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Time for a Makeover? (Part Two)

Begin with your community entrance for immediate impact

Q Now that I have the data needed for my upgrade outline, what's next?

A Since it is up to the community management to lead the way in the upgrade process, we will begin with elements under management. You'll make immediate impact by starting with the community's entrance and frontage — its image area. In newer communities with larger homes that don't need any reconfiguration of lots and infrastructure, this may be the main or only step needed.

The image area consists of the landscape elements, the signage, fencing and lighting. Many older communities already have plantings in the entrance and frontage area. If these were properly selected and well maintained by pruning, watering and fertilizing, they may be handsome assets worth saving. If they have been neglected, they may need work. Seek the advice of a landscape architect, horticulturist or nurseryman.

Be certain that the existing or proposed new plantings do an adequate job of screening out unsightly views. A proper mix of plantings, deciduous and evergreen, will not only create an attractive and visual barrier here, but will also guarantee year-round beauty. If lack of water has been responsible for the poor performance of the plantings and lawn areas, consider a sprinkler system or the use of plantings and ground cover that perform well in dry conditions. If sprinklers are installed, plant bold beds of annual and perennial flowers in the lawn areas and around trees and shrubs to create a colorful accent. Be sure that the beds are shaped for easy mowing of the adjacent lawn areas with riding equipment. If new plantings are installed, select varieties that will not require a high degree of maintenance and pruning to sustain a positive appearance well into the future.

Some well-designed entrance signs may only require repaint-



ing or refurbishing. If that is the case, consider changing to a more contemporary color combination to produce a fresh look. In several instances, we have even changed the name of the community and created a new logo as part of the upgrade process. The new color combination and logo should be appropriate for the community and able to be utilized on other community facilities. If this is one of several communities owned by a company, consider a uniform logo, naming system and color combination for all company communities as a way to unify the company image.

Decorative fencing is another element that can add to the positive image of your project site. Be certain that existing fencing is in good repair and repaint to the new color combination if necessary. If it is decided that fencing is needed, select a style and materials that will coordinate with the community theme and be as maintenance free as possible.

Interspersing fence sections among plantings or earth berms may be as effective and cheaper than installing a continuous fence. Finally, lighting of the entrance sign and accent lighting of the landscaping can extend the image window into the evening hours.

The same process used in the frontage and image area should be utilized in the remaining community controlled areas: the clubhouse, recreation areas, open spaces, and the maintenance complex. Cosmetic upgrades to the community may be the only items needed to create a new image, or only the first step in a comprehensive upgrade. In my next installment, I'll discuss the reconfiguring of lots and infrastructure required in severe upgrade situations.

Don Westphal has over 35 years of experience planning manufactured home communities. He can be contacted at (248) 651-5518 or via email at don@dcwestphal.com