

## Tips from Taft:

# Property Management Survival

**Q.** Taft, you've been around long enough to have seen downturns in the economy before. My vacancies are mounting. How can I find good, long-term tenants to fill my units?

**A.** Landlords and managers need to recognize and respond to changing market conditions. Of course, in our current economy, job losses are having a major impact on the ability of tenants to pay the rent and on the pool of qualified tenants. But a good program of marketing and screening can help you fill those units with solid tenants who keep your building strong.



**Taft West**  
Director of Property  
Management Training

Here's an interesting fact: Studies have established that nearly 75 percent of occupants will come from less than one mile away. Obviously, it's important to reach out to residents in the community where you own your property.

There are several ways to do this, including putting a sign on the building itself to attract local walk-by traffic; letting the vacancy

be known to local clergy and perhaps advertising in their church bulletins; placing an ad in the local newspaper; and — the one which many landlords forget — asking your existing tenants to use word of mouth to advertise the vacancy. Tenants want good neighbors so they will be careful about whom they suggest.

### *Property Owners and Managers:*

Do you have an issue or a challenge where you need help?

Send your questions to  
[AskTaft@cicchicago.com](mailto:AskTaft@cicchicago.com)

## Weathering the economic storm

In these tough times, managing multifamily property is more of a challenge than ever. "Tips from Taft" is the first in a series of articles on how to weather the economic storm. Taft West, CIC Director of Property Management Training, has more than 30 years experience in property management. Taft presents seminars on specific property management topics almost every week of the year.

Property management is an exceptionally complicated task. A manager must be a maintenance specialist, accountant, police officer, therapist, public relations expert, judge, social worker, teacher and lawyer all at once.

Curb appeal is the first and best opportunity to create a favorable impression to an applicant. Pay attention to how the property looks from the outside. Does it look like a place you'd like to live? Any unit shown to the applicant must be market-ready and in move-in condition — no exceptions, no excuses. On average, applicants shop five or more apartments before making a decision, so it is vital that the shopping experience at your property stands out in their minds.

Use a good screening process to ensure that you get tenants appropriate for your building. Screening should include eligibility, or capacity to pay regular rent; and acceptability, to ensure that the tenant is behaviorally appropriate for the property. Credit reports and employment verification can determine eligibility. Home visits and previous landlord references can be the benchmarks for acceptability. In some circumstances, it may also be desirable to conduct drug screening for new applicants. A personal interview with each prospect prior to final approval is an important step toward getting to know the applicant and is the first opportunity to welcome a new resident to the community.

Good property management can ensure a building's success even under the most difficult circumstances.