



Catherine Halkett

Happy Membership Season!

I have been glued to my television, watching the Olympics unfold before the entire world and have been fascinated by the numbers of people, ordinary people, who have been swept up by this occasion. What makes people want to be involved and connected to this amazing event? I think there are many reasons and would like to expand on a few because I believe that many of these can relate closely to why people get involved in anything, and in our case, communities. The level of involvement (in community) varies according to opportunity, philanthropy aspirations, desire to participate at some level, pride, and the basic need to belong and gather in groups for a common goal.

Watching the Olympic crowds and events we see people who have taken time off work to volunteer and help at the events. We see people who are simply there to get swept up in the spirit and have a good time. We see individuals and teams that have dedicated a large portion of their lives to training and competing, many without any fiscal gain at all. We see the “wind beneath their wings” contingent of people—those coaches, trainers, doctors, families, et cetera, who have made a commitment to teams and individuals, helping the athletes on their journey. We see people who have organized the events and celebrations and desperately want everything to go well. Finally we see all those external forces, such as the weather, beyond anyone’s control, that provide challenges to even the best laid plans. And topping all of this is celebration; win lose or draw—and in some cases cancellation; the crowds celebrate the vision of the Olympics.

So what does this have to do with believing in community and membership? Well, I will tell you...

How we think about membership and participation within communities can be shaped by what we are seeing unfold before our eyes in Vancouver. Community associations must evolve to live in this

moment, yet preserve the values and beliefs of a long established, historically important past. They must evaluate what is working and what isn’t, what is worthy of keeping and what must be relegated to the history books. Most importantly this job must be done with the conviction and confidence that ultimately, if given the opportunity, people do want to belong to something like a community association; something that fulfills a variety of different needs and desires.

If we believe that people are not interested in belonging to an association – we are probably right. If we believe that we will never be able to get people to join a board – we are probably right. However, if we believe the opposite who knows what can happen. Not that just believing will make membership appear. This goal can be achieved through an enormous amount of dedication, work, planning (and a little bit of luck).

There is assistance for communities to help plan membership campaigns, search for Board members, create celebrations, publicize what is great about your community and demonstrate why it is worthy of joining and celebrating. Similar to the Olympic athletes, community associations have support systems in place. Organizations like the Federation or various facets of the City of Calgary are behind community associations and are cheering for them to be successful.

Combine this with the knowledge that people want to live in a community where they know people, get involved with their neighbours and you have the chance to achieve some of your community’s goals – a vibrant, involved, devoted membership that is involved at a variety of levels within the organization.

Helpful Links...

Free Board Tool Kit

Every topic you can come up with is here.
www.managementhelp.org

Volunteer Calgary Board Match

www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca/programs/board_match.html

Membership Drive

www.calgarycommunities.com> membersonly> membership