



Fredericksburg (VA) REALTORS® Use Murder Mystery Game to Boost RPAC Investments

Murder for fun and profit? Seems unlikely, in an organization with as high ethical standards as the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®. Nor is it every day that the staff member in charge of organizing an association's RPAC fundraising claims that a highly successful event was “not much work,” “loads of fun,” and “something I wish we could do more often.”

But on the evening of June 6, Kim McClellan, Government Affairs Director of the 1,400-member Fredericksburg Area Association of REALTORS® (FAAR,) pulled off a real fundraising coup by ‘killing off’ the association’s President, Chip Taylor -- at a “Murder Mystery Dinner” at the local country club. She credits the Greater Augusta Association of REALTORS® with the idea; it had hosted a similar event for charity last fall, and posted a glowing report on the Facebook group page for Association Executives. “All I did was follow their lead. I called the same murder-mystery professional, and made arrangements with the country club – and, oh yes, laid down on the floor while someone traced a blue tape outline around me as ‘evidence.’ It couldn’t have been easier!”

McClellan was testing out NAR’s RPAC Fundraising Grant process. “I had been curious to see how it worked,” she says, “Again, it couldn’t have been simpler. We received a \$1,200 grant, which helped pay for the services of Kathy Johnson, whose company, Murder Is a Game, scripted the event. It also helped defray food costs.” The \$45 tickets included a buffet of heavy hors d’oeuvres and one drink ticket from the cash bar. Over 100 people attended, with free admission for FAAR’s major RPAC donors. “NAR has a great culture of rewarding these folks, and we try to do the same,” McClellan points out. “Of course, there were those who bought tickets anyway, and made additional donations. Everyone seemed to get in to the spirit.”

McClellan and her colleagues determined the ‘victim’ and ‘suspects’ – including her boss, FAAR’s long-time Chief Executive Officer, Pat Breme; two local brokers, and an affiliate-member. Then Kathy Johnson took over, sending each role-playing participant a questionnaire and scripting an elaborate, deliberately misleading, and sometimes hilarious plot that unfolded over the course of the evening. All guests were invited to be ‘sleuths,’ taking notes, questioning suspects, and searching their pockets and bags – where ‘evidence’ had been carefully planted. Everyone submitted a ‘solution’ to the crime, and the winner was awarded a big, bountiful movie gift basket, for continuing entertainment.

The FAAR members and their affiliates clearly relished the opportunity to get together and laugh -- “and talk about something other than that short sale that fell through after months of hard work,” notes McClellan. “Things are definitely getting better, but like everywhere else, we’ve had a couple of really tough years here.... My face actually hurt at the end of the evening from laughing so hard,” she says. “Not only that, but people were having such a good time, they lingered on until we had to shoo them off the premises. And a few folks



even approached me about sponsoring the event next year, which, given the success of this first event, would be a great opportunity for sponsors, and an easy sell for us.” She guesses they could easily sell twice the number of tickets next time.

The ‘murder’ raised over \$4,000 for RPAC, with additional pledges still coming in. Who says ‘Crime Doesn’t Pay’?...



Body outline of our murder victim, FAAR 2012 President Chip Taylor



The “cast” including from left Kevin McGrath of RE/Max Bravo, murder victim 2012 FAAR President Chip Taylor, FAAR CEO Pat Breme, Sabrina Anderson of Coldwell Banker Carriage House, and affiliate member Peter Habib of M&T Bank



Dinner guests question murder suspect Peter Habib, affiliate member from M&T Bank



Mystery winner, Pat Martin of RE/Max Bravo, flanked by murder suspects Kevin McGrath of RE/Max Bravo (left), murder victim 2012 FAAR President Chip Taylor (left center), murder suspect and FAAR BOD member Sabrina Anderson of Coldwell Banker Carriage House (right center), and affiliate member Phillip Blake MBH Settlement (right)