

The POA Bulletin

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The Property Owners' Association of The Villages

Issue 39.08

Champions of Residents' Rights Since 1975

The POA Website – www.poa4us.org

August, 2013

“Turf Talk” - Executive Golf Course Maintenance

Eric Van Gorder is the District staff member who has been responsible for overseeing the maintenance of all of the Executive Golf Courses North of CR466, as well as Belmont, Churchill, and Pimlico, for the last two and one-half years. He shared with us what he does, how he does it, etc. at the POA June 18th Meeting. Highlights of his presentation are as follows:

He pointed out that while the Developer still owns most of the executive golf courses south of CR466, that they try to be consistent for both areas and that he serves as the liaison between the two golf maintenance groups. The goal is that it does not matter which course you are playing, you will see the same amenities.

Eric is responsible for insuring that the contractors are performing to the standards that are required to maintain golf courses for sustainability and according to their contracts. That not only includes what we actually see, but also the fertilizers, chemicals, pesticides, etc., which are necessary to create the best playing conditions.

In May and June the transition process begins with various practices to get the cool season grasses out and help the warm season grasses return from winter dormancy. This is the time that many areas, including the greens, are aerated and top-dressed. You can find out what the playing conditions will be like in a given month on any given course by going to districtgov.org - click on departments and then golf. You can find this information in Eric's monthly “Turf Talk”.

Aeration notifications are probably the most important aspect of “Turf Talk” articles throughout the summer. Please, remember when you're planning your playing dates that it takes approximately 15 to 20 days for the green to recover to best conditions. Every

effort is made by district golf to not have two golf courses in the same area closed so that you do not have to travel too far from your local neighborhood except for a change of scenery.

When he arrived two and a half years ago, Eric set out to evaluate each course's playing areas and based on age of the course, made assessments to these areas concentrating on the most seasoned courses first and moving to the South. He spent almost an entire year evaluating the 16 golf courses he oversees for the VCDD. He looked at water management, soil conditions, expected life of the golfing components, etc., and made an assessment of what needed to be replaced immediately and long term. With the help of many departments, he was able to develop a plan based on the history and life expectancy of each of the golf courses to form a sound, but ever changing budget. This budgeted plan was then projected out for the next ten years and included when each of those items would be

expected to be replaced or upgraded. These projects are then quoted from many different sources for cost throughout the State and then budgeted for approval each year for presentation to the AAC, SLCCD and various boards for approval.

Some examples of projects already completed in his short time here are the amenities upgrades. These include water coolers, ball washers, painting and the newly designed concrete tee pad areas installed. At some of these specific courses like Hilltop, Silver Lake, Mira Mesa, Chula Vista, Amberwood, and the 3 courses south, many major renova-

(Continued on page 2)

IRS Update

District Manager Tutt presented an update on the IRS issue to the VCCDD Board at their July 18th meeting. She advised that Attorney Israel had sent a memorandum, dated July 15, 2013, to Chief Counsel Wilkins at the IRS in response to the Technical Advice Memorandum (TAM) the District had received. (Both documents can be found on the districtgov.org website (left hand column - click on IRS Update). The following is the closing paragraph in this four page memorandum:

“The result of the failings of the TAM - lack of legal analysis, ignoring precedent cited by the Center District, and coloring of the facts through omissions or misstatements - is to target the Center District through innuendo and through the attempted creation of new legal standards not set forth in any previous law or guidance. The Center District has now had its bonds under examination for five and one-half years. Moreover, that examination started only a few years after a previous examination of its bonds had closed without change. The Center District requests a review of the TAM and its conclusions that fairly examines the facts and applies the applicable legal precedents.”

STAY TUNED! □

Tuesday, August 20, 2013

POA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Third Tuesday of the Month – 7:00 PM

Laurel Manor Recreation Center

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DONUTS AND COFFEE AFTER THE MEETING

All Residents Welcome - Come and Join Us!

Course Maintenance

(Continued from page 1)

tions have taken place. These include new & leveling of teeing areas, bunkers rebuilt, irrigation upgrades and landscape additions. The plan is an ongoing program and because a golf course is a “living thing”, he must continue to evaluate each golf course as time moves forward.

AUDIENCE Q & A

1) How many maintenance companies do you deal with? **A)** We have eight in The Villages, but for the courses north of CR466 we only have three that are major. We have one company that takes care of eight courses and the two others smaller numbers.

2) Should the fairways be cut at one-half inch rather than one-quarter inch as it is thought that this would speed up play? **A)** This goes back to cold season and warm season grasses. This is the first year we have over seeded the fairways on the executive courses. We don’t have very many fairways, so most of the time you are playing on dormant Bermuda which, when it goes dormant and it’s cold, lays down and we mow much less frequently. During the normal growing season the Bermuda grass fairways should be half inch to three-quarter inch in height. During the winter, with the Bermuda lying down you get really tight lies and with the lack of water that we have had over the last couple of years, that ground and soil is so hard that the Bermuda lays over - it is a survivability mode for it. We only have a few fairways on the executive courses and they were playing incredible this year because we were able to over seed with some cool season grasses and we got the weather and temperatures that we needed to make them almost perfect. I get asked at least once a week why we don’t cut the fairways higher - the grass is going through a transition with the rye grass which stands up a little bit higher so that the

half to three-quarter inch height is really seen, versus when the rye grass starts to die out this time of year and the Bermuda is recovering, it looks like it is about a quarter inch but it truly is not being mowed at that height.

3) You mentioned the 16 executive courses. What about the other executive courses? **A)** It is a unique situation. I have the 13 courses on the north side of CR466 and 3 on the south side of CR466 for a total of 16 which are owned by our District government. The Developer still owns all of the others south of CR466. However, we work very closely together due to what I had stated earlier with consistency issues. Over all the appearances need to be consistent on all the executives. In fact because of this relationship things that we have brought to the table for the betterment of our courses are now being adopted by the Developer side, so it is a mutual benefit to the players. A perfect example are the concrete tee pads being used to reduce maintenance labor and materials costs, as well as increase safety, as they are being implemented by the Developer on his courses as well.

4) Could you speak a little bit about the irrigation systems at the various executive golf courses? Are you trying to streamline them - make them more electronically attuned to where it is needed and not on a unit basis? **A)** One of the programs that we were able to implement because of the evaluations that we did early on is that we are now converting a lot of the antiquated hydraulic systems. Those systems are run by water and not by electricity to turn the heads on and off and you have to have a constant water source to that sprinkler head which has to be a potable (drinking) water source and always on. So, we are now converting these irrigation systems - starting with the ones that are in the most need of repair. Moving forward

(Continued on page 11)

The POA Bulletin is published monthly by the Property Owners’ Association of The Villages, Inc. Articles represent the opinion of the POA or the writer, and Letters to the Editor postings represent the opinions of the writers. Care is taken to ensure that facts reported herein are true and accurate to the best knowledge of the POA and are taken from reliable sources.

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POA Mission Statement

The Property Owners’ Association of The Villages is an independent organization devoted to our home ownership experience.

The Vision/Objective of the POA is to make The Villages an even better place in which to live, where Residents’ Rights are respected, and local governments are responsive to the needs and interests of residents.

The POA serves Villagers through programs of education, research, analysis, representation, advocacy, and legislative action.

The POA also functions as a “watchdog” organization overseeing the actions of our Developer and our local governments.

Specific POA attention is focused on housing, community, neighborhood, and local government issues. Special emphasis is focused on the Amenity Authority Committee (AAC), our Community Development Districts (CDDs), the Florida Chapter 190 law that regulates CDD operations, and our Developer.

The POA has no ties or obligations to the Developer of The Villages which might compromise the POA position or its advocacy of Residents’ Rights.

The POA, founded in 1975, is the original homeowners’ organization in The Villages. Membership is open to all Villages residents. □

The Villages Residents’ Bill of Rights

RESIDENTS have RIGHTS to:

1. Be treated in a respectful, fair, and responsive manner by the Developer and our local government officials.
2. Have decision making authority for important issues in our community.
3. Elect our top government officials and approve appointments of the top administrative officials in our community.
4. Approve major purchases of common property and the related debt obligations assumed by residents.
5. Have local governments that are free of any conflict of interest issues.
6. Be charged honest monthly amenity fees that are used only for the stated purposes.
7. Receive full disclosure when purchasing a home here in The Villages.
8. Receive an objective market appraisal for major purchases of common property.
9. Receive objective, unbiased, unslanted news reporting from local news sources.
10. Be informed beforehand by the Developer on any major change in our community. □

Parking in Unauthorized Areas

In the June POA Bulletin we reported that Community Watch and local law enforcement officials were teaming up in a new safety initiative to prevent golf carts and other vehicles from driving and parking on our sidewalks and other unauthorized areas. Not only is it in violation of District Rules, but driving and parking on the sidewalks is also extremely dangerous for our residents and guests.

In the current phase of the new initiative, Community Watch has been placing red and black “WARNING” signs on vehicles parked in unauthorized areas. The warnings reference District Rules and are designed to educate vehicle operators of their parking infractions. To date, one hundred and forty-two (142) warnings have been distributed to automobiles and golf carts and three (3) repeat offenders have been documented. Community Watch is working with the Sumter County Sheriff’s Office to influence repeat offenders not to park in unauthorized areas. As a last resort, drivers of vehicles repeatedly parked in violation of the District Rules may be prohibited access to any District property. District staff states that they hope this action is not required, but the safety of our residents and guests must be assured.

Please assist the District in making our sidewalks safe for residents and guests. □

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We still have concerns in The Villages – the eventual outcome of the ongoing IRS investigation; warranties on leaking underground a/c refrigerant lines and defective roof shingles; District governance as we approach build out; and the desire for the creation of a resident elected Amenity Authority Committee for the Sumter Landing Community Development District residents, to name a few. The more members the POA has, the better able it will be to help manage good results for residents if there are problems. We are supporting you. We urge you to support us.

We put a Bulletin on almost every driveway in The Villages every month, regardless of whether or not you are an active POA member. We believe it is important that all residents have all of the information about happenings and events in The Villages as they make deci-

sions on various issues. The POA has no ties or obligations to the Developer which might compromise the POA position or its advocacy of Residents’ Rights.

We are making every effort to research the issues and advise you of any pertinent information which was not included in the various Villages media outlets.

If you believe we are providing a service and you read the Bulletin, we urge you to become a POA member. (Membership form and information below – annual membership year is from January 1 through December 31.)

Paying a membership fee of \$10 per year is an investment in your future as you will be helping to keep the POA financially sound and your membership numbers will increase our “clout” if action needs to be taken. □

THE POA HAS YOUR BACK – DO YOU HAVE OURS?

POA 2013 Membership – New / Renewal and Contribution Form

Please complete each section and return to: **The POA, P.O. Box 1657, Lady Lake, FL 32158**

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1. MEMBERSHIP NEW/RENEWAL: Please enroll my POA membership for 2013 at the **Annual Rate of \$10 per household**. A check payable to POA is enclosed. Memberships are for Households and run annually from Jan 1st to Dec 31st. (check the box that applies)

I will include a **stamped, self-addressed envelope** with this form and my check. Please mail my Membership Card to me At the address above.
 Please hold my POA Membership Card for me to pick up at one of the monthly POA meetings.

2. ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION: Please accept my additional contribution to the POA in the following amount:

\$ _____ (Please indicate amount)

3. TOTAL DUE: _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUING FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

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El Santiago

Will It Ever Be a Restaurant Again?

The Answer NOW is a For Sure - NO!

After the Developer closed the Chula Vista and Silver Lake restaurants and donated those facilities to the amenity program, El Santiago was the only remaining “stand alone” neighborhood restaurant/bar establishment in the residential area of The Villages. All of the others were Developer owned country club restaurants. Unlike the other closures wherein the Developer donated the properties to the amenity program, the Developer has left the El Santiago structure vacant for over two years, keeping the hope of residents alive thinking that someday it could again open as a restaurant.

At the June 10th Amenity Authority Committee (AAC) meeting where the possibility of purchasing the El Santiago restaurant building for use as a recreation facility was being discussed, an audience member asked if anyone approached anyone about putting a restaurant instead. Ms. Tutt responded that,

“I would like to comment just a minute as there seems to be a tremendous misunderstanding about this building - restaurant vs. recreation facility. That building has not been a restaurant for several years. It is my understanding that there has been no interest expressed by anyone to the Developer to turn it into a restaurant. I have no doubt based on my conversations that if there was an entity that wanted to open a restaurant, they would be more than glad to secure lease payments and rent from someone to have that building occupied and have it as a restaurant. It was not a viable location and could not survive to be profitable and that is why I am sure the facility has been vacant. Regardless of whether or not the AAC decides to purchase

the facility, it will not be a restaurant. I think there is some assumption by residents that if it is not turned into a recreation facility it would be a restaurant. That just has not been the case in years and my assumption would be based on the competitiveness of the restaurant business and as you know - location is everything.”

The POA, while not taking a position either way, believes that not only is location a problem, but the increased amount of competition which now completely surrounds the residential area of The Villages, as well as the addition of the Glenview and Lopez restaurants several years after El Santiago opened was problematic. It understandably would be tough to sustain a restaurant business such as this when you are outgunned by bigger companies that can throw a lot more money at marketing. Plus you have to deal with the slow season that we annually have in The Villages which has to be difficult for any business, even the bigger chain restaurants.

This being said, all hopes that the building would again contain a restaurant were forever dashed when the Amenity Authority Committee voted 5-1 to purchase the building with the caveat that it would be used as a recreation facility and not a restaurant. □



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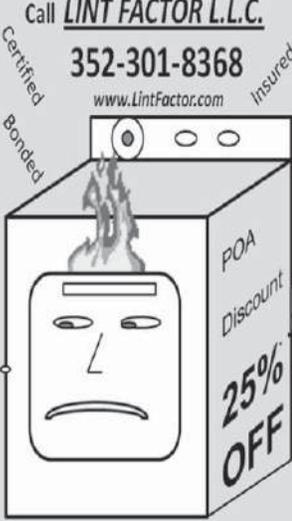


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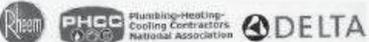
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Governance Improvement

Round One

On June 21, 2013, representatives from CDDs 1-9 met in a “brainstorming” task force meeting. Approximately 30 residents were in the audience to listen to the discussion and offer their comments at the end of the session. Chairman Bill Ray, who originally raised the issue of the efficiency of the multiple CDDs at a CDD3 meeting, led the discussion around a set of notes he had prepared. While the framework presented leaned toward the notion of consolidating the separate CDDs into possibly one or two CDDs for the entire community, most task force members’ comments supported the existing structure. However, they seemed to be in favor of pursuing any suggestions that might make the current operations more efficient. There seemed to be strong support for how well the current CDDs were functioning and how responsive they are to residents.

As a brainstorming session, ideas were allowed to be thrown out for future consideration without regard for their practicality, legality, financial impact or support by others. The participants were told that the overall objective of the committee was to: “Identify and evaluate potential opportunities to achieve material productivity improvements in operation(s) of CDDs within The

Villages.” The direction to the participants was that all suggestions would be collected by staff and the task force could give them consideration at a future meeting.

From the beginning, there seemed to be some degree of confusion as to what problem the group had been created to solve. While there was general agreement that it was probably a good idea to periodically look at how you are operating to determine if there is a better way, that didn’t mean the current structure was not working. One individual pointed out that the CDD meetings had come a long way from the early days when board members only received a single page agenda at the start of the meeting and the meetings lasted only 15 minutes. It was pointed out that while the content of the meetings each month is repetitious for the staff, each board often has a different view on how the information affects their District. Consideration was given to the District Manager’s desire to have staff spend less time in CDD meetings and how that might be accomplished while still providing the beneficial interactions with residents - fewer CDDs, fewer meetings, an expanded committee process (like the Investment Advisory Committee), selective staff attendance, etc.

The Committee decided the following:

- Share the results of the meeting with the individual CDDs, allowing them to absorb the information, process it and provide feedback to the committee.

- Request that VCDD staff provide feedback to the committee.
- Ask the VCDD staff to identify and quantify, as can reasonably be done, hard and/or soft financial benefits of identified opportunities.
- The committee suggested it meet again in two months to process the various feedback items returned and determine how the committee should move forward.
- It was also recommended that a resident communication plan/process be defined.

On July 12th (CDDs 1-4) and July 18th and 19th (CDDs 5-9) at their regular meetings, the CDD Boards heard from their committee representatives and discussed the committee meeting “Synopsis” provided by staff. A broad sampling of those individual CDD meetings seemed to provide a common theme. The CDD Boards think (1) the current process works well, (2) there are things that can be done to streamline some aspects, (3) it is better to make the “wheel” turn more efficiently than to re-invent it and (4) that resident representation is crucial to district governance. One board member pointed out that due to Florida’s “Government in the Sunshine” statutes, board meetings are crucial so that supervisors can have meaningful discussions on issues of importance to residents. This feedback will apparently be funneled back to the committee at their next meeting which is scheduled for August 30th at 1:30 p.m. at the Sea Breeze Recreation Center. □

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Golf Cart Crashes With Injuries

Recent reports from The Villages Public Safety Department (Note: we cannot guarantee that the information we receive is completely accurate about all the details.):

Wednesday, June 19th – 11 pm – Jason Drive. 65 year old male driver going home from square. Ran into the back of a parked truck. No ejection. Extensive front end damage to cart and a deformed steering wheel. Chest pain from hitting the steering wheel. Transported by EMS to The Villages Regional Hospital.

Thursday, June 20th – 12:45 pm – Crash occurred at Bailey Trail and Buena Vista, but we were unable to secure any of the particulars. It is believed that the ambulance was cancelled due to minor injuries.

Thursday, June 20th – 12:30 pm – A golf cart was struck by an auto, tipping the cart over. The female passenger was dumped out of the cart, but refused transport to the hospital.

Saturday, June 22nd – 5:20 pm – A golf cart was cut off by a car on Belvedere Boulevard. The cart rolled onto its side and the passenger was trapped with her foot caught in the steering wheel. She needed to be extricated from the steering wheel and helped up, but refused EMS transport.

Thursday, June 27th – 12:15 pm – Male driver states he was “run off the road” by a woman in a cart who was talking on the phone and his cart tipped over. The driver was ejected with the cart landing on his knee. Bystanders removed cart. He received bumps and bruises, but refused EMS transport to the hospital. □

USE OF SEAT BELTS WILL KEEP YOU IN YOUR CART!

Update on Sumter County Sheriff’s Office Golf Cart Traffic Citations

From April 10th, 2013, through July 5th, 2013, in the Sumter County portion of The Villages there were 82 tickets issued to golf cart operators

- 54 were charged with “running a stop sign”;
- 15 were charged with “no motor vehicle registration” which appears to mean that they were traveling in excess of 20 mph, the maximum allowed for a golf cart;
- 6 were issued citations for improper operation on a public roadway;
- 4 were cited for careless driving, and
- 2 were ticketed for failure to yield right of way and one for an open container.

Forty-two stop sign citations were issued at the Lisbon Lane/Panama Place intersection (Village of Rio Grande) and the other twelve were issued at the Kingston Way/Winifred Way intersection (Village of Winifred). The citations for no motor vehicle registration were issued on Bailey Trail, Odell Circle, Morse Boulevard, and St. Charles. The citations for improper operation of a golf cart occurred at CR101/Palm Ridge Plaza, Woodridge/CR101, CR235/222, Canal Street and CR466/Mariposa Way and careless driving citations were issued on Lake Sumter Landing Boulevard, Bailey Trail/Andrews Avenue, Cazaras and Lisbon Lane/Panama Place. The open container citation occurred on Morse Boulevard.

We urge all golf cart operators to obey THE RULES OF THE ROAD. □

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AAC Meeting Summary

July 10, 2013

Old Business Topics Included:

- The Committee was advised that construction for the Woodshop Parking Lot project began on July 1st. The estimated construction timeframe is 60 days.
- Only one bid was received for the Paradise Park Area A project. The AAC approved the Kimley-Horn recommendation to re-bid the project.
- Restroom and dugout construction at Knudson Field has been delayed because of weather. The project is now expected to be completed within ten days. In the meantime the fields are being utilized.
- The AAC agreed to pay for half of the \$47,000 cost to move the CDD3 multi-modal path behind the Glenbrook gates at Tally Ridge Drive.
- The committee was advised that staff will begin meeting with the architect and residents, to begin the next step in the Tierra Del Sol Recreation Center reconstruction and improvement project.
- Staff has identified September 27, 2013, at 1:30 p.m. at Laurel Manor Recreation Center for a joint workshop meeting to discuss re-painting of homes.
- Installation of the next phase of gate cam-

eras has been delayed due to weather. The next gate to receive the new cameras will be Morse South. Staff was asked to provide information regarding gate breakage activity at the Del Mar gate, which has the new camera configuration.

- The AAC was advised that the average of the two appraisals received for the former El Santiago restaurant building is \$350,000 and voted 5 to 1 to proceed with purchasing the building shell from the Developer. The committee member casting the dissenting vote suggested that the appraisals did not reflect the fact that the property did not include any parking but utilized Amenity facility parking that need not always be available to the commercial property. He further pointed out that all the other restaurants in The Villages own and pay to maintain their parking lots, including Tierra Del Sol and Chula Vista when it was a restaurant. Audience members again voiced their preference for a restaurant and pointed out that no one has asked for an additional recreation facility in that area. Another resident explained that given the purchase price plus the likely cost of converting the gutted shell into a recreation facility, it might be cheaper to build from scratch in the parking lot if a facility is really warranted in the area. (Please see related article on page 9).
- Staff presented a modified conceptual site plan and audience comments were re-

ceived regarding the Silver Lake Recreation Center refurbishment project. These additional revisions will be brought to the architect to address some functionality concerns. Once revisions are received, the updated conceptual plan will be provided to the billiards groups. Staff will also provide an inventory of the current tables and equipment.

Consent Agenda:

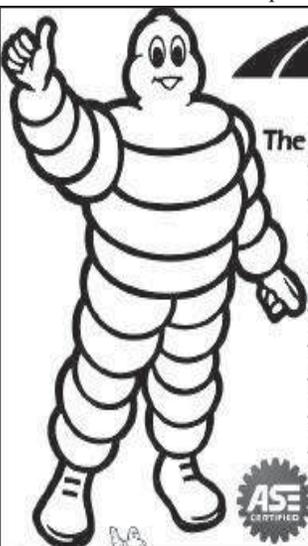
- Recommendations to award bids for the following were approved:
 1. Bi-annual pine straw application to Groundtek of Central Florida, Inc.
 2. Savannah Center lighting renovations to Grant Electric, LLC.
 3. Savannah Center curtains and curtain machine to Hile’s Curtain Specialties, Inc.
 4. Hilltop Golf Course path renovations to Lenard Powell, Inc.
 5. Hilltop Golf Course starter shack to Signature Enterprises, Inc.
 6. Landscape and irrigation maintenance for executive golf courses, Knudson softball field and Rio Grande lawn bowling courts to Down to Earth Golf, LLC.
- Recommendation to reject and reissue the bid for Paradise Park Area A improvement project.
- Recommendation to “piggyback” on a Miami-Dade County contract for recreation center tables.

Audience Comments:

- Resident Bob Baker requested further consideration and support for the undertaking of a feasibility study for an indoor athletic facility that could accommodate indoor activities such as basketball, volleyball, badminton, handball, etc. This request triggered an audience question regarding the ability of using Amenity funds to create a new facility without a 50% vote of residents and the loss of the CPI cap on amenity fee increases. Staff agreed to review the Deed Covenants to determine the restrictions on adding new facilities.

PLEASE GO TO THE districtgov.org WEBSITE FOR THE OFFICIAL MINUTES, AGENDAS AND MEETING SCHEDULE.

NEXT AAC MEETING – WEDNESDAY August 14th, 1:30 P.M. AT THE SAVANNAH CENTER □



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El Santiago Recreation Center

Amenity Authority Committee (AAC)
Hastily Approves Purchase

At the June 10th meeting the AAC voted 5 -1 to have the VCCDD proceed with the signing of the Purchase and Sale Agreement for the El Santiago restaurant building for the agreed upon price of \$350K, with the knowledge that they would need to spend an estimated \$450K for interior renovations. This was done without any real organized request to the AAC from nearby residents for anything other than the addition of interior restrooms, a small kitchen and a larger meeting room to their current building. In fact, the area residents provided a petition to Ann Forrester, their AAC representative, asking for help to encourage the Developer to maintain the building as a restaurant - not a recreation center. So how did we even get here?

As part of the acquisition process, the AAC had a building inspection done. At the June 12, 2013, AAC meeting, Ms. Tutt stated that the inspection report had been received by staff and forwarded to the two appraisal firms. One AAC member asked if any major items had been identified during the inspection and Ms. Tutt replied that the building had been completely “gutted” and “it is questionable whether the (HVAC) system is functional.” Another AAC member then inquired if the lack of AC might raise the probability of mold. Ms. Tutt responded that “the interior to the studs had been removed and no issues were identified during the inspection.” The actual inspection report is not quite as positive. The report states “The exposed framing shows extensive rework and repair to the original. Without an accurate history, it is difficult to know why some of this work was necessary. To correct a deficiency? To remodel or repair, to repair fire/smoke damage, to repair water damage? Mold? Decay? Insect damage, functional obsolescence? We can only guess.” In the Conclusion the inspection report states “The presence of water stains, **black mold growth**, slight wood decay (non-structural), insect & vermin history, etc., all lead to **recommending further investigation for environmental issues.**” The AAC did not pursue further investigation of environmental issues before agreeing to purchase the building.

The next step was to obtain two appraisals. Both appraisals state assumptions that the property has parking through an easement or a legal agreement. This is not the case.

The MarketConnection appraisal states “... we have assumed the subject to have legal access with no restrictions limiting access to the public.” The Arline and Company appraisal states “... Therefore, although the appraisers were not provided any documentation of the implied easements within the El Santiago Recreation Center, such easements are presumed for purposes of this appraisal.”

It is hard to understand that the staff did not make it clear to both appraisers that this was not the case. There is no legal agreement guaranteeing access to the parking lot nor is there an easement to that affect. This parking lot adjacent to the restaurant is owned by the VCCDD as part of an amenity transfer that occurred in 1998 and as such allows public access, but as part of an amenity transfer, the AAC controls its use and could at any point in time build something in that parking lot which would obviously take away the parking for that commercial structure. This fact would clearly lower the appraised value of the property. So, while the current appraisal might be reasonable in the current context, clearly in the context of amenity system ownership of the parking lot, the AAC should not have accepted these appraisals.

In responding to resident interest in better facilities at other locations such as Chula

Vista, Tierra Del Sol and Silver Lake, the Committee was able to have a basic plan drawn up to illustrate how any changes to the facility would fit with the existing structure. Shouldn't that have been a first step for El Santiago? Shouldn't the AAC have had at least a basic understanding of the usability of the El Santiago restaurant building? What if it is of very limited use or a “tear-down”? Even assuming the availability of commercial parking, the .22 acres of land was only valued at around \$100K.

We believe the AAC acted hastily without a clear understanding of the inspection, the appraisal and the usability of the restaurant building which has been vacant for several years. There is no reasonable use for it other than by the Amenity System, so why the rush? While residents prefer a restaurant, the second choice was expansion of the current recreation center to provide for a larger meeting room with interior restrooms and a kitchen, something that could have likely been accomplished for a lot less than \$800K. □

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July Forum Q&A

1. Is the golf cart trail going alongside the Morse Blvd./El Camino Real roundabout one way or do carts go in both directions? **A)** It is one way only and Lt. Wolfe has confirmed this fact. We think what confuses the issue is the post in the middle of the path and residents would be better served if those posts were removed and one-way signage was erected.

2. I am a new resident having lived here six months and I would like some information. I have asked all over The Villages as to where the hurricane shelters are located and have been told there are no shelters in The Villages. Is that a fact? **A)** We don’t know of any inside The Villages, but when we had the hurricanes come through here in 2005 they used the Community Center in Oxford as a hurricane shelter.

3. We live off of Bailey Trail and that road is so busy with golf carts and cars now

and this isn’t even the busy season. Can anybody address this? **A)** We realize that the traffic is very cumbersome during the winter months, but you would have to go to the Sumter County Commission in order to try to get some additional traffic controls.

4. I get questions every day when I’m working in The Villages as to why there are no signs on Buena Vista and on Morse as you enter the roundabouts to designate a direction. If you are unfamiliar with an area as you approach one of these streets it would be helpful if the signage could have an “N” for north and an “S” for south. **A)** This is an issue for Sumter County, but we will pass this suggestion on to District staff to see if they could approach the County on this issue.

5. In case the IRS finds against The Villages, how would that affect me as a homeowner, especially from a financial viewpoint? **A)** The Trust Estate (collateral) for the Tax exempt bonds in question are the amenity fees we pay. So, if there are any expenses for the bonds the amenity fees are responsible for it. However, your amenity fees cannot be increased more than the annual CPI. If the worse case scenario happens there would be the potential for a decrease in some of the amenity services and renewal and replacement on some of the facilities because when

the amenity fees come in, the first thing that they must be used for is the bond debt and then whatever dollars remain form the annual operating budget for the amenity program. The second thing is that if in fact there was a negative finding on the District - **NOTE IT WAS THE DISTRICT THAT ISSUED THE BONDS, NOT THE DEVELOPER** - the District would have the opportunity to go after Bond Counsel as they certified that the bonds would meet the requirements to qualify as tax exempt. So, this could go on for a long time. In a nutshell, the maximum negative impact you would have would be a decrease in some of your amenity services and facilities. That would be a long way down the road and we would expect some other positive things to happen in order to deter that situation.

6. In regard to the bond debt we assume when we purchase a home, should we pay that off and what is the interest rate on that bond? **A)** Typically, the Districts have been able to refinance when they get to be about ten years old, so most of them are less than 5%. So if you have money that is not earning that much for you, then it is probably worth paying it off. Likewise, if the reverse is true, you are probably better off not to pay it off.

(Continued on page 11)

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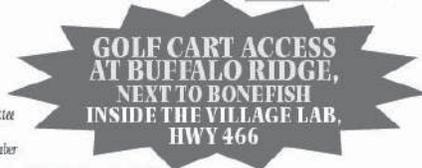
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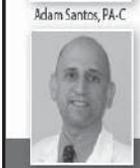
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July Q&A

(Continued from page 10)

7. Is there any more information on the defective shingles on some of the homes built between 2007 and 2009? I contacted the Warranty Office and they told me it would be a while before they would notify me. She said don't worry about calling them up because they are so swamped with phone calls. So, what should I do? **A)** We have received contacts from residents who indicated that they went ahead and called Owens Corning (OC) and were issued a claim number because they wanted to be sure that their claim date was more timely than what it might be if they wait "and hope" OC contacts them.

8. In regard to the bond on our homes, what is that money used for? **A)** The infrastructure bond that you are paying off is just that. It is used to build the original infrastructure - the storm water system, retention ponds, light fixtures in the streets, the streets, the recreation trails, etc. The initial cost to create all of this is what the bond is for and you are charged several hundred dollars per year for the operation of the District. □

"Turf Talk"

(Continued from page 2)

we have been able to stick with our plan of course upgrades and changed over Chula Vista and Mira Mesa last year. These two courses have the brand new state of the art IC system and were able to save about 30% of their allocated water budget. De La Vista irrigation upgrades are going to be started soon and its hydraulic system will be replaced with a new IC system also. Hilltop and Silver Lake courses are slated for irrigation upgrades in 2014 and 2015. This is just one more way of protecting 'good golf conditions' for the future.

5) What kind of irrigation system is the Developer installing in the courses he is building? **A)** Evans Prairie and Bonifay were the first two courses with the IC systems. Another great thing about this system is that you do not need controllers on the golf course. Each sprinkler head has its own computer chip in it and it is run by one wire. So, if you have lightning damage or something you are not searching through 20 wires and water pipes. You are only searching from

one irrigation head to the next. So, not only are we saving water percentages, you are saving a lot of money in maintenance costs for time and labor. We use the Rain Bird System as they are on the cutting edge of this type of technology.

6) Have there been any changes in the last 5 years on chemical applications for protection of the environment? **A)** Absolutely. The contract requirements we use specify a certified applicator on the golf course at all times and who has passed the State exam. We constantly check that this requirement is being met. With pesticides, we are probably in the forefront with the recommendations on the distance applications take place from water edges, wetland areas, run-offs, etc. We are in constant contact with state representatives from the extension offices and the Audubon society to ensure we are doing what is best and practicing good Integrated Pest Management (IPM) We also post at all of our golf courses (put a sign out stating that chemicals are being applied that day).

7) How do you determine what kind of sand you use in the traps? **A)** When I first

(Continued on page 12)

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“Turf Talk”

(Continued from page 11)

got here I noticed many different varieties in the sand traps. I'm not sure how this came about but actually, the purer the sand the lighter it becomes, so I think as they found with playing conditions over the years that they needed different types for different bunker designs. Different angles, weight, particle size and of course research changes constantly. The USGA recommends different sands for different needs. Here on our courses LF38 sand is recommended because of the blowing wind and not wanting the finer sands that will move or cause harder playing conditions. We are trying to get consistency for the District Executive courses but, again, I cannot comment on the Developer courses, but I think the Developer understands the same principle and in fact is also using the LF38 on all new construction. The bunkers that we have actually rebuilt already have the LF38 sand in them which is working well at Chula, Mira, and Hill Top. □

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Home Warranty Issues

I would like to extend a great deal of gratitude to the POA for its perseverance in addressing tough issues that affect us all and to Dave Gott of Real Cool Air Conditioning & Refrigeration, whose help with regard to a leaking underground copper line set at my villa proved invaluable. You may recall that Dave Gott is the gentleman who, while vacationing in The Villages during the summer of 2011, volunteered to help the POA evaluate the widespread failure of underground copper air conditioning lines that had been occurring. He has since become a Villages resident and started a small business, “Real Cool,” and we're pleased to be among his customers.

You may also remember me, the one al-

luded to as a “troublemaker” in the VHA Voice several years ago, for bringing the vinyl siding installation problem to the attention of the POA and Villages homeowners. The Owens Corning (2003–2006) defective shingles) roofing problem was another issue in which I was active in helping the POA, so you can see, I'm a strong believer in Edmund Burke's philosophy that “*No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.*” When one sees a problem, it's important to speak up, because without that, problems simply get swept under the rug and are not resolved at all. It's really not about “complaining,” it's about helping make things better. Therefore, I'm going to relate our own recent experi-

(Continued on page 13)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Home Warranty Issues

(Continued from page 12)

ence, and perhaps it will be helpful to other homeowners.

When the air conditioning failed in our 2005 villa the refrigerant was recharged. Cooling soon failed again due to leaking refrigerant, so we contacted Home Warranty, under the terms of the 10-year Extended Service Plan provided by The Villages in September 2011, because failure of the underground line set was then suspected. We were immediately referred to the original installer, who shall remain unnamed, at present. Their technician performed a pressure test over several days and diagnosed a leaking line set underground, but said there was also a leak in the outside condenser coil. We were told the coil itself was still under manufacturer's warranty, but the cost for labor to replace it would be close to \$600.00.

The choice we were given was to replace both the line set and the coil (for the cost of the coil labor) or they could just run the replacement line set through the attic, but would not attach the copper to the condenser coil, because, they said, it had a leak. Being skeptical, we contacted Dave Gott for a second opinion, and after further pressure testing, he gave us a written statement that there was NO leak in the coil. Therefore, we insisted that the replacement line set be connected to the existing coil by the original installer as part of the covered line set repair and, sure enough, it has been proven that there never was a leak in the coil. Later, I pulled out the original copper tubing from underground and it was easy to see the corrosion and pinholes where the refrigerant had leaked out, in addition to wet mud well into the PVC chase and the remains of the plastic grocery bags that had been used to "seal" the end of the chase in the original installation. If I had not contacted Dave for a second opinion, I would have been persuaded to spend a lot of money for unnecessary labor to replace the condenser coil that did not need to be replaced.

Further, the original installer refused to reimburse us for the coolant that had leaked from the corroded copper tubing prior to their diagnosis. This is disturbing because the Developer's 10-year Extended Service Plan

states under Coverage: "Repair and replacement of HVAC copper refrigerant lines, together with the cost of the repair and/or replacement of other air conditioner components whose failure is reasonably related to the failure or leaking of such HVAC lines due to corrosion." It seems quite obvious that the coolant is a component of the HVAC that leaked out due to the failure of the corroded copper, and therefore should be reimbursed.

A written claim was then submitted to Home Warranty, and in subsequent conversations with the representative of The Villages-recommended HVAC installer, unnamed for the present, we were offered partial reim-

(Continued on page 14)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Home Warranty Issues

(Continued from page 13)

bursement of our out-of-pocket expenses, **but only for the costs incurred to disprove their findings after they had made a misdiagnosis.** Dennis Stradinger at Home Warranty told us that Home Warranty is not responsible for the Extended Service Plan and referred us back to the installer.

The installer is refusing reimbursement for costs prior to their misdiagnosis, **even though the coolant was lost due to corrosion of the underground copper line set.** There was/is nothing else wrong with the system, though we did not know it at the time our independent technician recharged the refrigerant and examined the other components. Full reimbursement is being refused because we did not call Home Warranty or the original installer at the first sign of **any** cooling problem-- **but how were we to know it was a**

line set issue before our regular technician looked at it?? Is there hidden meaning in the Extended Service Plan that we are compelled to use the original installer for all service, just in case it might turn out to be a line set problem sometime in the future? If so, it becomes doubtful that there was ever any intent to be responsible for: **“... the cost of the repair and/or replacement of other air conditioner components whose failure is reasonably related to the failure or leaking of such HVAC lines due to corrosion.”**

Our point is that our problem existed solely because of the underground line set. If not for the underground installation, there would have been no system failure, no need to replace lost coolant and no diagnostic expense. The expenses incurred were caused only by the underground line set, one incident in a widespread problem which the Developer has acknowledged by issuing the ten year Extended Service Plan in 2011, and additionally, by changing the way subsequent installations are done in new construction.

In conversations with The Villages-recommended original installer, we were told that they simply followed the engineers’ plans when installing the lines underground. We are curious to know what engineer would ever specify an underground line set installation using plastic grocery bags as a seal for the PVC chase containing the line set and we doubt that any such engineer would be em-

ployed by The Villages’ Developer. Yet we have seen this plastic grocery bag method repeatedly in homes where the underground lines had to be replaced due to corrosion.

Why is the installer still refusing to take responsibility for their poor workmanship? Is this an engineering problem or an installation problem? In either case, we feel full reimbursement of associated expenses should be made because **all of the expenses were due to the corroded line set and only the line set** and Home Warranty was contacted when this was suspected to be the cause of cooling failure.

This experience makes me wonder if something similar has happened to other homeowners. Perhaps it was a simple mistake, but the number of occurrences of “finding something else wrong” might be enlightening. As seen in some recent Letters-to-the-Editor in the POA Bulletin, it’s far too easy to mislead people, especially when it comes to air conditioning, an obscure subject like many other specialties.

It’s baffling to most individuals, myself included, but A/C is a necessity here in Florida. Therefore we tend to trust those that claim expertise and take their advice without further investigation. Perhaps, because of past experiences, wherein my trust has been violated, I am now extremely skeptical, as well as indignant on behalf of others, such as the senior residents of The Villages. So once

(Continued on page 15)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Home Warranty Issues

(Continued from page 14)

again I'm speaking up, and suggesting that anyone with an air conditioning problem (or any other matter involving major expense) get an independent second opinion. It may cost a few dollars and take a little extra time, but there is potential for huge savings.

Each homeowner needs to stand up for themselves, be responsible, ask questions, get written, itemized estimates and make their own decisions based on their own research. Just because we love life here in The Villages, there's no reason to be a victim. Though some residents may be "well off," just because we live here doesn't mean we all have money to waste on unnecessary repairs. Our 7-1/2 year old villa is just one example of why every homeowner should continue to be vigilant. The underground copper line set issue will continue well into the future for the simple reason that the copper lines installed under many homes will continue to deteriorate. Ray Micucci

Editor's Note: It's the time of year when

A/C problems are most likely to develop and we are grateful for Dave's continued willingness to help residents make good decisions regarding repairs. Dave attends most POA meetings and would be happy to answer questions before or after meetings, or if anyone wants to contact him his phone number is 352-391-4599 or you can e-mail him at davidgott@hotmail.com. A special thank you to Ray Micucci who continues to be a tireless advocate for residents. We're also grateful to homeowners and residents such as Art Cocchiario for providing information and expertise and A. Yapaolo for relating personal experiences for the benefit of residents and readers of The POA Bulletin. □

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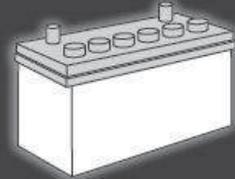
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Defective Shingles

I may be affected by the Owens Corning defective shingles situation, and want to share what I know. According to Scott Smith roofing, Owens has two issues:

1. The roller that presses the gravel pebbles into the shingles at time of manufacture was in disrepair. The result is that the pebbles did not stick to the shingles and just fell off at the end of the production line. No one caught this for some time and a lot of out-of-spec shingles were produced. The result of this

defect is shortened shingle life, not leaks.

2. A stone or pebble that turned/caused a rust color on the roof was mixed into the pebble mix. This was not discovered until installed roofs began to change color.

I tried to get Sack Roofing to take my 2 shingle samples and send it to Owens. After 5 weeks of bugging them to no avail, I decided to call Owens. They told me anybody could take the samples including myself. I established a claim number at that point.

I then contacted The Villages Warranty Dept to find out who put on my roof and when. I then bugged Scott Smith Roofing until I wore them down. They finally took the samples three weeks ago and should have mailed them to Owens yesterday. Owens says it takes them 2-3 weeks to do the testing due to the huge number of claims. At least a dozen of my neighbors (Hadley) have had new roofs installed at no cost to them.

At first we were told those who got a claim number within 5 years of purchase got a full payment and others after that would get

a pro rata share. Now, it appears Owens has changed their policy as it looks like all are getting a full payment. (If they do revert to the pro rata policy, a number of us will sue as we were not given notice by either Owens or by The Villages Warranty Department before the 5 year deadline.) It is my understanding that the folks with new roofs are also getting a fresh restart on their warranty period.

I called Owens to find out if I was on The Villages list. I was told that I was on the list but was not a "Priority" and would not be sampled by the on-site Owens team in June. I was told there was no schedule; but they would get to me eventually. I asked what it took to be a Priority residence. No answer was given by customer service.

At this point I am waiting for my samples to be evaluated. I will let you know what happens after that. The roofers are absolutely hammered with work. The area South of 466A is going at record pace, homes need to be reroofed, and samples need to be taken (this includes, data, pictures, shingles, etc.)

I hope this adds a little more perspective. I expect hundreds if not thousands of homes will need to be redone. Thanks. B.Rutkowski

Editor’s Note: We received the following update from Bob: “I just received a full replacement settlement (labor and materials) from Owens Corning even though I got my claim number past (2 months late) the 5 year deadline. They have been super about handling this entire matter to this point. □

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Seniors Vs. Crime

Leading the Fight Against Scams The Scam Blotter

During the Second Quarter of 2013 (4/01 thru 6/30), the two offices of Seniors Vs. Crime located in The Villages (the Marion County Office at the Marion County Sheriff's Office on Mulberry Lane at CR42 and the Sumter County Office at the Sumter County Sheriff's Office at Morse Boulevard and CR466) reported 179 new cases processed in support of residents in our area. During this same period those two offices completed and closed 195 cases, recovering \$95,349.22 for area residents in monetary value or realized gain. Of all those cases that were completed and closed during the quarter, 65% of them were successfully resolved in some manner.

At absolutely no cost to Florida taxpayers, Seniors Vs. Crime, as a Special Project of the Florida Attorney General's office, is an all volunteer organization with volunteers working in their own communities.

By far, the most complaints were described as involving or concerning Landscapers or Lawn Services (33 complaints); Credit, Billing, Debt Collection or Financial Related issues (18 complaints); Identity Theft (16 complaints); Contractor or Home Repair Related Issues (16 complaints); Unsatisfactory Service (10 complaints); Contract Disputes (9 complaints); Medical/Dental issues (6 complaints); and Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) issues (6 complaints). The remaining 65 complaints were spread across some 33 descriptive categories with there being five (5) or less complaints in any one of those descriptive categories.

What kinds of complaints were reported?

There were 27 cases of Incomplete Work while some 20 cases alleged Unsatisfactory Performance by the vendor. Thirty-three cases involved some type of Scam, Fraud, Deception, Price Gouging, Pressure Sales, Failure To Disclose, or ID Theft. The spike in ID Theft cases is attributed to an Income Tax Return Scam that has been experienced nationwide. Twenty-eight cases involved either a Contract Dispute, an issue with a Contract Warranty, or an alleged Breach of Contract. Financial, Billing or Credit issues led to an-

(Continued on page 18)



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Seniors Vs. Crime

(Continued from page 17)

other 31 cases while Faulty Products led to another 9 cases. Sixteen cases involved disputes over the quality of Landscaping, Yard, or Tree/Shrub Trimming Services. In 6 cases some Assistance was provided to clarify issues or misunderstandings but these did not rise to the level of a complaint. The remaining 9 cases were spread across some 5 categories, each with 4 or fewer complaints per category.

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What advice can Seniors Vs. Crime offer to help you avoid problems?

27% of the situations described above involve unsatisfactory or incomplete work.

That would indicate too many of us are paying for work or services without inspecting the finished product before parting with our hard earned money. Don't pay in advance. Inspect the finished product carefully before making that final payment. 18% involved a scam or fraud of some type. Apply the **TGTBT Rule**: If it sounds **T**oo **G**ood **T**o **B**e **T**ue, it probably is! Stay alert, be smart, be aware and be wary.

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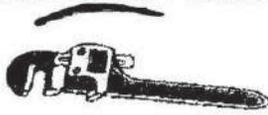
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Seniors Vs. Crime representatives are also available in the rear of the room at each POA monthly meeting. They will be happy to talk to you one-on-one before or after the meeting. Seniors Vs. Crime will also come to your club, church, or social group meeting to speak about scams, how to recognize them, and what you can do to protect yourselves. To schedule one of these free presentations for your group, contact either office of Seniors Vs. Crime at the above numbers. □

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Lightning Matters

DO YOU NEED SURGE PROTECTORS?

By Len Hathaway - Study Group on Lightning

On May 18th we had a severe thunderstorm in The Villages. We are aware of a *direct lightning strike* that destroyed a home. We are also aware of several homes that suffered damage to TV's, appliances, garage door openers, microwave ovens, and other sensitive electrical equipment as a result of an *indirect lightning strike*. **Remember lightning loves electronic technology!**

Last month's article discussed how a lightning protection system (lightning rods) protects your home against a **Direct Lightning Strike**. You can review that article on the poa4us.org web site by going to Archived Bulletins, July 2013, and scroll down to page 21. The purpose of this article is to discuss how surge protection can save your electrical and electronic equipment from damage caused by Indirect Lightning Strikes.

What is an Indirect Lightning Strike?

An Indirect Lightning Strike is one that does not hit your home directly, but hits something nearby. This can be your next door neighbor's home, a nearby tree, a flag pole, a wall, or maybe it hits the ground. A lightning strike is a burst of electrical energy that is seeking a path of least resistance to GROUND and can impact anything in its path. The electrical current, upon entering the ground, spreads out in many directions. It can enter your home through the electrical ground circuit of your home. Damaging voltages can be created in the electrical wiring of

the home to create insulation failure of electrical equipment.

How do you prevent damage to electrical equipment?

The answer is by installing electrical surge protection, commonly called surge protection devices (SPD). There are two types, **Primary** and **Secondary**.

PRIMARY SURGE PROTECTION

Primary Surge Protection can be installed either at the electric utility meter located on the outside of your house, OR at the main

(Continued on page 20)

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Photo is courtesy of Hunter Industries

Lightning Matters

(Continued from page 19)

electrical panel in your garage. Your electric utility (either SECO or Progress Energy - now Duke Energy) can install an SPD on your electric meter and will charge a monthly fee on your electric bill. Another option to achieve Primary Surge Protection is to have a licensed electrical contractor install an SPD at your main electrical panel in your garage. Primary Surge Protection will protect hard-wired equipment that you do not plug in such as your furnace, air conditioning system, dishwasher, garbage disposal, etc.



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SECONDARY SURGE PROTECTION

This can also be referred to as Point of Use Protection. This is an SPD that plugs into a 120 volt electrical wall outlet. Garage door openers, irrigation controllers, refrigerators, micro-wave ovens, TV's, computers, telephone answering machines, etc., would then plug into the SPD. Remember to also route computer telephone lines and television coaxial cables through the SPD sometimes called power strips.

When you have installed **Primary and Secondary Surge Protection**, as described, you then have whole house protection. Safety is never absolute, but based on today's technology, you will have done everything that you can to protect your electronic devices from Indirect Lightning Strikes.

LIGHTNING 101

If your club, organization, church, or civic group would benefit from a free non-commercial Power Point presentation, *Lightning Tips for Villagers*, that addresses personal lightning safety, residential considerations, lightning surges to electronic equipment, and the susceptibility of corrugated stainless steel tubing (CSST) gas pipe to lightning, contact me Len Hathaway at LHATHA@AOL.COM or my colleague Bob Freeman at STALIT1@AOL.COM. □

Fitness Challenge

March In Time

By Judi Da Costa, Personal Trainer
exercise2gether@aol.com

If you are unable to get a walk in at the early part of the day, very often it is too hot to even try later, you can still get your cardio in at your house! Try this one out for size...

Put on some upbeat music and start marching in place, using both your arms and legs. Pull up your knees when you march and pump those arms as that will also assist in getting your heart rate up.

Start with a count of 10 seconds on the clock, rest for 10/20 seconds and do it again, you can build up easily to a whole minute of marching in no time! □

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Our Gardening Column:

There's Fungus Among Us

by Anne Lambrecht, Master Gardener
annegarden@embarqmail.com

All this rain brings fungi, mushrooms, and what is known as fairy rings. Many of these mushrooms are highly toxic and a good number are edible. As a Master Gardener, it is my duty NEVER to tell you that a mushroom is edible. Never, ever, EVER eat a mushroom without knowing for certain that it is edible. And there is only one-maybe two-people in the entire state I would trust to tell me which are poisonous and which are edible (see **Note**). Remember those hippies who would run out into a cow pasture, right after the rain, and gather up "shrooms" growing right out of the MANURE. Can you imagine how many got insanely sick?

In Florida, mushrooms usually grow in warm weather, after a rain. Florida has several thousand types of fungi. Mushrooms, toadstools and the yeast that is used to make bread are all different kinds of fungi. Toad-

stools are usually referred to as mushrooms that are poisonous, and therefore toads and fairies and other creatures use them for seats.

Mushrooms and toadstools are the fruiting bodies of various forms of fungi. The fungi are always in the soil. They grow in damp fields, your lawns and dark woods and they do not need sunlight to grow. Although some fungi grow in the ground, they are not plants because they cannot make their own food.

Fungi play a very important function in nature. They break down dead plant and animal matter so that the base chemicals of which the dead plants and animals were made of can be used again. Fungus spores are everywhere. If they land where there is warmth and nutrients, the fungi will develop and grow. Because fungi can survive in difficult situations, they are full of nutritious minerals and trace elements not always found in "regular" food sources.

So what do you call a mushroom who buys everybody in the bar a drink? A FUNGI.

There are many interesting mushrooms growing here and there in my potted plants as

well as in the mulch in the flower beds. I enjoy their colors and shapes for a while, and then I get rid of them. Ever dig down under the mulch and see a bunch of white cottony "threads?" This is called mycelium and is actually the body of the mushroom.

There are many myths and tales about which mushrooms are safe to eat. However, there is NO easy, clear way to tell if a wild mushroom is safe or poisonous. About 100 are known to be poisonous. Many poisonous mushrooms look like safe mushrooms. Poisonous mushrooms sometimes grow beside good ones. Be sure to have any mushroom identified by an expert (mycologist) or buy it from a store or restaurant. Poisonous mushrooms cannot be made safe to eat by cooking, freezing, washing, or canning. Prevent poisoning by not eating toxic mushrooms.

(Continued on page 22)

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Fungus Among Us

(Continued from page 21)

Mushrooms rarely cause landscape problems, but can harm pets and children. Most mushrooms are fungi feeding on decomposing grass clippings. Sometimes they will pop up in wet mulch. They will disappear when it becomes drier outside. In the meantime, you can mow them or hand picks them.

Another common lawn mushroom is the Parasol or Fairy Ring Mushroom. These are large, whitish mushrooms (four or five inches across the cap) with reddish tan scales on the cap. The stem is three to five inches long, with a ring (annulus) around it near the top. The ring is easy to move up and down the stalk and the cap breaks easily from the stem. Fairy rings grow in a circular pattern as a result of an ever widening ring of the soil-based fungi. I'm sure you've seen them around The Villages common lawn areas.

It is said that fairies, elves, and witches make the fairy rings by dancing in them. These fairies do not like it if you step inside

their fairy ring, especially during the full moon - you may be lost forever down in the fairy world or you could become invisible. The fairies may force you to dance until exhausted, dead or in the throes of madness.

If I ever am lucky enough to get a fairy ring in my back yard, I will invite the Husband to make a merry dance at midnight, under the full moon on a hot and humid summer's night. Once he steps in, I will then decide if I shall jump in after him or go back into the house.

Note: Two trusted mycologists in Florida are Dr. James Kimbrough, a retired UF/IFAS Mycologist who has written a book, Common Florida Mushrooms and another good source is Bill Petty from Wakulla County. His website is Florida Fungi at nettally.com/annep/floridafungi/. □

A/C Air Filters

By Arthur Cocchiaro
Retired HVAC Contractor

I have received several phone calls regarding problems residents are having with their HVAC systems and contractors. Most were air filter problems, quite a few were service issues and so on. I gathered some information that may be helpful when selecting what type air filter is needed.

I use a pleated type filter, rated Merv 7. (I purchase filters at Lowe's or Home Depot.) Folding the filter material into pleats increases the surface area of the filter and extends its useful life. If the filter material were used as a flat panel, instead of pleated, it would clog with dust in a matter of days. This would lead to a decline in system performance and could even cause equipment failure if a replacement wasn't installed.

Here are some important things to remember when replacing your filter:

- Make sure you turn off the unit, turn off the circuit breaker, and then unlock and remove the filter access door.
- The replacement filter should be snug in the filter rack with no leakage around the filter or unfiltered air can bypass it and allow the dust and dirt to flow into the fan, coil and supply ducts.
- The manufacturer doesn't say to do this but I also duct tape the filter to the side in the front where a small amount of air can bypass it. The tape keeps the filter tight in the rack.
- Install the filter access panel in the correct track and lock in place, turn the circuit breaker back on and you are ready to activate your system again.

Art Cocchiaro - If you have any questions please give me a call at 203-996-7211. □

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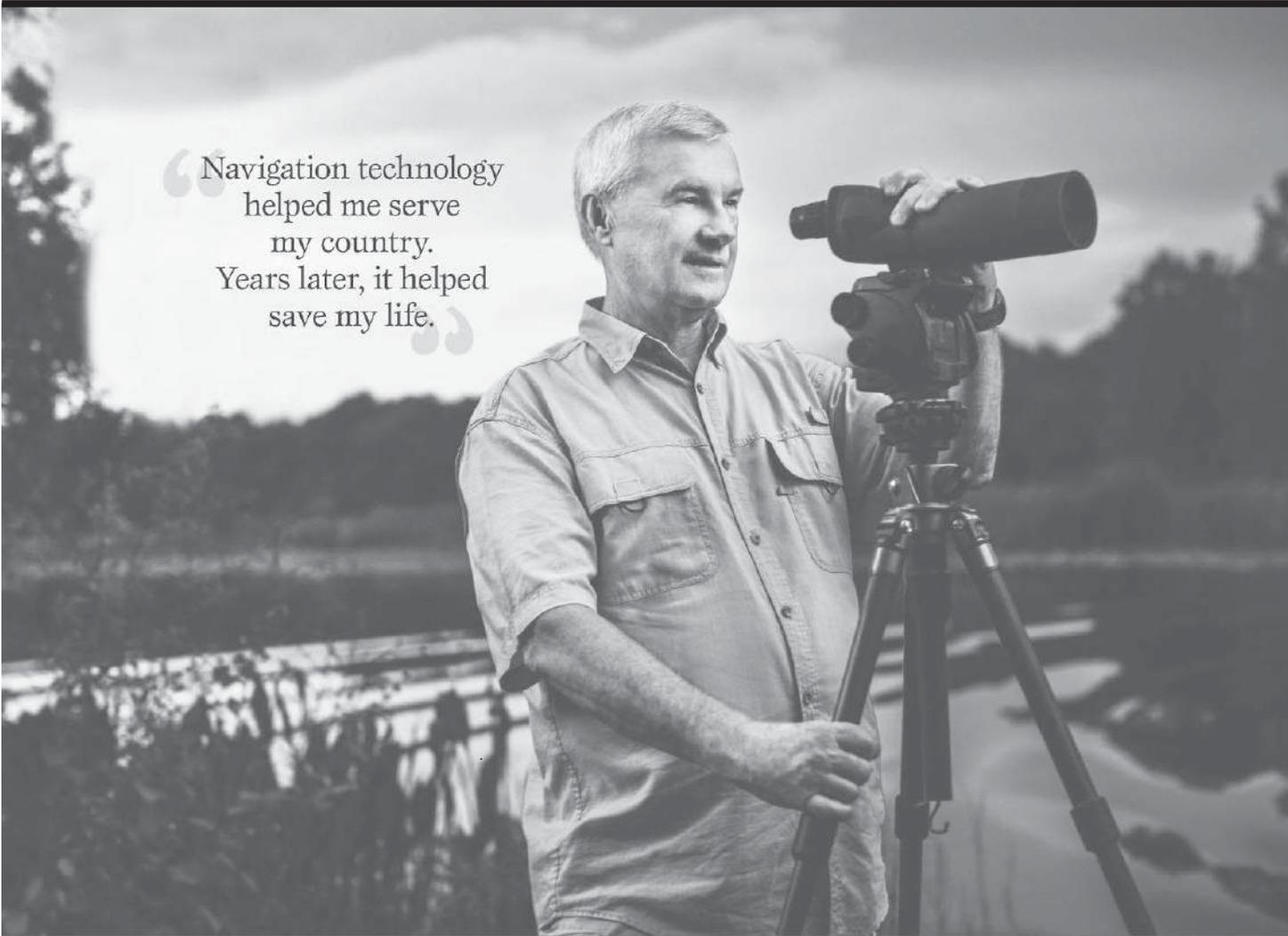


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