

***Serrano on California***

*Serrano on California* Association President, Christine Houser, summarized her experience on the board when she said, “I look at this as a start-up, with all the learning curve, growing pains, and experimentation that implies.”

According to Chris and Deborah Bullock, Secretary of the *Serrano on California* Association, “the board went from 0-60 miles per hour in two years while determining the necessity to take control of the Association from the developer.” Taking control from the developer was a tremendous struggle and emotionally difficult for the Association. Additionally, the board had to gain control of the Association’s finances, find an experienced association manager, and had to gain the trust of the homeowners. Once the homeowners realized it was in their best interests, they rallied and helped outline priorities and goals for the Association. The Association Manager selection process began, and open communication lines between the board and the homeowners were formed.

As if this wasn’t enough, the Association learned that their monthly dues were under-funded. Under-funding monthly dues is sometimes a common marketing tool with new condominiums to attract prospective buyers. However, this marketing effort does not effectively prepare the Association for future needs. For the *Serrano on California* Association it has had an adverse effect and will hamper them for years to come.

Prior to discovering WSCAI and soliciting help from industry professionals, it was difficult for the Association to get on their feet. The sense of pride, dedication and motivation was evident throughout my conversation with Chris and Deborah. Having approached their involvement on their Association’s Board as a “start-up” they offered the following advice to other board members and homeowners:

1. Join WSCAI, attend courses, and network, network, network (within and outside the WSCAI chapter).
2. Understand your association’s finances so that they make sense! Chris and Deborah said, “having your finances in order is the beginning of your decision making process when deciding on repairs, improvements, etc.”
3. Get a professional Association Manager and hand over the daily control of the building. The Board must focus on strategic planning for the future.
4. Create a schedule for your building. Note things like the annual fire inspection, annual cleaning of chimneys and fire vents, contract review for the janitorial team, etc.

*Serrano on California*, located in West Seattle, was built in 2002, and has 35 residential units and one commercial unit. The commercial unit is currently owned by an accounting firm. Common in the Pacific Northwest is the building’s exterior; a combination of brick, cedar shake and cedar siding. One gem at *Serrano on California* is the rooftop garden that is available to all homeowners. The beautifully landscaped rooftop garden

has tables and chairs, a grill and offers gorgeous views of Puget Sound, Mt. Rainier and downtown Seattle. A welcome amenity in any Seattle neighborhood is onsite parking for residents. *Serrano on California* has a secure two-level underground parking garage. The Association also has a community room available for meetings, social events and private homeowner events.

Taking ownership in one's single biggest asset, a home, is often a challenge. Chris and Deborah's goal has been to get homeowners more involved. In their community room, they setup a box with "Maintenance/Work order forms" from McCue & Associates for homeowners to complete when they saw something that needed to be addressed, such as burned out common area light bulbs or areas that needed to be cleaned by the janitorial team. The board also had the role of "gently" informing homeowners that the Board doesn't change light bulbs in an individual unit. That came as a surprise to some of the first-time homeowners!

Communication with homeowners is important to this Board. The *Serrano on California* Board has open board meetings, a monthly memo from the President outlining items discussed in that month's board meeting, and, they post important announcements near the elevators and in their community room for all homeowners to see. As a result of their efforts, homeowners are more informed and better satisfied. Plus, homeowners are confident that things are getting addressed.

Geoff Wright, *Serrano on California* Association Manager, is with McCue & Associates. Imagine my surprise, when I learned Geoff is a board member on his **own** association! Geoff can certainly identify what clients like *Serrano on California* face as he knows first hand by serving on his association's board. After an initial interview process, the Board hired McCue & Associates to begin managing *Serrano on California* in January 2005. Another important factor for this board in their selection process was that Geoff had first-hand experience regarding construction defects, having been on his association's board when they went through the litigation process. The *Serrano on California* Board also wanted the best match for their building that would be responsive to their needs.

It has been a good fit from the beginning according to Chris, Deborah and Geoff. The Association wanted a professional Association Management firm to focus on the daily control of the building, make recommendations that are best for the homeowners and assist the Board with the many challenges they face. Geoff provides this level of service.

During my conversation with Geoff, I had the feeling he was a homeowner at *Serrano on California*. His passion and desire to manage this association as if he were one of the homeowners was very evident during our conversation. He's proactive in his management approach by providing information that the Board requires to make an informed decision and also informs them of any pitfalls. Geoff mentioned, "It's a pleasure to work with Chris, Deborah and Daniel, as they are always prepared prior to homeowner meetings, they are dedicated, motivated and hard working, and there is a tremendous sense of teamwork."

When asked about this year's challenges for the *Serrano on California* Association, Geoff indicated one major challenge is to work with the Board and Barker Martin, P.S. to address the building's construction defects. Other challenges this year include:

- Ensure the Association's financial security by formalizing and monitoring their budget and all expenses;
- Review the association's financial recordkeeping to determine future cash flow needs and future maintenance and improvements;
- Enhance property security;
- Continue to meet and exceed the board's expectations and to take one measured step at a time and work with the board on any issues that may arise.

If you would like to have your community appear in the Community Spotlight, please contact Michelle Medlock, Executive Director, of WSCAI.

*Ms. Chris Houser, President, Serrano on California Board of Directors, and Ms. Deborah Bullock, Secretary, Serrano on California Board of Directors, can be contacted through Geoff Wright of McCue & Associates*

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