
Quick & Quirky: December 11, 2008

MULTIFAMILY EXECUTIVE Senior Editor Chris Wood rounds up interesting and intriguing news tidbits. This week: a smoking ban success story, senior and student mixers, and reference letters gone awry.

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By Chris Wood

No Butts About It

If you're fretting over enacting a no smoking policy at any of your properties, breathe easy. After nearly a year of living under Portland, Ore.-based Guardian Management's no smoking policy, a majority of smokers and nonsmokers alike think the snuff out was a great idea. Three quarters of residents were "very" or "somewhat" happy with the ban, and the percentage of nonsmoking residents who reported never being exposed to second-hand smoke in their apartments increased by 75 percent, according to a survey administered by Guardian in conjunction with the Oregon Public Health Division.

"The survey results are consistent with initial research that residents want the opportunity to live in smoke-free environments," says Guardian vice president Jim Wiard. "We've also found that the policy not only improves the overall health of our residents, but we can offer cleaner, better maintained apartments that provide more value for residents, owners, and investors."

Among smokers responding to the survey, 30 percent reported being happy with the ban, and 43 percent reported smoking less tobacco since the policy took effect. More than half of the smokers surveyed have tried to quit since Guardian enacted the ban, and two-thirds of them said the policy was the main reason for trying to kick the habit. Guardian's no-smoking policy covers 17 federally subsidized rental communities across the Western states and was the largest multifamily smoking ban in history when it was enacted last January.

Charm School

Residents at 10 West 65th Street near Central Park West in Manhattan are due for the ultimate meet-your-neighbor mixer. After being sold to a private development company in 2004, the building's mostly older contingent of rent-controlled and rent-stabilized residents feared luxury gentrification was inevitable. Those fears were replaced by thoughts no less anxious when tenants were notified this fall that the building has been sold to New York City Touro College. Students began moving in this Thanksgiving, and thus far, the social atmosphere has been surprisingly positive.

Credit that to the student body at Touro, an all-female Jewish-backed institution. So far, the worst of noise

complaints have been the click-clacking of high-heels overhead. "It was over the top," resident Carolyn Cohen said in a *New York Times* article about the community. The next day, Cohen left "a very nice note" for her upstairs neighbors, and they have since "been very, very careful." Mixing student housing within market-rate and affordable communities is neither illegal nor uncommon in real-estate starved Manhattan, the *Times* noted. A Touro spokeswoman says that residents at 10 West 65th Street can rest easy, explaining that the students are all "mature young women of the highest caliber who will live harmoniously with their neighbors."

Just Being Nice

A positive reference from a past landlord doesn't empower or otherwise qualify a resident to move back into a unit where the lease was not renewed, says tenant/landlord advice columnist Robert Griswold. A reader who misses friends after being "falsely accused" of breaching lease covenants wonders if the good references mentioned in casual conversation by a current landlord is enough to require an old community to roll out the red carpet for a prodigal return. Not so, Griswold says.

"Remember, there is no requirement that he gives a reference in the first place," Griswold advised the resident in a column appearing in Chicago's *Daily Herald*. "So I don't agree that you can use his positive recommendation against him. He actually has done you a favor by not bringing up any negative issues concerning your former tenancy."

Q&Q wonders if the time invested in thinking about sticking it to a landlord offering a gracious exit might have been better spent in community common areas meeting new neighbors. Just a friendly thought.

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