

Q: When Isn't a Dining Room a Dining Room?

A: When It's "Flexible Space"

BY LISA TROSIEN

If your community has a glut of one-bedrooms available, trying to make each one sound wonderful, unique and fabulous to a prospective renter can be difficult—especially if prospective residents in your market are absolutely dying for one-bedrooms with a den, right?

Wrong!

Regardless of market conditions, leasing professionals must scrutinize their available inventory with far greater detail than in the past. Those one-bedroom apartments are not simply one-bedrooms with a dining area; they are one-bedrooms with a home office.

If you don't believe me, just ask a member of your maintenance team what most of your residents use their dining rooms for. Guess what? It's not for dining.

The fact is, many one-bedroom residents do not use their dining area for dining. They instead have discovered that their so-called dining room makes for wonderful home office space. Many simply plunk their desktop computer onto their dining room table, plug it in and work from there. Others have taken the plunge and furnished their dining area so that it serves as a home office.

Describing a one-bedroom apartment instead as a one-bedroom with a den has proved to be an effective marketing tool for many leasing professionals. Smart leasing professionals think "outside the box" and offer dining areas instead as home office alternatives, especially to prospects who express a need for a home work space. Remember, a dining area isn't always a dining area—it is flexible space.

What about the dining area in a two-bedroom apartment home? Property management professionals have seen their residents use their so-called dining area as:

- a reading area complete with chair, floor lamp and bookshelves;
- a sitting room with furniture, stereo and soft lighting;
- a playroom with toys, a toy box and colorful wall decorations;
- a home office, complete with a small desk, computer and filing cabinet;
- a yoga/meditation room with yoga mat, yoga brick and a

television and VCR to use when watching workout videos;

- an extension of the living room—where the living room and dining room had met, the furniture keeps going into the dining area—with no dining table and chairs to be seen;
- a sewing room with sewing machine, task lighting and a full array of sewing supplies;
- a craft area with tables, supplies and everything needed to do small home-based crafts;
- and in an extreme case, one resident turned their living room into the dining room (complete with a table that seated 10) and turned their dining room into their living room.

How can leasing professionals capitalize on this ever-growing trend—by starting to rethink their models. No longer must the "dining room" be shown as a dining room. Review the list of alternate uses for the dining room and furnish it accordingly. ■

Lisa Trosien has more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as being an expert on targeted uses of the Internet. Reprinted with permission from the January/February 2003 issue of UNITS magazine, published by the National Apartment Association (NAA). For more information about NAA, please visit www.naahq.org or call 703/518-6141.

Fair Housing Compliance

Before beginning any marketing or leasing program that materially changes the way a community is leased or marketed, it is advised that leasing professionals or management staff review any changes with their house counsel or an attorney who specializes in Fair Housing.