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Search on for Communities of Excellence

By Dave Hodges
DEMOCRAT BUSINESS EDITOR

Residential communities across Florida are lining up to showcase their efforts at neighborhood improvement in the 2011 Florida Communities of Excellence Awards.

A program sponsored by *The Florida Community Association Journal* and law firm Becker & Poliakoff, the awards recognize the efforts of professional community managers, board members, homeowners and residents. All are encouraged to nominate their favorite communities for the awards, which honor and document the achievements of condominium and homeowners associations statewide.

The awards program is now in its third year. "Every year it gets more and more support from corporations and more participation from communities," said spokesman Alan Penchansky, president of The Pen Group Communications, adding 160 communities from around Florida have participated thus far.

As the program has grown, more communities are hearing about it and deciding to enter. "We have already been getting entries for about a month now and about half of them have never entered before," he noted.

There is no cost to submit an entry and communities may enter in multiple categories. The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15.



Special to the Democrat
One of last year's Communities of Excellence winners was the Forest Ridge Village Condominium Association in Fernandina Beach. It won for best small association in the category of safety and security. Built in the early 1980s, the community consists of 104 residences in a mix of townhouses and garden-style condos.

The 2011 awards are being supported by numerous participating companies that serve condominiums and homeowner associations. They include Associa, Comcast, The Continental Group, Association Financial Services, Kent Security Systems, Aquatic Systems, BB&T Association Services, The BCH Group, First Southern Bank and KW Management.

Finalists will be

announced in the March *Florida Community Association Journal*. Winners and finalists will be honored at the Florida Communities of Excellence Conference & Awards Ceremony, which is scheduled for April 1. This year's event will be held in Broward County. Board members, residents and community managers are invited to attend the day-long event and admission is free.

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ners was the Forest Ridge Village Condominium Association in Fernandina Beach. Forest Ridge won for best small association in the category of safety and security.

Built in the early 1980s, the community consists of 104 residences in a mix of townhouses and garden-style condos. It's about a block and a half from the ocean, said Sherrill Schafer, the community manager. Beginning in 2007,

Forest Ridge underwent a large-scale renovation that included new roofing, stairway modifications, landscaping, lighting and other improvements that enhanced the community's appearance. In the process, however, Schafer said the residents became aware of some security problems they faced, not the least of which was certain units where suspected drug activity was taking place.



FLORIDA COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

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Complete information about the awards and submission forms can be found at www.communitiesofexcellence.net.

"The president and I said we are not going to have this and we talked to the chief of police. We had a face-to-face meeting," Schafer recalled. "We just started reporting every bit of this activity to the police and they came in and cleaned it all up."

Residents developed a system of e-mail alerts when suspicious activities were noticed, and they stayed in touch with each other. The homeowners association also began sponsoring annual "Spring Cleanup" days for sprucing up the grounds, and followed up with a picnic. People got to know their neighbors and community life improved, she added.

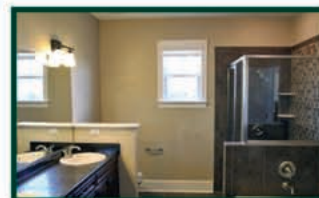
Forest Ridge Village will be entering the Awards of Excellence again this year. "Absolutely," Schafer said. "I am very, very proud of that community. The homeowners have worked so hard and I want them to have that recognition."

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