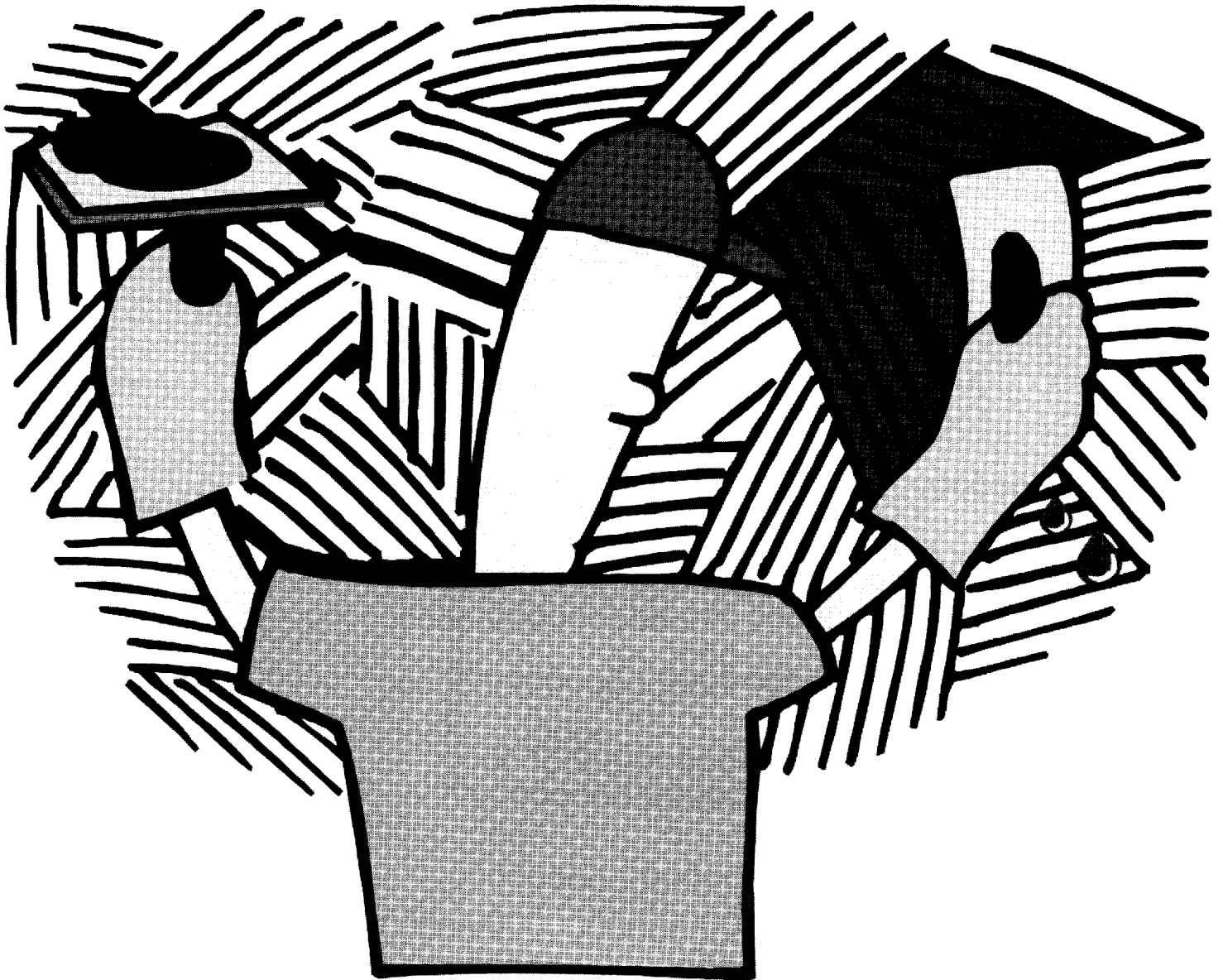


Is Your Community **Ready**

By Stephen R. Bupp, PCAM



Additional renovation and repair articles in this issue

Are You Protected?
Such Tangled Webs We Weave

VOGUE! A Runway Perspective on
Carpet Fashion

Conversion to In-Unit Laundry for
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The Beauty of an Effective Community
Landscape

A Fresh White-Coat

to Renovate?

Do your community's buildings look dated? Some looks are classic, or even desirable. Some looks say this community was built 30 years ago! Following up on Dale Robinson's article in the December 2000 issue of *Quorum*TM, *Good, Old Fashioned Curb Appeal*, it is not always enough to keep your community property values competitive with neighboring communities by keeping buildings and grounds well maintained, and selecting upgraded carpet.

Residents of all communities become so familiar with their close surroundings that they tend not to notice that it is dated. After all, they purchased their home because they liked it. *Won't everyone else feel the same way they do?*

But if you step back and analyze the number of home sales in the community, you may find that your community may need to go beyond high maintenance levels and seriously consider renovation. Some indicators may include the average sale price of homes, the pace of sales, the appreciation in value as a percentage by year, the increasing or decreasing number of renters, the desire owners have to live in their home.

One conclusion that I have consistently found in over 27 years in the management business is that when colors, carpet, and design are mentioned, everyone has an opinion. It is usually easier to replace a \$200,000 chiller than it is to change the color of the hallway doors. Before undertaking any renovation program, every board member and manager must think realistically.

The board of directors at Greenbriar knew that they alone should not tackle the design and color selections for their interior hallway renovation without outside professional help. The three boards agreed to work together and utilize the services of one architectural firm, share the costs, and try to agree to do the same renovations in all three adjacent communities. It took 18 months, numerous revisions and a great deal of discussion, but the boards persevered and agreed on a plan, colors, a budget, a financial plan. In addition,

they coordinated all of the scheduling and are well underway toward their original stated goal of updating the community. Four of 50 buildings are completed and nine more will be done during 2001. The work consists of new dropped ceilings in common halls, recessed lights, recessed emergency lights, decorative interior architectural columns and arches, new railings on all stairs, crown molding, chair rail and smooth surfaced MDO board covering part of the original interior brick. Retrimmed entry doors to each home, ceramic tile in heavy traffic areas, new stair treads, and upgraded carpet with integrated mats at each entry door are also part of the renovation.

Not everyone in the community is committed

to these changes. Yet when stages of renovation reach the *nay sayers'* buildings, the complaints are not very loud. Reserve funds are being used to replace the railings, the light fixtures, carpet and tile and stair treads. Operating funds are being used for the painting, and the wall covering material is a capital improvement. The plan for completion is six years for all 50 buildings.

Addressing the costs up front makes it much easier to continue the program because owners are ready for these improvements. In order to increase reserve funding and cover increased operating expenses the condominium fee was increased 4 percent. Open budget meetings

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were held to hear owner comments about the proposed increase with 75 owners attending these meetings. Only one person voiced concern over the increase. Many owners had questions and suggestions for the renovation specifications, but all were presented in a positive manner and the boards approved proceeding with the budget increase. Telling owners that the association could renovate the hallways and not have it cost money would have been a mistake, in my opinion.

In order to complete the work, three staff members were hired by the association. They are supplemented by an electrical contractor, a railing contractor and a carpet contractor. The staff completes all of the demolition work, carpentry work, stair treads, tile work and painting. Greenbriar believes that by using on-site staff, the pace, cleanliness of the buildings, disruption and noise can be better controlled. In addition, the residents know the workers and feel comfortable around them.

The contractors are called in to complete their specialty when the renovation staff is ready for them.

Time will tell if the overall renovation will bring the property values of the 25 year-old community up to the level of its newer neighbors. We will be monitoring owner-occupancy rates, pace of resales and other measurable items to see if the whole program is successful. No matter what those numbers and statistics show, however, the appearance, brightness and improved look of the halls are experienced by every resident many times a day when they enter and exit their building.

If your community decides to pursue a renovation program, there are a few points that need to be discussed in order to ensure that your project complies with your community's documents, and that your residents are in agreement upon the renovations.

- Do your homework first—do not rely on anecdotal data about your community and neigh-

boring communities.

- Realizing that change for most people is difficult, recognize the problems you may face and be patient.
- Get professional design help and... listen to them.
- Realize that the vote for renovation will not always be unanimous.
- Acknowledge change...*renovation is not free.*
- Do a sample building and let everyone look at it before moving forward.
- Don't make the renovation a race—stage the work.
- Check reserve funding and readjust reserve categories if necessary.

Steve Bupp is President of Condominium Venture, Inc., and has been managing the Greenbriar Community since 1978. He served as the President of CAI National in 1999/2000.

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personal tastes to the decision of color. To some people, green represents tradition, quality and old money. Others may think of envy or inexperience when they see green. A color combination containing the colors black, tan, taupe and gray may seem very sophisticated to some while to others, it may seem boring, dingy or even suggest mourning or fear. Depending upon ethnicity, members of a committee may favor bright clear colors including red, green, purple and turquoise. Some may perceive these as garish. Some may prefer maroon, dark green and dark blue as elegant and traditional, while others may see the same colors as old and stuffy. Most importantly, those members who decide to become active will have to make a decision in the best interest of the community. If other residents want to contest the decision, recommend that they join the committee.

Other than *commercial* carpet, another suitable carpet style for condominiums is *hospitality*. This carpet is primarily designed for hotels and is constructed for areas that receive heavy traffic and heavy soiling. The patterns and colors are designed to hide wear and soil, yet they usually are designed with colors that are bright and festive and not acceptable to residential condominiums. The patterns generally are large in scale and may be difficult for a committee to accept, even if they are appropriate to the scale of the common areas. It is frequently necessary to modify or recolor carpets to obtain products

appropriate and acceptable to condominiums. For larger buildings this may be a good option. If you require a thousand yards or more, there may not be an additional charge for a custom color and pattern.

For many years, *cut pile* carpets were perceived as residential and upscale while loop piles were considered utilitarian and economical. Yet, it has become more acceptable to use loop pile carpets for corridors and heavy traffic areas. Newer loop pile styles have become very sophisticated and attractive and are more pleasing for residential applications. As a generalization, if face weights are equal, a loop pile carpet will perform somewhat better than a cut pile. Therefore, it may be possible to get a more durable carpet for the same price.

Tunnel Vision

Common areas generally consist of long, narrow corridors and elevator lobbies in high rise buildings or narrow stairways and small landings in low-rise buildings. It is common practice to make narrow hallways look wider and less like tunnels, and there are several ways to do this. Adding light fixtures on the walls (such as sconces) is very effective. Updating the overhead lighting is also helpful. Styles in lighting have changed in the last few years, perhaps in an attempt to save energy. While many older buildings have very subdued lighting, it doesn't have to be bright enough to read by.

Borders were very stylish in narrow hallways, but after living with them for some years we have come to realize that they often make the hallway seem narrower. In most typical layouts, designers don't want borders although the residents still do. Light colored borders are not practical—the ventilation system causes dust to collect at the outer edge where vacuum cleaners can't reach, and soil becomes an ongoing problem. Dark borders make the halls seem narrower. Borders do help to define specialized areas such as elevator lobbies and can add interest there. Just don't over do it with the borders.

What is important to remember when selecting new carpet for your community is that an up-to-date style is important to consider, especially when prospective residents visit the homes that are for sale and walk through the common areas of the building. But even more important than how vogue the look is, is how practical the application is. High fashion carpet is usually designed to look good. For how long? That depends on the manufacturer and the maintenance program performed on the carpet. Consider walking through neighboring communities who have recently replaced their carpet and let that stroll help you in making an informed decision.

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