

Camelot president's goal: Keep subdivision vibrant

By Jdanno Maliczowski
staff writer

If your neighborhood needs some tips on homeowner participation, just ask Farmington Hills resident Neil Swiacki and his Camelot Courts Association colleagues.

"There'd been a lull with the neighborhood association for awhile," said Swiacki, president of the homeowners group in the subdivision, which is north of Middlebelt and west of Inkster.

"But we want to let people know we still exist. Like a tree, we're still in the process of growing. I think people are beginning to take interest," he continued.

The beefed-up homeowner association is taking the lead — and trying to set an example — for increasing homeowner participation, improving subdivision aesthetics and increasing buying power for home and neighborhood improvements.

Maintaining property values in the 20-year-old subdivision is a good part of the reason for stimulating interest in the association and in subdivision camaraderie, Swiacki said.

Association leaders know they wanted a stronger association and more homeowner involvement, but they needed to know how to make those improvements. A questionnaire asking for that direction was mailed in March to the subdivision's 160 households.

"The board was trying to find out

what the hot buttons were. With simple questions, we were able to get a pulse on what the neighborhood wants," Swiacki said.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS — printed in the neighborhood newsletter — showed residents' interest in maintaining the neighborhood's appearance and in neighborhood safety and property values.

"By increasing the value of the entire subdivision, each homeowner makes out," Swiacki said. "The number one thing is to have a nice neighborhood, a safe one and to keep values up. If you have a weak association and people start doing things that aren't positive for the neighborhood, the whole sub goes down."

Repairs — often expensive ones — that would add to the neighborhood's improved appearance have been part of the association's program.

For starters, association officers rounded up about 20 residents who wanted roofs repaired. Roofing companies were checked out and three that were willing to offer a good deal to residents were picked. They did the same with linoleum companies.

"Residents can pick any one of the three companies," Swiacki said. "We are acting sort of as the intermediary. We'll probably do the same thing with trees."

CAMELOT COURTS is among a handful of neighborhoods trying the coordinated discounts for improvement, said Jack Rajkovich, president

of the Council of Homeowners Association of Farmington Hills. "We like to see as much interest in these things as possible," he added.

Coordinating discounts is something municipalities have been doing for some time for such things as gasoline purchases. Farmington Hills city manager William Costick was surprised neighborhoods are now trying similar discount methods.

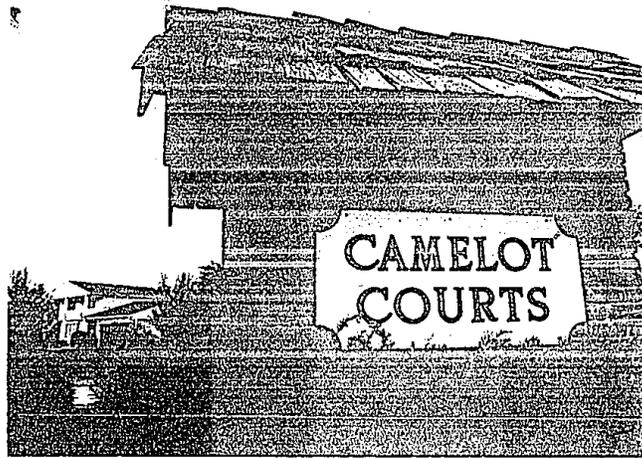
"I think it's a good idea. It points out to me the value of a neighborhood association," Costick said.

Swiacki considers the coordinated discount program and questionnaire a success and a start for improved homeowner involvement. At the least, he said, the questionnaire told the association board where it should allocate its time and money.

While the coordinated discounts certainly attract homeowner attention, the questionnaire showed other interests: tree plantings, a baby-sitting cooperative, beautification awards and a neighborhood-wide garage sale.

Participation is slow, but Swiacki is convinced the association can continue to draw involvement. A designated cleanup day for the subdivision park brought out residents armed with shovels and rakes. The primary goal: camaraderie and aesthetic improvement so more residents will use the open space.

"We're trying to improve the overall appearance of the neighborhood," Swiacki said. "I think it's working."



Camelot Courts residents filled out a questionnaire in March to help steer the newly revived homeowner association in the right direction.

DOUGLAS E. SUSALLA/staff photographer

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