

The POA BULLETIN

The Property Owners' Association of The Villages

Champions of Residents' Rights Since 1975

May, 2003

- [The VCCDD and The Daily Sun Withhold Important Information from Residents](#)
- [Is the POA Too Negative?](#)
- [The VHA Corner](#)
- [CHEERS AND JEERS](#)
- [Cracker Barrel Yes -- Silverlake No!](#)
- [Guard Against Fraud and Rip-Offs](#)
- [April Fools Day Revisited](#)

The VCCDD and The Daily Sun Withhold Important Information from Residents

Two significant news stories recently were ignored by the Daily Sun. Both should have been front page stories. In both cases, the district government could have publicized the details for the benefit of residents, but did not.

Who loses in cases like this? It is the residents of The Villages who lose.

Censorship rears its ugly head – and Villagers are the victims.

The first story concerns the details surrounding the recent sale of property by the developer to the VCCDD for \$60 million. This story was reported in the previous issue of the Bulletin.

Bonds amounting to \$64 million were issued to fund the purchase. And, this debt repayment will be serviced by a portion of the monthly amenity fee paid by all residents.

Residents were not asked whether they were agreeable to this purchase. And, residents were likewise not asked to approve their assumption of the obligation to repay the debt.

The Daily Sun did not print the full story and the VCCDD did not issue a press release explaining the details of the purchase.

Why is this significant?

First, this is important news in our community. \$60 million is not a small number.

Second, residents have a Right to Know about significant issues like this.

Third, residents need to know that the dear money they paid for their homes and lots does not include all the nice facilities that attracted them to The Villages in the first place.

Fourth, residents need to know that they are obligated to repay this debt principal and interest.

The Daily Sun does not routinely send a reporter to the VCCDD or CDD meetings or report on the meetings in the paper. This is no excuse.

How can the Sun justify this oversight? It can't be a matter of limited space in the paper – it already published all sorts of frivolous stories on a daily basis. Are these more important than a \$60 million debt repayment obligation assumed by residents and our right to know?

The VCCDD is also complicit in this action. The VCCDD needed to publicize this important information for the Daily Sun – but it didn't. Where was the detailed press release?

The POA believes this adds up to a deliberate effort on the part of the Daily Sun and the VCCDD to withhold information from residents.

In the second instance, CDD #2 decided to spend \$127,000 to put an artificial liner into Lago Bonito. This was discussed in detail in the March meeting.

The decision was prompted by the Southwest Florida Water Management Division (SWFWMD, or Swift Mud) as a solution for the many sinkholes in the "lake" that were allowing polluted water to drain directly into the underground aquifer.

The spending of \$127,000 is hardly a trivial amount. The cost to typical households in the district will average approximately \$40.00 next year added to an already high annual assessment.

CDD #2 did not issue a press release to explain this matter. The VCCDD did not issue a detailed press release on this matter either. The Daily Sun did not cover the story.

Actually, Mr. Pete Wahl, District Administrator, could have explained this situation in his Pete's Place column in the week after the meeting. However, in referring to the meeting, Mr. Wahl chose to discuss the district's consideration of paying supervisors a meeting fee of \$100 for each meeting attended for a total of under \$10,000. He chose to ignore the liner cost of \$127,000 and made no mention of it.

The conclusion here for both stories is that important information is being withheld from residents. In both instances, there are significant financial considerations. And, residents end up paying the bills.

In the case of the \$60 million sale of facilities to the VCCDD, this is an example of taxation without representation in the sense that residents cannot approve the transaction or vote for or against the supervisors who made the decision. It is also an example, the POA believes, of censorship by the Daily Sun.

As a suggested partial solution, the Daily Sun should send a reporter to all CDD meetings and report the news. And, the CDDs should issue press releases for any significant news. If the Sun doesn't want to report the news, perhaps the Reporter, the Orlando Sentinel, the Ocala Star-Banner, and Leesburg Daily Commercial will.

Residents need to be aware of these issues. These are not inconsequential. It's your community! And, it's your money!

Is the POA Too Negative?

The comment is often made that the POA is too negative and complains all the time.

Do you really think this is true?

You, the reader, should study the other article on this front page. The article explains a major problem in The Villages – the problem with the Daily Sun and the VCCDD withholding important information from residents.

So, if the POA points out this problem, is this complaining in a negative sense?

If you think it is, you have missed the point.

The point is that the POA is addressing a serious problem in this community -- you should be outraged about this problem. And, your anger should be directed at the Daily Sun and the VCCDD for committing this outrage — not the POA for reporting it. Don't kill the messenger.

If you review Bulletin stories over the years, you will see that the POA motivation is to identify problems that, if solved, will make The Villages an even better place in which to live.

Don't you think that residents in The Villages have a right to know the important news in our community? The POA thinks so.

Don't you think that the Daily Sun has a responsibility as our community newspaper to report the important local news without bias or censorship? The POA thinks so.

Don't you think that our local VCCDD government should publicize its major decisions for all to know? The POA thinks so.

Please answer “yes” to all of these questions.

The “no” alternative answers suggest a totalitarian state where a dictator rules. This would surely be a company town then! Pity us if The Villages ever comes to that!

THE VHA CORNER

Several people have commented that the POA criticized the Spaghetti Dinner recently sponsored by the VHA. The Spaghetti Dinner was discussed in the February, 2003,

issue of the Bulletin in the article on Red Herrings.

The POA did not criticize the Spaghetti Dinner itself. This is a worthwhile event with a charitable and noble purpose.

The point of the article was that the VHA was ignoring the more important Residents' Rights issues in favor of the Spaghetti Dinner.

A homeowners' organization should focus its attention on homeowner issues. Unfortunately, the VHA ignores the significant Residents' Rights issues that should be its focus.

For example, the VHA has said nothing about the Daily Sun withholding important information from residents (see front page story in this issue). This is an important issue, and the VHA said nothing to support the Residents' Right to know.

So, a Spaghetti Dinner is fine — but, not if it deflects attention from the more important issues. This is a classic example of a Red Herring.

Cheers and Jeers

Remember that we need material for this column of comments and opinions. Please send in your submission and be sure to sign your name.

CHEERS??/JEERS?? - To the developer for cleverly sidestepping state licensing requirements to get approval for an expansion of the Villages hospital. More capacity is good. But, how many other clever schemes to sidestep something or another have been hatched by the developer?

CHEERS — To the golf division for its decision to close Hilltop golf course for a full renovation. It is sorely needed.

CHEERS — To the trash and water utilities for getting together on one bill. That is a smart move that saves money. Why not the amenity fee also? Will rates now be lowered?

CHEERS — To the developer for the Chatham recreation center, pool, courts, golf courses, etc. These facilities are fabulous! How much will this cost us later when the VCCDD buys them?

CHEERS — To the Daily Sun for printing a Letter to the Editor saying that the writer, referring to the Sun, has "... never seen such blatant use of "News Analysis" to conceal opinions that should have been confined to the editorial page." The writer went on to say: "It is obvious that the Daily Sun is a master of the practice....." Thanks to the Daily Sun for printing this letter and acknowledging what many would agree with.

JEERS — To people who, when driving up to the card readers at entrance gates, are so far away that their cards can't be read properly. Then they wave their cards around in a futile attempt to have it read. Then they open their doors to get closer. Why not carefully drive up closer to the card reader in the first place?

JEERS — To drivers who don't come to a complete stop at stop signs or before making a permitted right hand turn at a stop sign.

JEERS — To the Jason Drive resident who blasts a car horn when pulling into her driveway

Cracker Barrel Yes

Silverlake No!

A new Cracker Barrel restaurant is coming to The Villages. The popular restaurant will be located in front of the new Lowe's on highway 27/441. The target opening date is in August.

Although Villagers should be happy to see this restaurant in our community, there is another aspect to this that needs to be mentioned.

Remember when the announcement was made about the closing of the Silverlake Club restaurant last year. A focus group headed up by Ron Kirschner of the VHA explained why the club was not viable as a restaurant in that location.

Kirschner made the point that the focus group and Village officials hoped to attract a national restaurant chain to a location close enough to be easily accessed by a golf cart on the east side. A location at the closed golf driving range on the east side was implied as a good substitute for the closed Silverlake Club. The idea was that east-side residents should have a full-service restaurant to make up for the loss of the Silverlake Club. The national restaurant chain most often mentioned was the Cracker Barrel.

Well, we can see now that the earlier discussion of the Cracker Barrel in the location of the closed golf driving range was wishful thinking at best and perhaps also a Red Herring.

All the talk about the Cracker Barrel tended to diffuse resident anger about closing the Silverlake Club. That was a useful way to finesse the closing issue and keep east-side residents quiet.

So, let's call it what it is — empty promises and another popular feature of the east side taken away from residents.

Guard Against Fraud and Rip-Offs

By reviewing these simple tips, you can significantly reduce your chances of becoming a fraud victim:

Do not carry your extra credit cards, Social Security card, birth certificate, or passport in your wallet or purse except when necessary. This practice minimizes the amount of information a thief can steal.

Never leave your purse or wallet unattended at work or in church, restaurants, health fitness clubs, parties, or shopping carts.

Never leave your purse or wallet in open view in your car, even when your car is locked.

Destroy all checks immediately after you close a checking account.

Destroy or keep in a secure place any courtesy checks that your bank or credit card company sends to you.

Do not have your bank send your new checks to your home address. Tell the bank that you prefer to pick them up.

Limit the number of credit cards you have, and cancel any inactive accounts.

Never give any credit card, bank, or Social Security information to anyone by telephone, even if you made the call, unless you can positively verify that the call is legitimate.

Minimize exposure of your Social Security and credit card numbers. If the numbers are requested for check-cashing purposes, ask if the business has alternative options such as a check-cashing card.

Do not allow your financial institution to print your Social Security number on your personal checks.

Safeguard your credit, debit, and ATM card receipts. Shred them before discarding.

Scrutinize your utility and subscription bills to make sure the charges are yours.

Memorize your passwords and personal identification numbers (PINs) so you do not have to write them down.

Be aware of your surroundings to make sure no one is watching you input your PIN.

Keep a list of all your credit accounts and bank accounts in a secure place so you can quickly call the issuers to inform them about missing or stolen cards. Include account numbers, expiration dates, and telephone numbers of customer service and fraud departments.

Do not toss pre-approved credit offers in your trash or recycling bin without first tearing them into small pieces or shredding them. Always do the same with other sensitive information like credit card receipts, phone bills, and the such.

Order and check your credit report once a year from all the major credit reporting companies.

April Fools Day Revisited

(Don't Believe Any Of This)

The pan fish stocking into Lake Mira Mar has gone horribly wrong. Piranha were inadvertently substituted for largemouth bass, but nobody noticed until the miniature remote control sailing fleet was chewed to ribbons by the hungry fish during last Sunday's afternoon regatta.

CCFJ Logo

This page is provided by:
Jan Bergeman
President of Cyber Citizens For Justice (CCFJ)
<http://www.ccfj.net>

