

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Advocacy group launches free condo series

SEAN D'OLIVEIRA Forum Publishing Group

1:22 PM EDT, September 23, 2010

To provide community associations with an open forum in which to discuss recent changes to condo and homeowner association laws, the Community Advocacy Network and Associa are hosting Community Forum 2010, a series of free community forums around Florida.

The community forums are intended to help provide a platform for residents and board members to raise questions about a variety of topics affecting condo owners.

"It's a dialogue," said Donna Berger, executive director of CAN, a condo advocacy group. "It's all question and answer, and we hope people come with questions and get answers."

The first forum is from 6 to 9 p.m. Sept. 27 at the IGFA Fishing Hall of Fame, 300 Gulf Stream Way in Dania Beach. Others are scheduled for Naples on Sept. 28 and Orlando on Sept. 29.

"It's a free education forum to let people's voices be heard," said Wendy Murray, director of Business Development at Associa Services of Florida. "There have been so many changes, now is a great time to know the rules for boards."

Murray added that participants do not have to be clients of Associa or CAN and that any resident or board member of a condo, co-op or homeowners association can attend.

The community forum differs from CAN's Board Member Boot Camp, which helps certify board members in community associations.

Sessions will focus on the most compelling issues facing associations, including Senate Bill 1196, how the gulf oil spill has affected property values around Florida, disaster preparedness, best management practices and how unit owners can work with boards to end conflicts.

"There have been sweeping changes across the board, and residents need sources for more information," Berger said. "We want to educate people living in communities to let them know what's out there."

CAN plans on hosting additional community forums in 2011 and 2012, with the sessions addressing issues that are affecting residents the most.

"We want people to feel that everybody was heard and if they feel they weren't, we'll provide contact information so they can always follow up with us," Berger said.

For information or to register for one of the upcoming forums, visit <http://www.communityforumfl.org>.

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