

## **Make a Smart Investment: Community Associations Offer Great Membership Value!**

By Bonnie Elgie

How do you create a small-town, neighbourhood feel in a large urban centre like Calgary? You join a community association!

Mayor Dave Bronconnier has proclaimed March as community association awareness month, and it is the perfect time to remind Calgarians of the value found in community association membership.

“Community associations help to build safe, vibrant communities,” explains Leslie Evans, Executive Director of the Federation of Calgary Communities. “They are a cohesive voice for the community and help create a sense of belonging for those who live there.”

The Federation of Calgary Communities was established in 1961 to give a common voice to 47 community associations. Today, there are 143 Calgary community associations registered with the Federation. Its mandate is to assist member associations with the administration and operation of their organization and/or facility.

Adds Evans, “It’s our job to support community associations and help them to do their job within the community. Our goal is to have vibrant community associations at a local level who in turn improve neighbourhood life in Calgary.”

Approximately 156,000 Calgarians, or almost 15 per cent of the city’s population, belong to community associations. Through this year’s membership campaign, the Federation hopes to see that number grow substantially.

“Many people may think they already belong to an association by virtue of living in their community, but they have not officially joined,” says Evans.

Memberships are inexpensive with annual fees ranging from free to \$45 per family or household. The average membership across all Calgary communities is \$20.50 per family, \$10 per senior or \$15 per individual.

“There is great value in a community association membership,” adds Evans. “You have access to programs, services and special events for all ages. There is a lot of information available through local newsletters and web sites. Many businesses offer membership discounts, and in many cases, there are central recreational facilities.”



**One of eight massive banners the Federation hangs throughout Calgary for two weeks in March.**

Even in communities without a centralized facility, people can still meet together and host events or programs in other venues such as churches, parking lots or shopping centres.

Community associations can be the conduit to creating that sense of belonging and a small-town feel within the larger city. There are numerous volunteer and social opportunities, as well as a sense of safety that is created when neighbours begin to get to know each other and take pride in their community. Volunteer turnout is higher for clean-up and improvement days, and there is a common commitment to creating safe, clean and cohesive neighbourhoods.

“People want a place to belong. In a city like Calgary, we have families and individuals who have moved from other places in Alberta, different provinces and even other countries. They want to feel connected to their neighbours,” says Evans.

One of the most critical roles that community associations play is to provide a vital link to the City of Calgary about issues relating to community life. Associations are the local voice for planning and development issues, parks and recreational amenities, and a wealth of areas that impact the day-to-day lives of Calgarians.

Says Evans, “There is a real benefit to having your community properly networked with City. People who belong to community associations feel that they have the ability to address issues and can offer constructive input on topics that are important to them.”

As part of the membership campaign, the Federation is posting awareness banners throughout the city during March...