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February  
2 0 0 9

*Welcome to the sixth meeting of the 2008-09 year!*

# February Meeting

**Monday, February 16, 2009 • 7 p.m.**

*Free to RAA members • \$15 non-members • Come to the meeting, join & save!*

**Venetian Club • 2180 Elmwood Road • Rockford, Ill.**

*topic is:*

## **“Let’s Talk UTILITIES”**

*Guest Speaker*

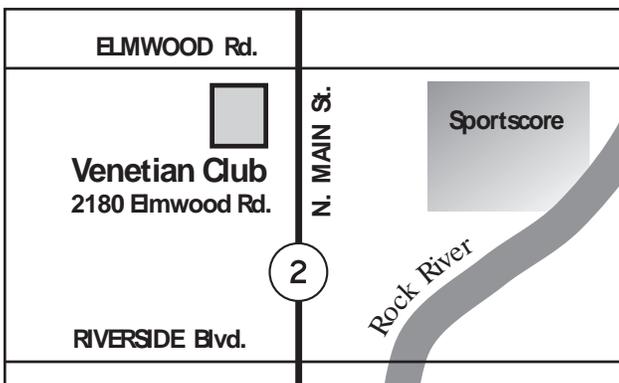
*James Agnew, ICC Consumer Policy Analyst*

*Special Guests*

*State Senators Dave Syverson and Brad Burzynski*

*See you on the 16th!*

## **RAA membership doesn’t cost—it pays!**



**Join RAA!** As a member, here’s what you get:

- ▶ 8 monthly meetings with guest speakers covering a variety of property management topics
- ▶ Winter Member Mixer
- ▶ Spring Banquet
- ▶ a Web link or page advertising your units on the RAA Web site
- ▶ Member networking with current tips, bargains and referrals
- ▶ Knowledge of State and local political issues affecting property managers and owners
- ▶ Monthly newsletter

A one-year membership is \$99. To join or e-mail RAA, go to [www.rockfordapartmentassociation.org/newmember.html](http://www.rockfordapartmentassociation.org/newmember.html)

**To join the e-mail group:** RAA members can join the RAA e-mail group at [RAAmembers@yahogroups.com](mailto:RAAmembers@yahogroups.com) Include the name your membership is in, and your e-mail address where the group can reach you.

## Utility issues will be addressed by RAA and IRPOA

Utility companies in Illinois are not required to provide an accurate meter reading. They can estimate your bill as long as they want. When an apartment is empty and utility usage is minimal those estimated bills are based on usage as if the unit is occupied.

The law gives utility companies the right to place service in a property owner's name. The law does not require that the utility company use an accurate billing address or to inform the property owner that the service is now in their name.

Utility companies transfer balances from one account to another without providing information as to where the balance due originated.

One of the issues of importance to IRPOA is the transfer of utility bills without notification. IRPOA will be proposing that when utility billing is transferred, to immediately notify the property owner, use actual—not estimated—meter readings, and to designate where the amount due originated.

RAA is assembling a special committee to address utility issues. If you would like to help on the committee, contact Karl Fauerbach at 815-877-6077.

Our next meeting on February 16th will be devoted to the ongoing and often expensive problems many of our members are experiencing with Com Ed and Nicor Gas. The core issues we will be addressing are:

1) Unauthorized transferring of account balances to landlord, whether it is an unpaid bill for which a tenant is responsible, or a bill from another property belonging to the landlord;

2) Getting Nicor and Com Ed to send correspondence, bills and notices to the correct billing address, as provided by the landlord;

3) Notifying the landlord when a service has been transferred to his name; and, Getting accurate and timely meter readings.

It is an indication of the level of concern arising out of these continuing problems that State Senators Dave Severson and Brad Bryzynski have committed to joining us for the meeting. In addition, we are being joined by James Agnew, Consumer Policy Analyst for the Illinois Commerce Commission.

### Call to Action

It is important to be able to demonstrate to the ICC and to our political representatives that the problems are more widespread than just a few isolated incidents. Our members can help identify specific issues by providing information:

**Identification of the utility company—Property address—Approximate date of the incident—Account and/or meter number—BRIEF, factual description of the problem, and the consequences.** ■

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## IRPOA Lobby Day 2009 March 4 in Springfield

**Please plan to attend with RAA and other Rental Associations from across the state. Using the form below, register by February 25. RAA members will organize carpooling arrangements for our group.**

Every year, there are about 40-50 laws proposed that affect our business. IRPOA (Illinois Rental Property Owners Association) identifies these out of the 6,000-7,000 laws that are proposed at the state level. IRPOA goes to work to support the proposals that will be good for us and fights to stop the bad proposals from becoming law. Rockford Apartment Association is a member of IRPOA along with 16 other associations as a state-wide coalition to help the rental property industry and its members in Illinois.

This event is open to non-members as well to give rental property owners a chance to participate in the process and see the benefits of group efforts. Taking the time to go to Springfield and meet with elected officials sends a strong message about your commitment to change the way owners of rental property are treated in Illinois. Nothing makes more of an impression than personal contact.

The current issues include:

- 1) Removal of Trespassing Occupants
- 2) Separation of Dealing with Nuisance Behavior from

Condemnation of Property

3) Defense of Court Rulings on Inspection without Probable Cause

4) Notification of Utility Transfers

**See how the process works Wednesday, March 4, 2009 from 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m., beginning at the Inn at 835, 835 South Second Street, Springfield, Illinois 62704**

### AGENDA:

- 10:00 a.m. .... Registration
- 10:30 a.m.....Welcome IRPOA Government Relations Chair, Remarks, Legislative Overview, Consulting4Biz IRPOA Lobbyist
- 11:30 a.m..... Lunch (provided)
- 12:00-2:00 p.m..... Individual Legislator Visits at the Capital Complex (Bring Picture ID and wear a suit/tie in case there is an opportunity to enter the Chamber Floors.)
- 2:00 p.m..... Debriefing at Inn at 835

**Registration fee \$30**  
**Discount of \$5 to members of IRPOA Associations**  
**Registration due February 25, 2009**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Member Association \_\_\_\_\_  
 Credit Card# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp \_\_\_\_\_ CID code \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail form & payment to:**  
**IRPOA \* 811 E Rollins Road \* Round Lake Beach IL 60073**  
**Phone 847-356-6010**  
**or fax Credit Card information to 847-263-5726**

## Professionalism in background checks: both sides are responsible

by **Tim Hoffman**

A recent incident reminded me about the importance of keeping background checks professional and confidential, for both the current and prospective landlords. It is highly recommended that you do a background check on all prospective tenants. This includes calling their current and/or former landlord. As a member of the RAA, we encourage you to give accurate, truthful information to any questions asked of you by the tenants' prospective new landlord. This

would include negative information about the tenant if that information is relevant to the new or prospective landlord.

Such issues may include:

- Payment history (good and bad)
- Are they current with rent or not?
- Have they given an appropriate notice to vacate?
- Have the police ever been called to their residence for

**Continued on page 4 ►**

## E-mail etiquette

by Pete Suknaich

E-mail is a powerful and useful tool to communicate quickly in today's world; however, reasonable care should be used when writing an e-mail. The purpose of e-mail is to clearly communicate with people in a very immediate fashion. E-mail is less intrusive than a phone call, and faster than a letter. When communicating via e-mail, please consider the following points:

- Be concise and professional when writing an e-mail—especially when the recipient is a group of people, some of which you may not know personally. A professional tone is the best policy when writing an e-mail.
- Please sign your e-mails. In many cases, I don't know your e-mail "alias" and I can't tell who is asking a question or posting an answer.
- The use of proper "Subject" lines is very helpful. Please refrain from replying to an e-mail with an entirely new topic. In cases like this, alter the subject line to be more helpful for the readers.
- Be sure to review your messages before you send them. A simple double check is useful to eliminate spelling errors and other typos. This also gives you a chance to alter the tone of your message, if desired.

- Avoid using all upper case letters. On the Internet, that is interpreted as shouting and may be viewed as disrespectful by some people. Also avoid using all lower case letters—that is sometimes viewed as mumbling.
- Choose your shorthand abbreviations carefully. Some people may not understand your message.
- The use of a simple "Please" and "Thank you" are signs of being respectful and courteous. ■

### Professionalism in background checks: both sides are responsible

#### ►Continued from page 3

reasons other than needing the assistance of the police?

- Have they lived by the current landlord's lease terms? If not, what did they violate?
- Would you rent to them again?

These are all valid in determining if the tenant will live by your lease terms and conditions. You want to get honest answers when you do your checks right, so give honest answers when someone else is doing the checking. This is only one side of the equation.

Both landlords are obligated to keep the questions and answers HONEST and CONFIDENTIAL. This means if you as the prospective new landlord get information that would keep you from renting to the tenant, you keep the source confidential. It is inappropriate to tell the tenant, "Your current landlord said you did "X" or didn't do "Y" so I cannot rent to you."

This creates a hostile environment for the current landlord and tenant, and will jeopardize the chance of getting accurate information in the future from that or other landlords who have to deal with the consequences of those actions.

If I get information that tells me I do not want to rent to a tenant, I have a set statement that I use. It says, "Due to information we received while processing your application, we are unable to rent to you at this time." This could mean you found false information on their application. It could mean you talked to their current landlord and he said they don't pay their rent as agreed, or the police were always there and the neighbors complained all the time.

It could mean anything other than information you received from a credit report. If the tenant wants to know more I always tell them, "Submit your request in writing with a self addressed stamped envelope and we will give you more information." In the 10 years I have been a landlord, I have only had one tenant who was turned down that took me up on this offer.

If you turn someone down due to information you received via a credit reporting agency, you have to send them the information regarding which agency you used and a way for them to contact that agency so they can get a copy of their report to check for inaccurate information. That, however, is a whole other discussion. ■

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## RENTER'S GUIDE

We at the **ROCKFORD AREA  
RENTER'S GUIDE**,  
support the  
**ROCKFORD APARTMENT ASSOCIATION**  
and encourage everyone to do the same!

#### Until further notice . . . .

We will donate to the Rockford Apartment Association, 10% of the cost of any AD, placed by an RAA member, in the Renter's Guide.

Now you can rent your apartment and do something nice for the RAA. When you place your ad, you must tell us you are a member and request that 10% be sent to the RAA. (First time customers only.)

Call us for details.

**815-964-6700**

## RAA January meeting 1-19-09



Carol Washington of Rockford Housing Authority presented in-depth information about the Section 8 Voucher Program.



Jody Marshall of *The Rock River Times* presented advertising benefits to RAA members in January.



Don of Pearson Plumbing and Heating gave away a \$50 gift certificate to a lucky raffle winner.

### Set up your contractor's table

**Attn. contractors:** To set up your contractor's table at one of the RAA meetings, call Karl Fauerbach at 815-877-6077.

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### Block cell phone sales calls

Cell phone numbers will be going public, which opens you up to receiving sales calls which you will be charged for. To block your cell phone from receiving these phone solicitations, call the National DO NOT CALL number from your cell phone and it will block these calls for five years. The number is 888-382-1222. ■

*Great Ad Rates for Your Rental Units!*

**10% OFF for  
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- Buy two weeks, get the third week FREE
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- Deadline is Thursday noon before following Wednesday's publication
- All classified ads must be prepaid

**Call Stephanie today at  
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## Advertising on the cheap

by Tim Jensen

If you are a typical landlord, you hate paying to advertise. For many years, the only forms of advertising were the paper and a sign in the yard. If you price a 3-line ad in the classified section, it is around \$200 and even more if you want a picture. Thanks to the internet, more importantly [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com), that has all changed. With craigslist, you can advertise your rental for FREE, YES I SAID FREE! Best of all, you are not limited to three lines of text and you can post color photos, too.

I have been using [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com) for the last year and my results are outstanding. Now, it is not a catch-all and there are times I still advertise in the paper, but you can't beat FREE. Below are some pointers to get the most out of your craigslist ad and get your property rented quickly.

**TITLE.** This is the most critical part of the ad; you need to give the reader a reason to click on your ad. If you are offering a move-in special, allow pets, or the property has been recently renovated—put that in the title. Same thing with stainless steel appliances, garages or basements. Bottom line, they need a reason to click on your ad and not someone else's.

**AD CONTENT.** The ad must do a good job of describing the unit. This is not a typical classified ad, so you can go into details. If it has a beautiful yard, big kitchen, nice

appliances, or you have a rent special—let people know about it. You need to have a balance here. You want to give a nice description of the property, without writing a manifesto. I suggest about one to two paragraphs.

Whatever you write, it is important to give the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, and if there is a basement and garage in the first two sentences. Many readers just browse the ad, so you want the most important info first. Include a phone number and your Web site if you have one. **DO NOT** put in your e-mail, because you will get spammed (that is junk e-mail).

Finally, you need to have the property address. It really cuts down on unnecessary calls, as people won't call if they don't want to live in a certain area.

**PHOTOS.** This is a must-have in any ad. Let me repeat, photos are a must-have in every ad. Having no photo is the biggest mistake I have seen in craigslist ads. If your ad has no picture, you cut down your chances of anyone looking at your ad. Remember, a picture speaks a thousand words and people want to see what their new home looks like inside and out.

When taking your pictures, try and do so on a sunny day. It makes the property look so much more inviting. Craigslist will only let you have four pictures per ad, so make them the best. Most people want to see the outside, the kitchen, living room and yard. If you have an extra special feature in the house, make sure you include a photo of it. Finally, make sure the picture is a quality one; don't use your cell phone to take pictures. If the picture looks bad, your property look bad.

**POST EVERYDAY.** Posting your ad everyday is essential. Craigslist will not let you post the exact same ad every day—however, this is how you can get around that: Write three different ads for one property, then rotate which ad you post.

Craigslist lets you post the exact same ad once every three days. It does not have to be a complete re-write, just move some sentences around or reword it. What has worked for me is to have one ad in which I use bullet points to describe the

property features and the other two where I just switch some sentences around. This may take some time to work out a system, but it is well worth it.

*Tim Jensen has been an investor for over 18 years in the Rockford area. He is also the co-host of "Talking Real Estate" on AM 1330 WNTA. His Web site is [www.timbuyshomes.com](http://www.timbuyshomes.com) and you can e-mail him at [tim@timbuyshomes.com](mailto:tim@timbuyshomes.com) with your comments or questions.* ■

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**RAA Coupon**

**\$5 off your next order of RAA Forms.**

Welcome to RAA.

As a good-will gesture for our valued members, RAA is proud to present you with this coupon good for \$5.00 off your next order of forms. We think once you use the forms available to only RAA members, you'll keep coming back for more. Let us prove it! Give it a try.

Fine print

- Coupon expires on April 1, 2009, No Exceptions!
- One coupon per paid RAA membership.
- Only you can redeem your coupon.
- Only one coupon may be used per order. If you order less than \$5.00 in forms ... you don't get any cash back.
- Not valid with any other offer or coupon.
- Void where prohibited!

## RAA 2008-09 Board Members

### President / IRPOA Rep

Paul Arena..... 815-243-2924

### Vice President / Nominating Membership

Ken Becker ..... 815-399-8000

### Secretary / Taxes

Tim Hoffman ..... 815-988-4004

### Treasurer

Mike Cavataio ..... 815-397-3320

### Legal

Mario Tarara ..... 815-399-6090

### Business Relationships / Ads

Jim Merrick ..... 815-222-7423

### Business Forms

Pete Suknaich ..... 815-332-9463

### Membership

Vince Miosi ..... 815-877-3272

### Newsletter / Fair Housing Representative

Lori Gustafson..... 815-963-0268

### Programs

Karl Fauerbach ..... 815-877-6077

### Lease Committee

Ken Hagemeyer.....

### Web Site / Promotions / Special Events

Steve Lantow..... 815-633-9967

### RAA's Phone Number

1-800-RAA-6676

### RAA's Web Site

[www.rockfordapartmentassociation.org](http://www.rockfordapartmentassociation.org)

## RAA member participation

The momentum of the organization is growing, which is good and necessary as we work to tackle local and state political issues along with staying on top of rental property management issues.

- The e-mail listserv is working well for people to post their questions and get helpful responses from others in the group.
- The terms of several board members will be up in May, and Ken Becker is taking nominations for people interested in joining the board. He can be reached at 815-399-8000.
- Another way members can get involved is by helping on a committee such as the Lease Committee and the Utility Issues Committee. Karl Fauerbach can answer questions about the committees at 815-877-6077.
- If you would like to contribute articles for the newsletter, email them to [LoriGustafson@comcast.net](mailto:LoriGustafson@comcast.net). ■

## RAA Service Directory

### ADVERTISING

#### Rock River Times

Frank Schier • 815-964-9767

### BANKING

#### Midwest Community Bank

3963 N. Perryville Road

Richard A. Schrom, Executive VP

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#### Coin Appliances Inc.

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## Rockford Apartment Association Code of Ethics

We, the members of the RAA, recognizing our duty to the public and the intimate nature of the relationship between the apartment resident and the owner, or manager, and being aware of the vastly increasing role of the apartment industry in providing the home of the future, and in order to provide the apartment-residing public with the maximum in quality and service upon the highest standards of honest and integrity, do hereby bind ourselves, with each and every member, together and alone, agreeing that, so long as we remain members of the RAA and so long as nothing contained herein shall be unlawful, we shall:

1. Promote, employ and maintain a high standard of integrity in the performance of all rental obligations and services in the operation of our apartment communities.
2. Maintain and operate our apartment communities in accordance with fair and honorable standards of competition, ever mindful of the purposes of the Rockford Apartment Association and in compliance with the bylaws thereof.
3. Strive continually to promote the education and fraternity of the membership and to promote the progress and dignity of the apartment industry in creating a better image of itself in order that the public may be better served.
4. Seek to provide better values, so that an even greater share of the public may enjoy the many benefits of apartment living.
5. Establish high ethical standards of conduct within the apartment industry in the business relationship between the owner, managers and suppliers of products and services to the apartment industry.
6. Maintain property standards of the appropriate governmental authority.
7. Ensure that every qualified individual, regardless of that individual's race, color, religion, gender, disability, familial status or national origin is afforded the same opportunity to rent an apartment and enjoy the benefits of apartment living.

*Financial statement available upon request to members in good standing.*

*The content and opinions expressed in the RAA newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of, nor are they necessarily endorsed by, the Rockford Apartment Association or its board.*

PO Box 2502 • Loves Park IL 61132

