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Condo Boot Camp drills home the basics

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It was military-style training with a twist. Privates hailed from community associations around [Broward County](#) as Gen. Donna Berger commanded attention from the room at the Community Advocacy Network's Board Member Boot Camp this past weekend.

More than 150 "recruits" filled the Knights of Columbus Hall in Hollywood, which was decked out in camouflage décor complete with a Jeep parked out front and Berger and her troops in military fatigues.

"Condo and HOA education does not have to be drudgery. We tried to make it something you can understand without citing statutes," said Berger, executive director of Community Advocacy Network, a community association lobby group created by the law firm of Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum. "It's an evolving process. This time there was a lot [better] atmosphere. We tried to create a barracks."

The Board Member Boot Camp is a fast-paced, entertaining program that uses a low-key approach to educate property managers and board members on community association laws, rules and regulations while dispelling false information.

"I find the current board [members] at my condo are not as knowledgeable, and I'm concerned we might make mistakes," said Rose Fuhrman, a recently elected board member at Hillcrest Golf and Country Club in Hollywood. "A lot of people get on the board to have a voice and don't think about the responsibility of it."

Boot Camp participants recite and sign the Board Member Creed and are given an in-depth packet of material covered in the seminar and earn achievement diplomas at the end.

Berger said some participants asked for a Board Member Boot Camp weekend in the seminar's survey. Additionally, by the following Monday, more than a dozen people had registered for the next Boot Camp, which has yet to be scheduled.

Seminar topics ranged from how to negotiate vendor contracts to negotiating with residents and how to handle delinquencies and foreclosures. Individual attorneys also led discussions on specialized topics.

Raymond Piccin, a senior associate at Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum, discussed vendor contracts and the proper way for board members to negotiate their needs. Piccin said he has seen associations pay up to 70 percent of the contract up front without the work beginning.

"Do not make a down payment. If a contractor cannot afford to pay to start the work, they cannot afford to finish the work," Piccin said. "You need to do a little bit of due diligence to research who you are dealing with. It will save you a lot of time and money in the long run."

Berger spoke of the importance of getting along with residents and what to do when fraud is discovered in an association.



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"Unlike negotiating with vendors, you have to live with the members until they die or move away," she said. "Even in a highly functioning board, there will be disgruntled people. But like a healthy body with a virus, you'll be able to beat it."

For information on the Board Member Boot Camp or to register for the next seminar's waiting list, visit <http://www.boardmemberbootcamp.com> or call Diane Schick at 954-315-0372, or e-mail dschick@canfl.com.

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