifamily (such as duplexes and triplexes, townhomes, and condominiums), and larger multifamily apartment communities. Ms. Carlson is actively involved in overseeing

all aspects of managing the company.

Obtaining her real estate license in 1987 and then her Broker's license in 1989, Ms. Carlson began working with Property Management Experts in 1990. She joined NARPM in 1997 and has served the association in a variety of capacities including Marketing Committee for three years (of which she chaired it for one year), Convention Committee for seven years (of which she served as the Program chair for the past three years), and the board of directors for four years. In addition to serving as this year's secretary, she also served as the association's Convention Program chair for the 2004 convention in Baltimore, MD. Ms. Carlson is also a member of the San Joaquin County Chapter of NARPM and served as its president for several years.

Ms. Carlson has been an active member in several associations through the years, including Lambda Theta Phi for five years (a service organiza-

tion that raises money for local charities), Hospice of San Joaquin (of which she is currently a director on their board), and the local IREM (Institute of Real Estate Management) chapter. Ms. Carlson is currently serving as a member of her local Junior Aid. She was also involved for four years with her college sorority, Delta Delta Delta at the University of Southern California. As an industry leader, she earned her CPM® designation in 2003 and teaches at NARPM events including local chapters and national events.



Robert A. Machado, MPM®, CPM®, is the chair of the Professional Standards Committee of the National Association of Residential Property Managers (NARPM). He began chairing the committee in 2004 and will continue to do so in 2005.

Mr. Machado is president of Homepointe, located in Sacramento, CA. The firm manages all types of residential homes including single-family, small multifamily (such as duplexes and triplexes, townhomes, and con-

dominiums), and larger multifamily apartment communities. It also handles association management and manages commercial property. Mr. Machado is actively involved in the company with his main focus being marketing and supervision.

Entering the real estate industry in 1979, Mr. Machado has been actively involved ever since starting his own company in 1983 and obtaining his Broker's license in 1984. He joined NARPM in 1992 and has served the association in a variety of capacities including: National president (1996-1997), National president-elect, National vice president, Nominations chair, Long Range Planning chair, Convention chair, Grievance chair, Finance chair, and Membership chair. In addition to serving as this year's Professional Standards chair, Mr. Machado also serving on the Marketing committee and is heading up a special project to potentially form a referral network. He is a member of the Sacramento Chapter of NARPM.

Mr. Machado has been an active member in several other associations through the years, including IREM (Institute of Real Estate Management), Sacramento Valley Apartment Association (of which he is a past board member), and Sacramento Association of Realtors Property Management committee (of which he is a past chair). As an industry leader, he also teaches a property management introductory course at Cosumnes River College and is a workshop presenter at many NARPM events.

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WELCOME, NEW NARPM EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Taking care of NARPM's administrative work with Executive Director Roy Bohrer is our new Executive Assistant Dawn Nicholson. Dawn is a native Texan, having lived in the Austin area all of her life. She has previously worked with one state association and another organization in administrative management and conference and trade show coordination. She is very personable and enjoys working with association members to accomplish their goals. She, her husband, and their son live in Liberty Hill, an Austin suburb. Many got the opportunity to meet Dawn at the 2004 Baltimore Convention.

FIVE-STAR ARTICLES

Carbon Monoxide: The Next Regulation?

by Rick Ebert, MPM®

Article reprinted from the June 1995 issue of the Residential Resource

BACKGROUND HISTORY

With over 2,000 Americans dying of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning each year, and scores of others being affected by the symptoms, coupled with lead-based paint disclosures due this year, it will only be a matter of time before CO detectors will be a requirement in all residences. Some localities have such a law already on the books. Last year, in a highly publicized case, tennis star Vitas Gerulaitis died while sleeping in a poolside bungalow when his room became filled with CO from a malfunctioning swimming pool heater. As residences have become more energy efficient with the installation of insulation, weatherproofing, caulking and thermopane windows, the danger of having CO present has greatly increased.

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

The most common sources of CO in residences are fuel burning furnaces, water heaters, fireplaces, and space heaters.

CO is a colorless, odorless, nonirritating poisonous gas produced when fuels containing carbon are burned with too little oxygen. It is a deadly gas because it has no odor and is almost impossible to detect with the senses. Evidence of CO poisoning includes tightness across the forehead, painful eyeballs, headaches, throbbing temples, weariness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, loss of muscular control, and fast pulse. Look for these signs if you suspect CO poisoning and, by all means, call for medical assistance. If a resident calls you and states that they are experiencing CO poisoning, ask for the symptoms and suggest they call (or you call) for medical assistance right away. A note of the conversation in the file is in order, don't you think? Often times, people get oxygen deficiency confused with CO poisoning, but it does not really matter much to a dead person, so act quickly in either case.

EMERGENCY CARE

If you suspect CO poisoning, either at a site or while talking to a resident on the telephone, take these recognized emergency steps in this order. (1) Call a doctor or EMS immediately, (2) restore and maintain breathing, including artificial respiration if necessary, but opening windows or moving the person to fresh air might be enough, (3) keep the person warm and quiet—having the person lie down is best. Do not forget to turn off the source of the suspected CO. Calling the fire department for this job is your best choice, even if small amounts of CO for a short time is not harmful—why chance it?

PREVENTION OF CARBON MONOXIDE

There are several ways a property manager can prevent CO problems, which include:

1. For a small fee, heater technicians and utility firms will test for CO. Their report may prove to be invaluable.
2. Be certain that chimneys and flues are clean. A report in your file by the maintenance person, again, may prove to be a great idea. Be

certain that your maintenance technician is looking for rust or corrosion in the heater and, if found, inform owners of the problem and make arrangements for replacement of worn parts. The flame of burners and pilot lights should be blue. A yellow flame means that the fuel is not being burned correctly and CO may be present. This is reason enough for a service call.



3. The blower door on the furnace should be kept closed.
4. The draft hood of the furnace should be checked for backdrafts as should all vent pipes and chimneys as noted earlier.
5. Vent all gas clothes dryers to the outside.
6. Check for cracks in any shared wall of an adjacent unit having a gas appliance or a garage.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

The detector responds to CO at the same levels that your body does, causing the alarm to sound at 400 parts per million (PPM) before 15 minutes elapse or at 100 PPM before 90 minutes elapse, by activating the "biomimetic" sensor. This sensor will need to be replaced from time to time and a special beep will sound when this

is required. These detectors must be installed in accordance with any existing local and state laws and in accordance with manufacturers' instructions, so you and your owners will have full measure of protection from liability. As detectors will only measure CO that will reach them, the manufacturers of these detectors strongly suggest that every level of the home and each sleeping area have one. By using this method, if an alarm should go off, the occupants have a better chance of hearing the alarm. The alarms do have limitations, and the manufacturers will have a disclaimer that person who are hearing impaired, taking drugs, or consuming alcoholic beverages might not respond to the alarm. That take us right back to having a good prevention plan in place for which there can be no substitute.

Rick Ebert, MPM®, cofounded Austin Landmark Property Services Inc. in 1986. His company has earned NARPM's coveted Certified Residential Management Company designation. Rick also serves as approved instructor with the National Association of Residential Property Managers.

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That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles by Erika Green, MPM®

A commonly known catch-phrase that invokes a meaning of, "That's the way it is...accept it," my company has learned how to **not** accept it but to change it giving the phrase an entirely different and positive significance.

In 1994, the first year my company leased a large overpriced office, we had a huge reception area. Although this area was beautifully appointed and had lots of seating area, I realize now that it was not warm and inviting, but rather intimidating to most of our tenants, as it epitomized fiscal hierarchy. Three years later, after realizing the absolute nonsense of paying such high rent, we moved our office and were unable to offer much of a reception area, since two agents were located in that main entry. However, those tight quarters were better than nothing, which is soon what we had.

In 1999, after our company was horribly victimized by embezzlement and we experienced a few unnerving and scary incidents with irate customers that resulted in us having to call the police to have them removed from our office (my two personal favorites were the former tenant who drove over 540 miles roundtrip to angrily dispute \$37.89 being withheld from his deposit and a prospective tenant who was trying to bully us into letting him do repairs in lieu of a deposit), our intimate office suddenly became Fort Knox. Located upstairs in an office space that had only one entry/exit, we installed a security system that did not allow entry by anyone without a key. All visitors that approached our door would ring the doorbell and talk through an intercom. We had a camera on them so we could see them (they could not see us) and we would communicate with them through the intercom until they identified themselves and their purpose. We would then elect to press a button to release the security latch so they could enter or ask them to simply place through the door drop slot whatever it was they needed to deliver. Unfortunately, our need to feel safe had quickly diminished the open communication we previously had with our customers. Although we realized this rather quickly, we believed it was our duty to provide a safe and comfortable environment for our staff, and this was the only way we knew how.

Focused on the financial considerations and the fact that moving an office is absolutely dreadful, we signed a two-year renewal in 2001. In September 2002, our company began focusing on "the big picture" of what we ultimately wanted the company to become. We focused on our core goal and realized that sound relationships with our property owners, tenants, staff and contractors were the most important to us. However, our present office arrangement was a great hindrance of that goal. Experiencing the worst rental market since we've been in business meant our profits and reserve were being depleted; yet, we were considering a move—an expensive undertaking. Knowing our lease was to expire at the end of 2003, we began looking for a new office in early June 2003. We had sketched our ideal office layout to satisfy our basic

needs with focus on face-to-face interaction and safety. As visionaries, the company president and I viewed various spaces taking the floor plan and altering it with a basic architect computer program to see how it matched our needs. We were close to making an offer on a gorgeous space with 12' ceilings, massive 9' solid wooden doors, private bathrooms, and walls of windows all around. However, no matter how many walls I deleted, added or moved, the floor plan did not meet our needs and we fortunately realized a space like that would again be too extravagant and intimidating.



A week later, we found it—the perfect space in a small, warm, inviting two-story professional building. The moment you enter the building, you are in an open-air common area atrium with live trees, benches and pebble-rock floors. And talk about location...location...location...it is prime! When first viewing the available space, we loved it but were having difficulty seeing how we could alter the current layout of six tiny exam rooms, two large closets, an itty-bitty kitchenette, and one large open room at the entry to meet our ideal floor plan. After sketching out the existing floor plan and manipulating it in the software program, we immediately realized its potential and negotiated a lease at such an incredible price that we requested and received a ten-year lease locking in that price.

As we went through the process of hiring a contractor to finish out the space to our needs, we were also developing our company's strategic plan and realized that décor was another key to the image we wanted to project. The 6 tiny and dark exam rooms became 3 large offices full of light, the kitchenette doubled in size to become a kitchen, the two large closets became one large open area for our rotary filing storage system (another investment we made to improve our storage, use of space, systems, and aesthetic environment), an offset storage area, and a receptionist workstation, and the one large open room at the front was divided to create a conference room and small entry/reception area that is partially open (via a small counter and window – like in most medical offices) to the receptionist's workstation and staff common area. Aesthetically, we decided to create a warm, inviting and cheery atmosphere by utilizing soft bright colors throughout and some faux wall treatments. This serves as a pleasant working environment for our staff, as well as, a calming setting for our customers and clients. Best of all, it really works! Since we opened in this new setting in January 2004, we discovered a change in our attitudes, as well as, those of our tenants as we get to see them and they get to see us through the reception window. We still have a safety feature in that they can only go as far as the reception area until we press a button that releases the security latch on the door from the reception area to the rest of our office. Most tenants do not want or have no need to go past the reception area; they just want to see our smiling faces (although some may not admit to that).

This has been such an exciting change and growth for our company that we continue to seek other avenues of nurturing professional yet

caring relationships with our property owners, tenants, contractors, and staff. You have probably heard that 'the way to a person's heart is through their stomach'. We tested that last month by placing bakery-fresh cookies in the reception area at rent time and it is true. I never quite grasped the true intent of the sweet treats readily available to visitors in the on-site leasing offices of apartment communities. Now I understand that they become part of the image of the company. It is not the physical satisfaction but rather the emotional pleasure one derives by being offered and eating one of these treats. Cookies invoke images of warmth, home and indulgence—the ultimate comfort food. Placing fresh cookies out each day, even by the late charge sign after the 3rd of the month, was such a treat for our tenants that most forgot to complain about having to pay late charges and the smiles we received were priceless. This sweet venture cost a mere \$15 over a five day period and is one we will continue, as we decided to alter the treats each month, some to be holiday oriented. The changes we have made in our company by focusing on our core goal has changed the meaning and wording of that common catch-phrase, as we now believe, *your way* makes the cookie crumble...and our cookies crumble the walls of opposition.

Erika K. Green, MPM®, is the broker and co-owner of Quest Property Services Inc. in Fort Worth, TX. She has been a member of NARPM since 1994 and has served in numerous capacities on NARPM's national level including New Membership chair, Member Support chair, and a member of the Membership, Convention, Long Range Planning, and Editorial Committees and is currently serving as a National director and the Editorial chair.

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Plain English?

by Robert L. Cain, Copyright 2004, Cain Publications Inc.

Are you renting to a lawyer? No? Then it is possible that your new tenant may not understand the rental agreement. In fact, he or she might completely misinterpret what it says. And the language in some rental agreements isn't that clear—for anybody.

Then if you consider the reading skills of people today, there are many who would not be able to read the rental agreement at all. According to the Census Bureau, 52% of renters have a high school education or less, as compared to 48% of the total population.

Even some people who should be able to understand the terms of a lease or rental agreement might find the language subject to interpretation. I got a call from a nationally recognized marketing consultant a year or so ago. Here is someone whose job it is to read and interpret information. His wife was getting a new job over 100 miles away and they were moving out of the apartment they were renting. He had read the rules for the return of their security deposit and did not fully understand them. He had friends read it, and they came up with diametrically opposed interpretations. So he called me.

After he faxed the page to me, I could understand the confusion. There were two paragraphs delineating what would happen if different things occurred when they moved, and a third paragraph which summed it up. It was poorly written, but I was able to glean the gist of the instructions, and the marketing consultant had misinterpreted it.

What's my point here? If you want to avoid issues later on with tenants, begin the tenancy by making sure your new tenants completely understand the rental agreement.

Take a look at the agreement you use now. Do not read it, just hold it up too far away to make out the words. What does it look like? Could be it's a black page of copy. The type size may be six point, smaller than

the type in a newspaper. To people who have trouble reading, it looks insurmountable. They will not even try to read it, but will just sign the thing and then complain when you follow the terms of the agreement that they never understood to begin with.

How do we go about taking the confusion out of the agreements?

One way is to take the agreement or lease you use now and read it with them, line by line, explaining as you go.

Another way, mark the important places with a highlighter, such as when the rent is due, when it's late, the requirements for terminating a tenancy, how notices are served, etc. Of course, that might mean the entire agreement is highlighted.

A third way is to have the agreement drawn up in plain English, in easy-to-understand words and sentences. I pulled out a sample rental agreement and took this sentence as an example: "In the event of default in payment of any installment of rent or at the expiration of said term of this agreement, Tenant will quit and surrender the said premises to Landlord."

Huh? Would you say that is "plain English"? How about this instead: "If you do not pay the rent when it is due, or on *[insert date]* when this lease expires, you will move out and give the keys and possession of the property back to the landlord." It says exactly the same thing, except my translation is relatively plain English.

Robert Cain is a nationally-recognized speaker and writer on property management and real estate issues. For a free sample copy of the Rental Property Reporter or Northwest Landlord call 800/654-5456 or visit the Web site at www.rentalprop.com.