**Have Party, Will Travel**

By Amy Repke

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRAMBLETON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Creating community spirit and building neighborly connections is a long-standing attribute of community associations. From single-family homes in master planned communities to suburban townhouses and city condominiums, each common interest community has its own history, personality, and characteristics that make it a special place to live.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for community associations, but it also has provided the opportunity to re-examine how residents build and maintain neighborly bonds. One community in Northern Virginia is taking a simple, old-school approach that’s proving to be a recipe for success.

Brambleton Community Association in Ashburn, Va., showed off its block party trailer during the 2021 Large-Scale Managers Workshop in September. Christine Elansary, Brambleton’s on-site community engagement manager, says the trailer was a collaborative effort envisioned by the management team, staff, and business partners.

At the heart of every community association is the people, and Brambleton’s management staff wanted to create something that could bring residents together in smaller sections of the community while maintaining social distance.

Launched in June, the block party trailer is a moving party on wheels. Hosting about one to two parties per month, the trailer is stocked with tables, tents, and drink tubs as well as a karaoke machine, sound speaker, sports equipment, and throwback games including hula hoops, a giant Connect 4, kickball, and dodgeball.

When Brambleton initially tested the trailer in one area of the community, it was an instant hit, says Elansary. “People started coming out of their homes, talking, laughing, and gathering with each other. They were blown away by the concept and were truly surprised when they realized it was complimentary for residents.”

Here’s how the program works: Homeowners reserve the trailer by completing an online form including the date, time, location, and what streets are invited to enjoy the block party trailer. They can use an online invitation tracker (such as Signup Genius) to know who will be attending. Finally, residents are encouraged to share pictures of their party by using a designated social media hashtag.

To spread the word about the trailer, the community publicized the recreational vehicle on its website, community newsletter, and parked it at larger community events. A sponsor helped underwrite the cost of wrapping the trailer to showcase a QR code with information, logo, images, and graphics. Elansary says that QR codes are a great way to connect with residents who are walking or running in the community with their phones in hand.

Elansary says that the block party trailer is helping engage residents and strengthen friendships by offering a way for them to connect and have fun in person. “It has been a great way to get our community active and back together. In our technology age, we’re thrilled when we hear from families that say their kids have never even heard of games like dodgeball or kickball, let alone played them,” she says.

If your community is interested in starting its own block party trailer, contact Christine Elansary at christine.elansary@brambleton.org or visit the Brambleton website at brambletonhoa.com.