



By Betsy Tucker, CPPS

When children are young, they often dream of what their future occupations might be. Some aspire to be astronauts who float around in space and walk on the moon, some want to be firemen who save people from perilous situations and get to climb tall ladders, others want to be doctors who get to “cut people open” and heal sick patients. We don’t often hear a child choosing a critical profession such as an accountant, economist, psychologist, counselor, IT or management consultant or property manager.

Let’s consider why kids dream about being astronauts, firemen, doctors, or even superheroes. First, these professions admittedly come with some pretty nice perks - getting to moonwalk, saving lives, or sliding down a shiny metal pole. Second, it’s easy to see the “up side” of these professions. Kids think of doctors and imagine them nursing others back to health. They think of astronauts and immediately see people rocketing into space. They think of firemen and form a picture of one rescuing a trapped person from a burning building. How are such young children able to summon these images? Because of a third reason which is that we are inundated with images of these figures - on television, in movies, in the news, in video games – even on apparel; hence, they are very much a part of our culture, specifically “pop” culture. Traditionally, no similar awe-inspiring images came to mind when one thought of an office worker, retail manager, accountant or property manager, but that trend just might be changing. Property management has become very much a part of our “pop” culture, and people are starting to associate

Property’s Entertainment Value: The Role of Property in “Pop” Culture

interesting and dynamic attributes to our profession.

Think about some television series that now air due to a near total invasion of the airwaves by what's known as "Reality TV." Have you ever caught an episode of the History Channel's "Pawn Stars" or PBS' "Antiques Roadshow?" In short, these shows document ordinary people's attempts to recover some value, albeit through different avenues, from items that have been saved and preserved for years, decades, and in some cases centuries. Items on these shows cover the entire gamut, including antique vehicles, signed memorabilia, ammunition from 19th Century wars, flatware used by royalty or postage stamps dating back hundreds of years. All items have a few things in common. First, they are old, some *really* old. Second, they

have some intrinsic value stemming either from their original owner, the time period from which they hail, or some such other unique detail. Third, their owner (or owners over time) has preserved them because they deemed them to be valuable, sensitive, or simply interesting items. Lastly, and in support of my argument, they make for fantastically entertaining TV viewing! If you're like me, you're near the edge of your seat waiting to learn from resident "experts" the dollar value of a sword dating back to the 18th century or a Confederate flag that's thought to have been carried through battle during the Civil War. Sure, the actors and their transactions contribute to both shows' entertainment value, but think about it: property, even people's old stuff that's been lying around for decades, is cool!

Another good example of property popping up in today's culture is The Learning Channel's answer to the reutilization challenge, "Junkyard Wars." This series presents the epitome of reutilization – building working machinery from items that are literally considered "junk". The reutilization challenge for property managers is fairly simple; match idle items that have not reached their end-of-life to a need that exists for that item. The challenge presented on "Junkyard Wars" is similar, while a bit more difficult. The series frames a demonstration of advanced manufacturing with a head-to-head competition in which two teams must complete a project – be it constructing an airplane, a car, a tank - using nothing but junk. The participants are basically doing

what we as property managers are doing daily, just in a different arena. They're reutilizing whatever they can find in a five acre junkyard to make a functioning machine; we're reutilizing idle items found within our organization so that we can buy fewer new items and realize a cost benefit. And again, it's interesting! Reutilizing idle property not only brings organizational efficiency; it makes for great TV! Admittedly, the head-to-head competition and "race against the clock" aspects certainly add to the show's appeal, but at its core, it's all about property.

Let's switch gears and take a look at real property. By now, most everyone has at least heard of HGTV, and most of us are probably avid watchers of one of many home improvement shows, whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or simply interested in how to cost-effectively buy or sell a home. This channel features several shows that are based on real property challenges and the effective use of space. On "Income Property," homes undergo amazing transformations as homeowners are assisted in sprucing up their space to make it rent-worthy. With the help of some interior design improvements, the transformation is based on restructuring or reconfiguring space so that it is maximized and utilized most effectively in a particular area - be it a basement, an attic, or an attached apartment. Similarly, the show "Designed to Sell" features homeowners who are trying to make their "space" more attractive to prospective buyers, which usually means restructuring the home to make the spaces appear larger and more logically designed. The parallels between the objective of these shows and the real property manager's charge couldn't be clearer. Real property managers must do exactly what the hosts of these home improvement shows do - find ways to maximize space

and ensure that all space is being used in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. These shows also illustrate how real property matters affect bottom lines; a good layout and effective use of space will yield a higher price for a home while driving down operating costs for an organization. And, anyone who has watched an episode of either show will likely agree that the transformations can be at times unbelievable, not to mention entertaining.

This increased exposure of our industry should come as no surprise. Consider professions mentioned earlier in this article and how important a role property management plays in these figures being able to execute their respective duties. To a child of any age (adults included), astronauts have really "cool" jobs. They get to wear spacesuits, explore the galaxy, and see first-hand what the rest of us can only hope to see in pictures or on TV. While kids aren't expected to consider everything that goes into a successful space mission, most people can certainly agree that it requires much more than a shuttle and a team of astronauts. Space vessels, for instance, contain countless tools, dials, sensors, meters, calibrators and measurement instruments, not to mention the parts needed to erect the vessel itself. These craft must be built with meticulous attention to detail, and can't exactly function with parts missing. Somewhere, a property manager is in charge of these parts. The property manager is the person charged with ensuring the right items are in stock, enough items are on-hand, and the necessary items make it to their destination so that space missions can continue without interruption. No one is trying to make the case that this job is as glamorous as the astronaut's job that takes him or her into outer space, but it's equally crucial to the overall

mission. Those astronauts would be going nowhere if it weren't for the people who maintain and manage the tools they need to do their job. Similar arguments can be made for the doctor who counts on certain tools and medical devices to do his job effectively, or the fireman who can't help anyone unless he has what he needs on his truck to effectively fight fires and save lives. Property management isn't just about tracking desktop computers and printers. Property managers are the folks who are behind the scenes ensuring seamless operations for a whole host of occupations, even those that are considered really "cool".

So what does all of this tell us? It's pretty clear that our industry is attracting all sorts of people who want to be property managers, whether they are interested in assisting space missions, the valuation of personal property, or the redesign of homes. As the industry grows and evolves, it is beginning to touch every aspect of our lives and gain recognition in myriad arenas - from space to medicine - not to mention increasingly positive exposure in the media. As property managers, we take pride in the duties we perform to support larger missions, as well as in the fact that more and more people - including those in the entertainment industry who have a hand in framing "pop" culture - are starting to recognize the importance of what we do, and the excitement that it can bring to those doing it. ■

BIOGRAPHY

Betsy Tucker, CPPS is a Senior Business Analyst with Sunflower Systems located in Arlington, Virginia. Betsy has over six years of consulting experience with most of her work focusing on federal agencies. Her focus areas in property management include systems enhancement, program operations and environmental initiatives. Betsy is a member of the Federal Center Chapter of NPMA and serves as the Eastern Region Editor.