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Community board association members go to Florida law "boot camp"

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In Army boot camp, soldiers go through a rigorous training program to get ready for potential battle with the enemy. In the context of the boot camp held recently at the Elks Lodge of Bonita Springs, training was meant to help "soldiers" do battle with large insurance companies and employ best practices to defuse disputes with association members.

The three-hour Board Member Boot Camp, hosted by the nonprofit Community Advocacy Network (CAN) and Naples law firm Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum, served as basic training for people who volunteer on their condominium and homeowners' board of directors. On March 13, the program was held for members of community associations throughout Bonita Springs, Naples, Fort Myers and surrounding areas. More than 100 people participated.

Playing "drill sergeant" for the day was Mike Oliver, a seasoned community association attorney with Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum, the firm that founded CAN. Decked out in military fatigues, army boots and a crew-cut hairstyle, Oliver was flanked by "Officers" Donna DiMaggio Berger, the firm's managing partner and executive director of CAN, as well as the firm's founding partner Alan Garfinkel.

Together the team drilled the "troops" with questions on Florida law as it pertains to proper association governance. Among other items, the group learned the dos and don'ts of negotiating contracts with vendors, handling collection matters, tips to deal with difficult people and how to spot the myths perpetuated by insurance companies.

"Most people who serve on boards are well-meaning volunteers who want to make their communities better places," said Berger, who conceived the Boot Camp idea. "But in order to do their jobs effectively they need to know the law. What we wanted to do is provide people with a basic understanding of best practices, but in a way that's fun and interactive."

"With the five-year statute of limitations for filing casualty claims right around the corner, it is essential that communities get a definitive answer as to whether or not they are owed more money for damage they suffered from Charlie, Wilma and other storms," Garfinkel said.

CAN is a nonprofit initiative started by Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum, a statewide law firm that concentrates its practice on community association and casualty law. CAN advocates on behalf of more than 1,000 associations, homeowners' associations and other common interest ownership communities. Besides legislative support, CAN also offers an Affinity Program that provides members access to special discounts and services from participating vendors such as banks, insurance agents and accounting services. Membership in CAN only costs \$150 per year with discounts given to larger umbrella organizations.

The Community Advocacy Network hosts free Board Member Boot Camps for large groups throughout Florida. To schedule a session for your association or for membership information, call 954-315-0372 or email Drill Sergeant Diane Schick at dschick@kgirlawfirm.com.