

Reprinted with permission from the June 2004 issue of *UNITS* magazine, published by the National Apartment Association (NAA). For more information about NAA, please visit [www.naahq.org](http://www.naahq.org) or call 703/518-6141.

# 50 Ways to Improve Your Resident Retention

BY LISA TROSIEN

**1** Be nice to the residents. Residents pay the salaries of all onsite employees, like it or not.

**2** Keep the community clean. Pick up all trash or debris. Notify residents immediately when their patios or balconies are not in compliance with the policies of the community.

**3** Send thank-you notes to residents who keep their balconies and patios clean and attractive.

**4** Offer a variety of resident activities. Year after year, residents say they want a “sense of community” at their properties. It is up to the onsite teams to create that sense through programming at the community.

**5** Have a good community newsletter or timely bulletin board. The newsletter doesn’t have to be four-color and 14 pages, but it should be informative, entertaining and delivered on time.

**6** Establish a resident retention program. While many communities have written marketing plans to attract new residents, most do not have written plans to determine how to keep the residents they have.



**7** Offer renewal incentives. Little things like carpet cleaning, repainting and apartment home improvements go a long way.

**8** Hand deliver birthday cards to residents on their birthday. It may be the only card they get that year, so let it be from the onsite team where they live.

**9** Offer free light bulb changes for hard-to-reach ceiling fixtures.

**10** Offer courtesy rent check pick up.

**11** Create a lending library filled with books, videos and DVDs in the community room for residents to check out on the honor system.

**12** Have small tools on hand for residents to borrow so they can hang pictures and make small repairs



to personal items.

**13** In states where resident referrals are legal, remind residents how easily they can earn money by referring their friends and associates to their community.

**14** Allow all residents “one free late” on their rental payment each year. The legal paperwork will still go forward if they don’t pay, but waive the late fees one time only. The residents will appreciate the effort.

**15** Explore alternative ways for the residents to pay their rent, such as with MasterCard, Visa, American Express or direct debit from their checking account.

**16** Look into the legal possibilities of weekly rental payments. If the resident profile of your community lives paycheck to paycheck, this program may benefit everyone involved.

**17** Have photo identification cards created for the onsite staff. Residents will feel better knowing who they let into their apartments to perform maintenance if they can see a photo identification card when the maintenance tech arrives to perform the repair.

**18** Use shoe covers when entering apartments to keep the residents’ carpet clean and stain free.

**19** Make a call back on completed service requests at the end of the day to make sure requests were completed to residents’ satisfaction. If not, make sure the service request is taken care of at once.

**20** Provide services such as plant watering, fish feeding, package delivery and mail pickup for residents who are on vacation.



**21** Set up a dry cleaning service that picks up and drops off at the community.

**22** Work with local vendors and companies to offer creative services for residents, such as \$5 pizza night on Fridays. Residents simply call ahead with their





order and pick up the pizza on the way home.

**23** Keep change on hand for coin-operated laundry rooms.

**24** Sell postage stamps at cost.

**25** Always have the local paper and a pot of hot coffee available in the mornings when the office opens for business.

**26** Stay open late (until 8 p.m.) at least one night a week for the convenience of the residents.

**27** Have the manager work one Saturday per month, again for the convenience of residents. Publicize the date in the community newsletter or on the bulletin board.

**28** Have the maintenance/building supervisor on hand during renewal meetings so maintenance issues can be addressed immediately with the resident.

**29** Send anniversary gifts to residents after they have been at your community for six months.

**30** Make sure the resident's move-in is absolutely perfect in every way. Stop by their apartment on the day of the move to ensure that their apartment was prepared to their satisfaction.

**31** Stock the apartment home prior to move in with paper towels, toilet tissue, facial tissue, liquid soap and fresh ice. Don't forget to hang an inexpensive shower curtain in the bathroom in case they can't find theirs when unpacking.

**32** Schedule a "pre move-in" meeting where all monies are paid and paperwork signed prior to move-in day. Allow move-in day to be as hassle-free as possible.

**33** Reserve the freight elevator for residents, as they may forget to do so when trying to coordinate their move.

**34** Reserve a parking space for their moving van that is as close to their apartment as possible the evening before their move.

**35** Double-check all of the keys before giving them to the new resident, including the mailbox key (if accessible) and storage room, as well as the garage door opener. Put fresh batteries in the opener.

**36** Change the smoke detector batteries and the carbon monoxide detector batteries (in cases where carbon monoxide detectors are required).



**37** Walk the apartment before the move-in to ensure that it has been properly prepared.

**38** Adjust the thermostat to a comfortable setting a few hours before the move-in.

**39** Offer to accompany new residents to the next resident function and introduce them to other residents.

**40** Be professional; remember, residents view you as an expert in your field. Don't let them down.

**41** Dress professionally. Residents like to feel good not only about the appearance of the grounds and the buildings of their residence, but of the staff as well.

**42** Don't gossip with the residents. Nothing good will come of it.

**43** Keep the office and leasing area clean.

**44** Learn the residents' names and use them.

**45** Arrive early for meetings and be willing to stay late if a resident needs assistance.

**46** Be a good communicator. Return calls and e-mails promptly. Send handwritten thank-you notes.

**47** Remember that you are often a member of a resident's "extended family." When they need to talk, listen. When they want to visit, let them. Don't let them linger for hours, but don't shoo them out of the office because you have too much work to do. They are a large part of your work. Treat them respectfully.

**48** Don't get personal. Socializing with residents outside of work is almost always bad business.

**49** Remember that Fair Housing applies to everyone, including current residents.

**50** Love what you do for a living. What other career offers you a job where every single day is guaranteed to be different and you can make such a difference in people's lives? ■



*Lisa Trosien has more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as expertise on targeted uses of the Internet. She is a frequent presenter for NAA and serves on the Communications Advisory Board for UNITS. Trosien can be reached via e-mail at [lisa@aptexpert.com](mailto:lisa@aptexpert.com).*