

# The POA BULLETIN

POA Logo

The Property Owners' Association of The  
Villages

Issue 30.03

Champion of Residents' Rights Since 1975

March, 2004

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## **Survey Results: Residents Want To Build a New Paradise Center Facility**

The recently completed survey of residents regarding what to do about the Paradise Center shows that residents want the old Paradise Center demolished and rebuilt with a new showcase facility. And, residents are willing to pay the estimated \$1.97 per month increase in the monthly maintenance fee to get it. A total of 540 questionnaires were completed and tabulated. The summary of results follows:

**Alternative Favored** - On the key question of what to do with the Paradise Center, 62% of respondents answered that the current Paradise Center should be completely demolished and rebuilt. 22%

favored renovation and redecoration without any demolition; 5% wanted to keep just the auditorium; 6% wanted to keep just the buildings on the south side of the center. The 62% figure is close to the general landslide definition of 66%. And, at a 3:1 margin over the second place choice, the preference of residents is clear.

**Pay \$1.97 per Month** - On paying for the project, 57% of those responding were willing to pay the estimated \$1.97 per month increase in the monthly maintenance fee. This response came from all three Villages counties. When just the responses for the east side of Highway 27/441 were broken out, the approval percentage was 67%. Again, these percentages show a decisive response by residents.

**Use of Paradise Center** - The Paradise Center is clearly a well-used and popular facility. 39% of residents responding to the survey are in the building at least six times a month; 68% of respondents at least three times per month. In a separate analysis of the Schedule of Activities brochure, about 47% of all non-golfing activities in The Villages are at the Paradise Center.

**Chatham Center Comparison** - A question was asked about comparing the Paradise Center to the Chatham Center, one of the new recreation centers in The Villages. Unfortunately, about 31% of respondents said that they had not seen the Chatham Center and therefore could not make a comparison. If these 165 respondents are excluded from the comparison, then 66% of the remaining 375 identified the Paradise Center as a "big disappointment" and another 19% said it did not compare favorably to the Chatham Center. Thus, 85% felt the Paradise Center was inferior to the Chatham Center.

**Observed Any Problems** - Respondents were asked whether they observed a variety of problems at the Paradise Center. A full 87% observed at least one of the problems mentioned. The individual problems noticed included termite damage (44%), Mold or Mildew (53%), Discolored Ceilings/Walls due to Leaky Roofs (64%), Dripping Rain Water due to Leaky Roofs (23%), Peeling Paint (51%), and Defective Floors or Carpeting (53%). This supports the assessment made earlier that the Paradise Center is a shabby and deteriorating structure.

**Seen a Rat** - Respondents were asked whether they had ever seen a rat in or around the Paradise Center. Only 20% mentioned that they had seen a rat. The most common place was outside but close to the building. This particular question is a good "check" or "verifier" question in the sense that if respondents wanted to answer untruthfully and "stack" the results one way or another, it would have been easy to untruthfully answer "yes" to this question. However, only 20% noticed the problem. This would intuitively seem to be a more reasonable response since rats are nocturnal animals and hard to see at anytime. Thus, this would appear to lend credence to the entire survey response. Nevertheless, rats are a serious and disgusting health problem that should not be tolerated in our community. This is a further condemnation of the inadequate maintenance procedures that have plagued the Paradise Center for its 30-year life.

**Property Values** - Residents were asked whether a new Paradise Center would have any effect on east-side property values. 76% said it

would have a positive effect; 21% said it would not. One resident in particular (see "Pretty Picture" story on page 2) said that a new building would "enhance the whole area" and "add another jewel to The Villages." Clearly, residents see advantages to having an attractive, new facility as the cornerstone of their neighborhood.

**Legal Action Fund** - Residents were asked whether they might be willing to contribute to a Legal Action Fund to support efforts to advance this idea. 32% said "yes"; 60% said "no." If needed, a call for donations will be made later.

**Demonstrate at VCCDD Meetings** - The question was asked whether residents were willing to demonstrate at a VCCDD meeting to advance this idea. 32% gave an unqualified "yes"; another 39% support the idea but cannot be there. These responses total 71% favorable support. Residents are asked to attend the monthly VCCDD meetings at which the Paradise question will be considered. However, there are no plans at this time to demonstrate.

**Picket the Sales Office** - Residents were asked if they were willing to picket at the Sales Office on the Main Street Square to advance this idea. 21% gave an unqualified "yes"; another 35% support the idea but cannot be there. These total 56% favorable support. However, there are no plans at this time to picket the Sales Office.

**Summary** - The residents have spoken and they clearly want a new Paradise Center. Mr. Harold Schwartz often said that he built The Villages by giving the residents what they wanted (see column 2 story). Hopefully the VCCDD will agree and support the residents on this issue. At the very least, a vote should be taken in the VCCDD to start the initial actions needed to get this done on a timely basis.

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## **Status of the Paradise Proposal**

The Paradise Center proposal and the Survey results were presented to the VCCDD at their monthly meeting on Friday, February 27th. Actually, the VCCDD Supervisors had received the material in advance as part of the meeting agenda package.

Mr. Mike Killingsworth, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, commented that the survey supported what the VCCDD has known for some time - that there was a variety of problems with the Paradise Center that needed to be resolved.

That is why the Board voted late last year to have a study done by a group of architects and engineers to review the problems. This group met with Mr. Pete Wahl, District Administrator, in early January to start the work. Recommendations from the group are due in the near future. .

The recommendations could range from renovation to a complete

demolition and rebuilding of various parts of the Paradise Center. Once the recommendations are received, the VCCDD staff, under Mr. Wahl's direction, will review the work and make a recommendation to the Board. The Board will then decide what to do and what provisions need to be made in the 2005 fiscal year budget beginning October 1, 2004.

Mr. Killingsworth declined to have a small group of residents work directly with Mr. Wahl during this review process. A focus group of residents might be formed in the future to solicit resident inputs for staff consideration. However, a decision on this will be made later. .

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## **Give Residents What They Want**

The obituary notice for Mr. Schwartz in the Daily Sun on December 24, 2003, provided many comments that are applicable to the ongoing discussion of what to do with the Paradise Center. Some of these comments are as follows:

Schwartz saw OBG transformed into The Villages by giving people what they asked for, bringing in restaurants, shopping and medical facilities, recreation centers, entertainment, etc. But, golf was very much on the mind of America's retirees, so Schwartz was determined to give people what they wanted.

Mr. Schwartz said that whatever you do, you must strive to be the best. If we are in the manufactured home business, we must have the best manufactured homes.

The years that followed contained countless more milestones as management gathered information through surveys and acted on resident's wishes.

In reviewing these comments, the POA was struck by the simple fact that governed Mr. Schwartz's vision in building The Villages - Give The People What They Want.

The POA thinks that this principle should govern the current deliberations about the Paradise Center - Give The People What They Want.

The People have spoken in the recently completed survey: They want a new Paradise Center.

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## **A Pretty Picture**

Many residents offered extra comments on the Paradise Center questionnaire. One letter was especially noteworthy. Mr. Dale Lamb lives on Kiley Court and wrote the following:

I feel that by building a new Paradise Center, there would be many good things that would be realized:

There would be pride for the people living in the area that Pete Wahl calls the Historical side to know that they are still in fact considered an important part of the Villages.

With the new fire station in place, a new building would enhance the whole area.

With the beautiful work that was done when the Mark Twain library was moved, a new building along side of it would just add another jewel to The Villages.

Looking down the hill, over the golf course and across the lake, at the southwest curve of Water Tower Circle, at a new building, would be a picture to paint. It is my feeling that this view is as pretty as any place in or around the Villages.

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## **The Patron Program**

The Patron Program is controversial. The POA has voiced its opposition to the program. Many have agreed; many have disagreed.

Let's consider it a different way.

Consider if the Villages Hospital also had a Patron Program. In this program you could become a Hospital Patron by giving the hospital \$50.00. Then, whenever you went to the emergency room, you would not have to wait 4-6 hours - you would be treated immediately because you were a Hospital Patron.

Consider if the supermarkets had a Patron Program. For \$50.00 you would never have to wait in line, no matter how long, because you go to the front of the line as a Supermarket Patron.

Consider if the restaurants on the Square had a Patron Program for \$50.00. Even if the wait for a table was over one hour (as it often is on popular nights), you would be seated immediately because you were a Patron.

Consider the next time you went to sign up for a Villages activity - say a Boccie Ball league - and were told that there were no spaces available

for non-Patron residents because Patrons get preferential treatment for paying \$50.00 to the recreation division.

Do you, the reader, see the POA's objection to the Patron Program?

It is favoritism for sale ... It is bribery for special treatment ... It is special treatment for special interests ... It is not fair treatment for all residents ... It should be ended.

Some would say that the arrangement is a noble idea in the sense that funds are made available for special speakers and special programs in the Lifelong Learning Center.

Furthermore, many of people we talk to feel that \$50.00 is worth it because the total discounts at 10%-15% for many activities and shows amount to more than \$50.00. If this is so, how is there more money in the system for paying special speakers and for special program?

The quick answer is that there is not more money in the system to pay for special speakers and special programs - because of the discounts. So what are you left with?

Another quick answer - special treatment for special interests who can afford a \$50.00 fee to gain unfair advantage and favoritism.

This doesn't sound fair to the many Villages residents who are not Patrons. Let's end this program ... now.

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## The VHA Corner

The previous issue of the Bulletin commented on the Spaghetti Dinner of the VHA. Some took this as a criticism of the dinner itself. Those comments were not intended as a criticism of the dinner which serves a worthwhile purpose for the charitable donations it provides.

The story was intended to point out that the VHA seems to favor distractions like the Spaghetti Dinner when it should be focusing its energies and attention on Residents' Rights issues like those pursued by the POA.

That article last month commented on the VHA's lack of support for residents on the golf greens fee increase.

On this issue, the VHA, to its credit, did broker a meeting with Ken Creely to review the situation. In this regard the VHA was successful in getting a meeting even though the Morse family executives were stonewalling the several other residents' groups trying to meet with them.

In reading the VHA's account of that meeting in the VHA paper, however, it sounded like the VHA president just blindly agreed with everything Creely said. There was no critical assessment of Creely's assertions - just a mindless acceptance of the Villages' company line and the broad generalities that Creely offered. There was no demand for specific justification of the fee increases. Villages residents were not served well by the VHA in this effort.

The VHA was able to point to its special relationship with the developer and claim that it accomplished something worthwhile. But, it really didn't accomplish much of anything. And, residents are the losers again.

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## Cheers and Jeers

**Cheers** - To the Daily Sun for publishing the announcement of the February 27th VCCDD meeting in the Daily Sun three days before the meeting. Furthermore, the Sun mentioned that the Paradise Center issue was on the agenda. We hope this is a monthly practice to not only mention these meetings but also to report on the agenda items from these important meetings.

**Cheers** - To the recreation department for their efforts to move the rained-out Mardi Gras activities indoors on Fat Tuesday. Thanks for the quick effort to avoid a complete wash-out.

**Jeers** - To Betty Ruth Leech, CDD #1 supervisor, for being the only vote against asking the Villages developer to pay for the original liner in Lago del Luna. We all know that the developer will not pay for the liner, even though it gets the primary benefit of using the lake for storage of recycled water to be used for irrigation purposes on golf courses. But, wouldn't it have been politically astute for Ms. Leech to vote for the request to the developer? Who does she represent anyway?

**Cheers** - To Sumter County Commissioners Roberts, Chandler, and Cox for voting against the proposed high-density apartments adjacent to the western edge of The Villages. Commissioners Strickland and Rutter, representing parts of The Villages, voted for the apartments. Maybe we do have stand-up voices on the Board that think independently of the Villages developer.

**Jeers** - To the Villages recreation department for packing residents into Katie Belle's for the Artie Shaw orchestra. Nobody could enjoy the orchestra because of the mob of people. Why wasn't this scheduled for the Savannah Center?

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## **We Need Your Help**

The POA board needs volunteer help from the membership in the following areas: An experienced sales representative to sell advertisements in The POA Bulletin on a part time basis. A generous commission will be paid. Previous experience selling newspaper or magazine ads would be helpful, but not essential.

An attorney to advise the board on a variety of organizational matters. Previous experience in the areas of real estate law, contracts, and/or corporate law would be helpful, but not essential.

Please call Joe Gorman (259-0999) for details.

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## **The POA Discount Program**

The POA will announce a Discount Program within the next month. Look for details at the monthly membership meeting and also in the next issue of The Bulletin. The program will require you to show your POA membership card to get the discount. So, renew your membership now and get that card.

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## **Membership Renewals**

Letters are being sent out reminding you of the need to renew your membership in the POA. Memberships are \$6.00 per household and run from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. Any additional donations to your POA will be appreciated.

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

With The Villages spreading out all over the place, many residents are complaining about the long distances to travel via golf cart to get to the outlying courses. Consequently, the developer has decided to build an underground subway between the two Town Squares. The fully functional subway will be able to accommodate golf carts. A stop will be made at the Savannah Center. Eventually, spurs will be built north to the Mulberry Center and south to Wildwood. The one-way trip cost for a golf cart will be \$10.00; individuals will pay \$5.00. Initially, only Priority and Patron members will be allowed to use the facility. When everybody else is allowed to use it, the Priority/Patron discount will be 25%.

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