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Foundation for Community Association Research Survey

September 06, 2012 - Owners Developers & Managers

For the fourth time in seven years, community association residents told pollsters they are satisfied with their homeowners associations, condominium communities and cooperatives.

Independent, national research conducted by IBOPE Zogby International shows that 7 in 10 community association residents are satisfied in their communities, with only 8% expressing some level of discontent and 22% neither satisfied nor unsatisfied.

More than 62 million Americans live in an estimated 315,000 association-governed communities, from townhome communities and cooperatives to high-rise condominiums and city-sized, master-planned associations.

The 2012 research findings, strikingly similar to the results of surveys conducted by Zogby International in 2005, 2007 and 2009, affirm the nationally representative tracking survey as an effective means of measuring the satisfaction of community association residents. The survey was sponsored by the Foundation for Community Association Research, a nonprofit organization created by CAI in 1975 and devoted to common-interest community research & development.

"These are reassuring findings given the media's usual fascination with conflict and tension in all segments of society," said 2011-2012 Foundation President Carole Murphy, CMCA, PCAM, a long-time community manager. "The public's perception of many institutions has declined steadily in recent years, but that hasn't happened to community associations."

Conflict and dissention make headlines," Murphy adds. "That's become the definition of news. While there are serious issues in some communities, this research affirms that the vast majority of homeowner board members and professional managers are doing good work for the community associations they serve."

Key Findings

The findings are especially positive for the homeowner-volunteer leaders who serve on association boards, with almost 90% of residents saying board members "absolutely" or "for the most part" strive to serve the best interests of their communities. Only 10% of respondents expressed displeasure with their boards. Almost two million homeowners are elected by their fellow owners to serve on association boards.

81% of association residents say they get a "good" or "great" return on their association assessments; 18% say they don't, and 2% aren't sure.

73% say their professional community managers provide value and support to residents and the association at large; 21% say they don't, and 6% aren't sure.

76% say their community association rules protect and enhance property values, while only 3% say rules harm property values, and 21% say there is no difference.

Although the enforcement of community rules can generate discontent and calls for more stringent regulation of associations, only 11% of those surveyed want additional government control of

association-governed communities. Almost 90% oppose more government involvement.

While most residents do not want additional regulation of their associations, Murphy readily acknowledges that many community associations are not without issues. "It sounds pretty good that only eight of every 100 residents are dissatisfied with their own associations," she says, "but that percentage represents close to 5 million Americans, so there is a continuing need for education and training."

Education and Training

CAI provides three levels of professional education for community managers, as well as a variety of tools and resources for the association board members and other homeowner leaders who play roles in the governance and management of their associations.

"The education of managers and homeowner leaders is our primary reason for being," says CAI chief executive officer Tom Skiba, CAE. "Community association management is an increasingly complex business—and associations are businesses—so it's more essential than ever that managers and homeowner leaders learn from the most respected experts in the field. That's what we offer in our classroom and online courses, at our national and local chapter events, in our publications and on our website."

Skiba urges managers to take full advantage of CAI's professional development program. "It's the single most important thing managers can do for their client associations and their own careers," he says. "Homeowners in every community deserve a professional manager who is trained, educated and always current on key issues and best practices that affect the well-being of the communities they serve."

Skiba adds that homeowners need to "step up and play a constructive and positive role" in their associations. "You get out of your communities what you put into them," he says. "There's no substitute for active and constructive homeowner involvement and no better way to build a strong sense of community."

Best and Worst

Asked to name the best aspects of living in an association, residents most often cite neighborhood attractiveness (24%), less maintenance for individual homeowners (17%), community safety (13%) and property values (12%).

Asked to name the worst aspects of their associations, 34% say there is nothing bad. That is followed by restrictions on exterior improvements (15%), dealing with neighbors (10%) and paying assessments (9%). Association homeowners pay assessments for services and amenities provided by the association. Services can include landscaping, building maintenance, garbage pickup, snow removal and street lighting. Amenities can include pools, clubhouses, tennis courts, playgrounds and association-sponsored social functions.

Based on telephone interviews conducted in February 2012, the survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.8%. IBOPE Zogby, now known worldwide as IBOPE Inteligencia, is ranked among the top 25 market research firms in the world.

Get more research findings at www.cairf.org.