

# The POA BULLETIN

The Property Owners' Association of The Villages

Champions of Residents' Rights Since 1975

January 2004

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## A Memorial -- For the Passing Of Harold Schwartz

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The POA extends its sincere condolences to the family of Harold Schwartz on his passing. Mr. Schwartz was not only the founder and guiding light of The Villages, he was also a friend to many of the members of the POA who remember him as a happy and friendly fellow resident from the early days of The Villages. Mr. Schwartz will always be remembered — and, he will be missed.

**Harold, thanks for everything, especially the wonderful way of life we enjoy here in The Villages because of your vision.**

## 400 Paradise Questionnaires Received/Tabulated So Far

The effort to determine what to do with the Paradise Center continues. We have thus far received over 400 questionnaires back from residents. We are in the process of contacting many of the activities which use the Paradise Center. If your activity is contacted in the near future, please offer your cooperation for the questionnaire and any discussions by your group about what to do with the Paradise Center.

We hope to summarize the resident's questionnaire soon, perhaps by the end of January. The response thus far has been good, but we are hoping for several hundred more returned questionnaires to represent a wider sampling of resident's opinions. If you haven't yet send in your questionnaire, please either cut it out of last month's Bulletin, or call any officer or director of the POA at any of the phone numbers listed on page four to get a copy. We need your opinion.

In viewing the 400 questionnaires received and reviewed thus far, several comments need to be made:

First, the Paradise Center is owned by the VCCDD, not the developer. In this regard, we, the residents, are actually the owners and financially responsible. The developer is for all practical purposes out of the picture

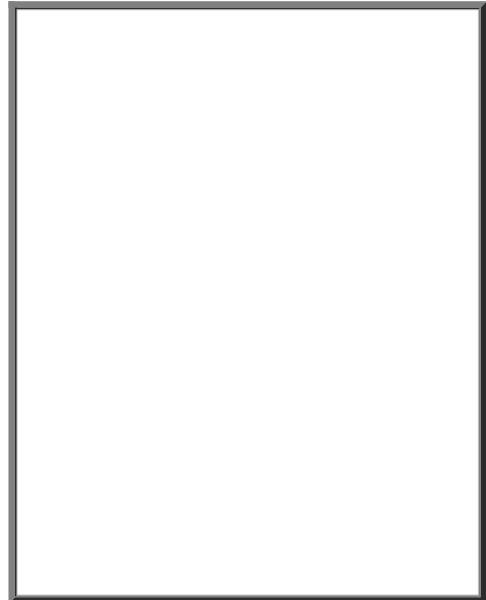
in the residential areas of Lake County. The developer accepts no financial responsibility for the operation, maintenance, improvement, renovation, or re-building of the 30-year old Paradise Center.

Second, there is no surplus of funds in the budget of the VCCDD that can be used to replace or renovate the Paradise Center. Whatever is done has to come out of the VCCDD's funds primarily from future monthly amenity fees. This is why the alternative of issuing a bond for this purpose, which would spread the cost over at least 20 years, is so attractive. This minimizes the impact of the cost per month per household at roughly \$1.97 per month.

Third, all residents of The Villages north of Highway 466 pay for all the Recreation Centers north of Highway 466. Thus, East-side residents are paying for the Savannah Center, the Saddlebrook Center, etc., through their monthly amenity fees, and West side residents are paying for East-side amenities like the Paradise Center through their amenity fees. Everybody's amenity fees are used for everybody's amenities. So, the argument that East-siders only should pay for East-side amenities is not valid. The beauty of The Villages is that our combined numbers spread the costs over many for the advantage of all.

Fourth, it is true that the Paradise Center has been allowed to deteriorate substantially over the past 30 or so years. The damage is done and here we are. We need to decide what to do now.

Fifth, what is the best alternative favored by residents? In the final analysis, residents should decide what is to be done. We have to pay for whatever is done. This is our community. And, we will have to live with the cost or consequences of whatever is decided.



Sixth, this process of using a questionnaire to determine the combined will of residents is a good way to do things here. If residents had asserted their will on previous questions like the closing of the Silverlake Club or the Cantina, perhaps we could have saved those facilities. We did assert ourselves on the question of turning the OBG restaurant facility into a pool hall -- and we saved that restaurant. Remember that all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. Don't let apathy rule you on this question -- we need your response on the questionnaire because residents should decide what should be done on this important question.

Finally, we see the deterioration that has been allowed to overtake the Paradise Center. If residents don't assert themselves on issues like this, what do you think will happen to the Savannah Center, or the Chatham Center, or the Saddlebrook Center when these are the age that the Paradise Center is now? Residents have to insist on standards of quality in our facilities -- or the deterioration will accelerate. And, these problems affect all of us -- no matter where in The Villages you live.

Please come to the POA's next membership meeting on Wednesday, January 21, 2004, starting at 7 p.m. in the main auditorium of the Paradise Center. We hope to present at least preliminary results of the questionnaire tabulation and discuss the findings. And, our guest speaker will be Ms. Paulette Walz of the Leesburg Social Security Center.

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## **Lazenby Article**

An article entitled "Your View -- The Villages Will Never Be a City" by Ms. Gail J. Lazenby was published in the 11/20/03 issue of the Reporter newspaper. This responded to the Robert Butz letter in the 10/30/03 issue.

The article is generally well-written and Ms. Lazenby deserves credit for airing these issues. However, several comments need clarification.

Ms. Lazenby confuses the comment about the District Administrator being elected. This refers to Mr. Pete Wahl who is appointed with the blessings of the developer and his hand-picked board of VCCDD supervisors. Mr. Wahl is like a mayor in our community, but he is appointed by special interests -- not elected by the residents of this community.

Ms. Lazenby says that "...we do have a voice in district governance." This is true in the sense that residents are, more and more, electing the supervisors in their individual residential CDDs. However, all the big money decisions in The Villages are made by the VCCDD supervisors appointed in effect by the developer. Residents have no say in their appointment or decision-making process.

She goes on to point out that "...not a single cent of district funds was expended to build that facility (the Mulberry Grove Recreation Center). (It was)...paid for by the developer." This is true.

However, when the developer decides to sell the Center in a few years, it will be sold to the VCCDD for an inflated price of roughly 3-5 times the original cost. And our amenity fees, if needed, will be increased to pay the inflated price. Residents will have to pay off the bonds issued to give the developer his money up-front.

Ms. Lazenby says: "The Villages isn't a city. It never will be." She should realize that it doesn't make any difference what our community is called or what organization or legal form it takes. But, it does make a difference if we can't elect the primary decision-making body in our community. It does make a difference that this government body is appointed by special interests. It does make a difference that residents have no say in the big-money decisions that burden residents with millions of dollars of debt.

She concluded her article by saying that "each resident has an obligation to learn how

## Pete's Corner

One of the key points in the Residents' Bill of Rights listed on the page 2 right-hand column of every POA Bulletin is the second point: Residents should have the right to elect the top administrative officer in our community.

In The Villages, this refers to Mr. Pete Wahl. There is nothing personal in this comment. Mr. Wahl is a capable chief operating officer and The Villages generally runs well under this direction.

However, many residents feel that we need to have a District Administrator more respectful of Residents' Rights and more responsive to the needs and interests of residents.

The POA feels that the best way to achieve these objectives is to have the District Administrator stand for election by all residents in The Villages. It would be nice for Mr. Wahl to stand for election in the November, 2004, general elections along with the many other public officials.

Mr. Wahl should welcome the opportunity to submit his record and achievements to a popular vote. However, this probably will not happen until the Chapter 190 Florida law that established CDDs is changed.

Mr. Wahl understands this popular election issue very well. Actually, he addressed this in his Pete's Place article dated December 4th.

In that article he criticized Sumter County Commissioner Roberts for his negative comments about a county-built library for the north Sumter area. Mr. Wahl said: "...Commissioner Roberts doesn't have to be concerned about your feelings, because you can't vote for him."

This is an interesting comment since Village residents have a similar situation with Mr. Wahl himself.

Let's try changing the words "Commissioner Roberts" to "Administrator Wahl" in that last quote and see how the sentence would now read: "...Administrator Wahl doesn't have to be concerned about your feelings. because you can't vote for him."

So, Mr. Wahl acknowledges that a public official doesn't have to care about the feeling of his or her constituents if those constituents can't vote for that official. Notice how this comment would also apply to Mr. Wahl.

Another comment from Mr. Wahl's article about Commissioner Roberts: "...he apparently doesn't feel that he had any obligation to provide the same level of services to Villages residents – nor does he need to since he doesn't have to answer to them when they vote in November."

Another comment from the Pete's Place article: "...I suspect even Commissioner Roberts' (read Pete Wahl's) tune might change if he had to answer to the voters within The Villages...."

Yes, Mr. Wahl – you should answer to the voters within The Villages – perhaps your tune might also change if you had to answer to us, the residents.

The POA thinks that Mr. Wahl should stand for election so that he will be more respectful of Residents' Rights and more responsive to the needs and interests of residents. And, apparently, Mr. Wahl agrees with us on this point.

The POA also asks for the support of the VHA and all of its members on this call for the District Administrator to stand for election.

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## **New Golf Fees**

Below is a letter recently sent to Ken Creely, Director of Golf Operations for The Villages, by a Villages resident, Gary Bibby. The letter has been edited for publication purposes:

I was disappointed to see the golf rate increase: a 20% increase in rates is ridiculous when our CPI increased only 2.5% this year.

Village management is forgetting that the people in The Villages are retired and are on fixed incomes. Most of us were told by our sales rep that we were buying a quality life and could expect only modest increases in golf expenses. This is why I and the majority of the people that live here moved here. This is no longer true.

My quality of life here in The Villages is eroding. I no longer can play the amount of golf I desire to play in the winter months. With this price increase I will be forced to cut my play down on the championship courses and will have to limit my play ... (to a few lower-priced courses). The shortage of executive courses ... is no longer an option to supplement the number of times I desire to play. A large percentage of Villages residents will also be doing the same thing.

As for cost -- my golf expenses have increased over 50% in the five years. That is an increase of 10% a year. When I amortize the cost of my priority fees and golf cart costs it adds another \$10.00 per round. That means that my cost to play the Palmer course as a Priority member equates to \$47.00 a round. I surely can't afford these prices.

Thus, I will be forced to also play courses outside The Villages more during the winter months, where the prices are cheaper and the courses are in better shape.

I have several friends that have moved out of The Villages this past year because of the greed that has come about in the past couple of years. I guess that ... you no longer care about the people such as myself that have lived here for ... years and helped to set the foundation for the growth of The Villages.

As for improvements and better course conditions -- I have not seen it. I was hoping that because of the reseeding closures I could expect to see the courses in better shape than in past years. This is not so. The majority of the courses in the surrounding area ... were ... in much better condition than are The Villages courses. I can't help but wonder why -- is it the quality of grass seed being used; the amount of grass seed being spread; or the quality of The Villages maintenance crew?

I felt it important that I state my feelings about this price increase. Talking with several of my golf friends today further confirmed that the thoughts expressed above were mutual.

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## **The Patron Program**

The Villages developer and the Lifelong Learning College have established the Patron Advantage program. The program allows special access and discounts for various Villages entertainment events in exchange for a \$50.00 contribution to the Lifelong Learning College.

If you are willing to "contribute" \$50.00 annually to the College, you can then buy tickets to Villages entertainment events two weeks before these tickets are put on sale for other Villagers -- and, you also get a 10% discount.

Does this sound like a way for some people to bribe the college for preferred access to unrelated entertainment tickets? Does this allow people to buy special treatment for themselves?

It sure sounds like that to us.

The disturbing part of this is that some of the very features that attracted us to The Villages in the first place are now prioritized for an elitist group of Villagers who can afford to bribe the entertainment division and the college with a \$50.00 bill.

Furthermore, who decided to start this program that is designed to exclude some Villagers? It appears that this idea was concocted with no input from the many Villagers who have patronized Villages entertainment events in the past.

If this program were to continue, the net effect would be an increase or surcharge of \$50.00 (less any discounts) on the cost of the amenities and features here in The Villages for which we already pay a sizable monthly amenity fee.

And, remember that most of these entertainment events are in the Savannah Center which is already owned by residents.

In the best interests of all Villagers, who value fairness rather than favoritism, this elitist program should be eliminated immediately.

And, whoever decided to establish this program should have the personal integrity to stand up and take credit for it ... and recommend that it also be ended.

The Villages Lifelong Learning Center is worthwhile – let's not confuse or debase it with irritating gimmicks like this \$50.00 Patron Fee which smacks of bribery and special favors.

The POA calls on the VHA for support on this issue. It has a special relationship with the developer that can work to help residents on this issue. The VHA's support here would be valuable and this could be a worthwhile opportunity for the VHA to show its advocacy on a real Residents' Rights issue.

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## **New Hospital Taxes Proposed in Sumter**

The annual POA elections for officers and directors was held at the November general membership meeting. The POA membership elects these positions rather than having these positions appointed by the board of directors as is the case with the VHA. Joe Gorman was re-elected President for his third term. Mary Paulsboe was re-elected Secretary, also for her third term.. Bill Garner was newly elected as Treasurer. There was no candidate for the Vice President position.

Re-elected as directors were incumbents Jim Creek, Pete Cacioppo, Dorothy Cheshire, and Bill Snyder. Newly elected as a director was Jeanne Regnier.

Please join in congratulating these POA officials for their election and decision to volunteer their time and effort in support of your POA.

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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. 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 corporate law, contracts, and/or real estate law would be helpful, but not essential.

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## CHEERS AND JEERS

**Cheers** - To POA members Dorothy Cheshire, Mary Ann Marsh, Lynn Sciacca, and Sadie Woollard for their wonderful work for our successful POA Holiday party at the December general meeting. Also thanks to the several gentlemen who went to get coffee, forks, and spoons after we discovered nobody remembered to bring the keys for our lockers where our supplies were stored. Everybody had a good time. Incidentally, a food tray was inadvertently taken home by somebody else. It is 15" in diameter, round, with a large Christmas tree in the center and green leaves and berries around the perimeter. Please call Joe at 259-0999 if you have this and can return it.

**Jeers** - To the Sumter County commissioners for not taking a definitive position supporting the idea of a library for the north Sumter area and vowing to find the money in the county budget sometime in at least the next few years. There is too much politicking going on here. Also, if the developer is allowed to build a library for only Villages residents, we will have to pay quadruple the construction costs when the developer eventually sells it to the VCCDD in a few years.

**Jeers** - To the rat running around on the ceiling tiles of the Charlie Chaplin room in the Paradise Center.

Maybe this should be Cheers!?

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## April Fools Day Revisited

### (Don't Believe Any Of This)

The residents-only policy at Katie Belle's is not working as well as planned with sales and profits failing to meet expectations. Therefore, rather than open Katie Belle's to non-residents, or turn it into a pool hall, the Villages has decided to require all residents to spend a minimum of \$25.00 per month in the restaurant. Residents will be billed separately for any underspending, plus a \$5.00 service charge and a 20% gratuity.

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