

# The POA BULLETIN

The Property Owners' Association of The  
Villages

Champions of Residents' Rights Since 1975

February 2004

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## Serious Problems in Villages Hospital Cloud Outlook for New Sumter Tax District

There is something drastically wrong with the Villages Hospital.

There are just too many stories of inattentive staff, long waits, ignored patients, overcrowding, bureaucratic bungling, questionable triage, and generally unsatisfactory service. Stories about malpractice lawsuits in the near future would not be surprising. Yes, there are also stories of good service, etc. However, the bad stories seem to overwhelm the good stories.

So, what's wrong? And, why can't the hospital management company brought into run

the operation fix the problems?

Now we have learned that Sumter county residents will be asked to approve in the November general elections the idea of a special county-wide taxing district to give public money to the hospital. If approved, the district would tax Sumter county residents up to 1% on a thousand dollars of house valuation. That would be up to \$150.00 on a \$150,000.00 house and would be added to the annual property tax bill.

Before we approve this new tax, let's ask a few questions:

First, let's ask for a complete disclosure of the financial records of the hospital. Neither the Leesburg Regional Medical Center (LRMC) nor the Villages Regional Hospital (VRH) has disclosed financial details of the VRH operation. We need to see the financial records so as to assess whether the hospital is running in the black or red and what start-up problems are still present. There should be no money before disclosure.

Second, we need to see the long-range plan of the hospital management company so as to see how current operational problems will be worked out in a reasonable 3-5 year start-up period. That should be enough start-up time for the hospital to turn into the black. LRMC and VRH should have anticipated this kind of start-up situation, and the related losses, and planned accordingly.

Third, we need the management company to explain why the hospital cannot manage on its own, without public funds, in this area of high demand and favorable demographics. VRH should be able to tailor and price its offering in such a way so as to successfully operate in this area.

Fourth, we need to see the hospital's plan for maximizing profitable operations and minimizing unprofitable operations. Yes, Medicare and indigent work is unprofitable, but specialized surgeries are profitable. So, what's the plan?

Fifth, should not the hospital, if it is given public funds in the lean times, be required to give back those funds in the good times? If we don't have agreement on this point, with appropriate controls, the hospital will always need more money and will never be satisfied.

Sixth, if public funds are offered and accepted, should not a representative of Sumter county taxpayers be on the board so as to independently report back to taxpayers on how the money is being spent?

Finally, why are we talking now about needing a special taxing district? The original plans for the hospital, as well as the expansion, were formulated without any input from a special taxing district. If the hospital was a viable operation before, why is it all of a sudden not viable now that a free handout from taxes is possible?

The Villages hospital is a valuable community asset. And, we all have a responsibility to support it in a reasonable and proper way.

So, let's not be foolish in how we do that.

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## Residents Comment on a New Paradise Center in Survey

The survey recently conducted by the POA regarding what to do with the deteriorating Paradise Center is in the final stages of completion. We are tabulating the results and should have these ready by the end of January.

The plan is to present the results to the VCCDD board at its monthly meeting on Friday, January 30, 2004. This meeting will be held at the Villages District Office just north of highway 466 and west of Hawkes Bay golf course. The offices are behind the gas station next to the bank. This regular monthly meeting starts at 9:00 a.m. and is open to all residents.

It is not certain that the VCCDD will allow us to present the survey results. The District Administrator, Mr. Pete Wahl, has asked that the survey results be given to him for use in his analysis of the situation. Mr. Wahl would then give the VCCDD board a recommendation based on his analysis.

The POA has decided that it would not like the survey

results to be diluted in the overall analysis process planned by Mr. Wahl. Furthermore, many residents either worked on or provided information in the survey because they all thought this was important. Thus, the POA plans to offer a presentation to the VCCDD on this very important question that has had significant input from residents.

If residents wish to participate in the meeting, or hear the presentation, they should come to the meeting. Alternatively, we will present a summary of the survey at the next POA monthly meeting on February 18th.

This is an extremely important question for all residents. A precedent will be established here on how The Villages maintains its recreation centers. The Paradise Center has been allowed to deteriorate substantially. The question now is whether The Villages will stand behind residents and, as Harold Schwartz had often said: "Give the residents what they want."

We hope the VCCDD will be listening.

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## POA Announces The Hall of Fame

It is with great pride that we announce The POA Hall of Fame.

The purpose of the Hall of Fame is to recognize and honor POA members who have contributed significantly to this organization over its 30 year life.

The POA will achieve its 30th anniversary sometime this year. This is a good time to recognize the significant contributions of our members who have served before.

Any POA member, past or present, living or passed on, can be nominated for this honor. We are considering having a waiting period of at least 3 years from the time of the most significant contributions before a person can be nominated to the Hall.

The process will start with a nomination form that we will have available shortly and will pass out at the POA's monthly meetings. Nominations can only come from current POA members. The form will contain the nominee's name and current contact information, if available. At least four co-nominating signatures will be required for the

persons making the nomination. A space will be provided for an explanation of why this person deserves to be in the Hall of Fame. This explanation is very important. Nominations each year must be received by the end of October.

The POA Board of Directors will review all nominations and make a final decision. Two or three of the most worthy candidates each year will be selected for induction into the Hall of Fame at the annual POA Holiday Party in December. Candidates not selected for induction into the Hall in any given year can be re-nominated in another year.

Members of the Hall of Fame will be honored for their dedication and selfless contribution to the POA. Popularity is not the deciding issue – a significant contribution to the organization will be the basis for selection to the Hall of Fame.

The POA will soon have 30 years of activities from which to choose candidates for the Hall. Let's make this a wonderful celebration of your POA and some of the really dedicated people who have served before to make the POA the great organization that it continues to be.

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## **The VHA Corner**

The POA has been especially disappointed with the VHA's position on Residents' Rights. The basic VHA position is to ignore any Residents' Rights issue that would be contrary to the interests of the developer of The Villages.

Consider the VHA president's position on the recent 20% increase by the developer in the greens fees on the championship golf courses. The VHA in its January newspaper asked residents to blindly support the increase as a way "to cover any increase in the costs of operations."

Missing from this statement was any substantiation by either the VHA or the developer of reasons for the increase. The VHA just assumed that an arbitrary 20% fee increase was justified. That is OK with the VHA. No questions asked.

Residents deserve a better explanation. The POA would like to see a detailed explanation of and justification for this increase. The VHA should have called for the same. That is what any worthwhile homeowners' organization representing its membership would have asked for.

The VHA president also said: "The VHA pledges to continue its leadership role of being in the forefront of issues affecting our community."

The VHA may think this sounds nice – but this is amusingly self-serving and totally out of character with the VHA's actions in the past.

The VHA is not in the "forefront" on issues affecting our community – it ignores and dodges many significant issues whenever it can.

The VHA blindly supports the developer on this fee increase when it should be questioning the basic facts and asking for an explanation.

On another subject, the VHA never responded to the POA proposal to eliminate the Patron Program of the Lifelong Learning Center.

This is a Residents' Rights issue in that special treatment is being given to residents who can afford to bribe the Learning Center with \$50.00.

This is not in the spirit of fairness and goodwill that should exist here in The Villages

between residents and the developer.

When asked about this by the Leesburg Daily Commercial, the VHA president said that this “was not an issue the association has dealt with.” He said: “I think we have a lot more pressing issues here at the Villages.”

It looks like the VHA considers some of its activities, like, for example, the Spaghetti Dinner, to be more important than Residents’ Rights.

This is somewhat comparable to the “Let them eat cake” quote attributed to Marie Antoinette. Supposedly, she said this as she and her king ignored the Human Rights of French citizens just before the French Revolution.

The comparable VHA quote here in The Villages, as the VHA ignores the Rights of Villages residents, might be: “Let them eat Spaghetti.”

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## **The Patron Program**

The previous issue of the Bulletin commented on the Lifelong Learning Center’s Patron Program. This program trades a resident’s \$50.00 donation to the Center for preferred access to entertainment tickets and special discounts.

Mr. Gary Lester, a spokesman for The Villages, responded in an article in the Leesburg Daily Commercial that the program “came out of the interest of residents” and that the program’s donations go “toward expanding programs such as the special speaker program.”

Mr. Lester should now take the opportunity to explain just how this came out of the interests of residents. Who are these residents? How was the decision made? Who initiated the idea?

Then, on the issue of the “special speaker program,” who are these speakers and what is the program? How much are speakers paid? Expenses? Could this program be funded out of the course fees paid by residents? Why can’t this program be funded out of the course fees?

And, on the fees, how much money has been generated by this program and what expenses have been paid using these funds? Has a full accounting been done? Please explain.

Furthermore, given the strong feelings against this program, and the manner in which it has been handled, shouldn’t the program be ended? Residents do not like elitist programs that seem to give preferential treatment to those who can afford to make a \$50.00 bribe. This isn’t fair.

Finally, Mr. Lester should be more forthcoming with information here. If he thinks this is a worthwhile program, there is no need to hide the details in what looks like a cover-up. Why do we have to pry this information out of him?

Honesty is always the best policy – and this can work for Mr. Lester also.

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## **Urban Sprawl**

The Orlando Sentinel recently ran an editorial on the subject of Smart Growth and Urban Sprawl. The premise of the article was that county officials must get a grip on sprawl to ensure a smart future with focused growth.

Referring to Lake County, the Sentinel said: "Commissioners waffle and make small decisions without a broader vision of what the county's future should be. The result has been massive urban sprawl in several areas of the county. Roads are clogged, schools are overcrowded, and the quality of life is dropping.... Commissioners need to ... state publicly how they would like the county to grow. Then they should overlay each decision as it arises on that larger vision."

The Sentinel has got it right.

Sumter County Commissioners need to listen and take note. The decision to allow The Villages to build south of 466 was a controversial one, decided in a 3-2 vote. It is not certain that enough smart planning was done on issues of roads, water, infrastructure, drainage, sewers, schools, traffic, etc., to go with that decision.

As the old saying goes, some county officials never saw a development plan they didn't like.

Now the commissioners are considering two apartment complexes of over 1,030 units north of 466 that will stress everything in the area.

Was this decided with a good overall vision of what the future situation will be? Traffic around The Villages is heavy now. Can you imagine what this will look like in another five years when The Villages population has doubled?

The only thing certain is that property tax revenues will soar. Maybe that alone is what makes commissioners smile.

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## CHEERS AND JEERS

**Jeers** - To non-residents who somehow get into Katie Belle's before 5:00 p.m. and stake out choice tables on popular nights. Wasn't Katie Belle's suppose to be for residents? How do these non-residents get passes anyway? Isn't there a person checking ID cards at the door?

**Cheers** - To the golf division for the idea of selling raffle tickets for an opportunity to attend the Arnold Palmer Clinic. Great idea. Good charitable cause. Wait a minute! What charitable cause? Where did all the money from the raffle tickets go? How much was raised?

**Jeers** - To the VCCDD recreation division for charging for free amenities that our monthly fees were designed to pay for.

**Cheers** - To Sumter County Commissioners who now have finally agreed that a library should be built for northeast Sumter county close to The Villages. Wait a minute – maybe they will change their minds again. Maybe they won't. It just goes to show you – you never really know....

**Cheers** - To the developer for opening up two new executive golf courses in addition to the Arnold Palmer course. With all the new people in The Villages, additional golf holes were really needed.

**Jeers** - To whoever is stealing golf clubs from carts around The Villages. Residents need to be careful and either cover their clubs or not take clubs into high traffic or problem areas.

**Jeers** - This is reluctantly given to the Troutman Christmas light display on Hillcrest Drive. This is a wonderful Christmas tradition. However, the traffic problems with all the nighttime visitors are too disruptive to the neighborhood – and perhaps even

dangerous. The Villages developer or the VCCDD should work with the Troutmans to move the display to a special place in The Villages where the display can be enjoyed without disrupting a local neighborhood. Maybe the island in Paradise Lake could be used -- a magnificent light display there could be spectacular and viewed by all. Maybe the back of the Hacienda Center as viewed from across Lake Mira Mar might also be suitable.

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## Supplemental Distribution of the POA Bulletin

We are pleased to announce that the POA Bulletin is now available in the Walgreens drug store and the Publix supermarket in the Mulberry Grove shopping plaza. Look for Bulletins to be stocked in both starting about the fifth day of the month. A complete listing of these supplemental distribution points is given on the Bulletin's back page. Thanks again to all of these stores.

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## April Fools Day Revisited (Don't Believe Any Of This)

The Villages announced that chicken will no longer be served in restaurants on the Town Square in an effort to combat Mad Chicken disease. This ban on chickens will not cover Silly Chickens or Surly Chickens. Bichara Deli also announced that it will ban meat products possibly associated with Mad Salami disease. The VHA president announced a psychological counseling program, with a 10% discount for VHA members, for anyone traumatized by either chickens or salami.

The Villages Hospital said that a Villages resident will need to have a Priority membership (with the chicken option) to be admitted to the hospital with Mad Chicken disease.

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## Next POA Meeting

**February 18, 2004**

THE NEXT POA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Third Wednesday of the Month – 7:00 p.m.  
Main Auditorium – Paradise Recreation Center

Mr. Dick Hoffman will speak on the One Sumter Initiative about a new method for electing Sumter County Commissioners

COFFEE AND DONUTS FOR ALL AFTER THE MEETING  
ALL RESIDENTS WELCOME – COME AND JOIN US

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