POA Logo

The POA BULLETIN

The Property Owners' Association of The Villages

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It's Decision Time For The VCCDD Straw Poll

It is decision time for the Straw Vote. The measure is on the November 7 ballot for a vote by Villagers north of highway 466.

Residents in the administrative area of the VCCDD have to decide whether they are satisfied with the VCCDD's current decision-making process for amenities and utilities by the developer-appointed supervisors - or whether they would like to change to a resident-elected board of supervisors.

If you are satisfied with the current situation, you should consider voting "Yes."

If you would like to change to resident control, you should consider voting "No."

Voting "Yes" will continue the current situation whereby the developer of The Villages appoints the VCCDD supervisors who make the major decisions in The Villages.

The rationale for this alternative claims that the developer has done a good job of developing this community. So, why change now to a resident board?

The POA response here is that the developer has done a good job of developing and constructing this community.

However, the developer has done a poor job of governance over the years and has repeatedly taken advantage of residents. See the Bulletin article on VCCDD Governance Issues starting on page 6.

Voting "No" will change the situation to a resident-elected board that will be responsive to the needs and interests of resident because residents will actually elect five out of six of the supervisors.

The rationale here is that residents should control their community since it is their community. Now, 80% of the VCCDD board is made up of non-residents who are out-of-touch with the details of our community and our residents.

Also, we need supervisors who are responsive to our residents. And, we need the ability to vote these supervisors out of office if they disregard our interests. This comment also applies to the top administrative staff.

Furthermore, there have been numerous charges of the VCCDD and/or the developer's appointed supervisors taking advantage of residents. Remember the Nancy Lopez pond sinkhole repair to the tune of $165,000 that the developer tried to stick to CDD4 residents.

In Summary, residents have a unique opportunity to assume decision-making responsibility for their community. This is the democratic ideal -- this is the way our Founding Fathers created our country. The voters decide.

This is the opportunity for Villagers to decide.

So, please review this material carefully to get fully informed about the issues. Then, if you agree, please vote "No" November 7.

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What You May Not Know About the VCCDD Operation

In the Purchaser's Covenants and Warranties Section of the VCCDD's contract with the developer for the purchase of common properties, the VCCDD Board of Supervisors agreed to "continuously and properly operate and maintain the Facilities in a condition not lower than its current condition, normal wear and tear excepted, and provide the same level of services related to the Facilities and as also described in Exhibit Q, as is currently provided."

The third and fourth paragraphs in Exhibit Q read as follows:

3. "Make available to current residents and future residents the facilities, and provide recreational services and activities of approximately the same quality, frequency, character and duration as is currently being provided as of the Closing Date.

4. "Provide Security Services for Current Residents and Future Residents of approximately the same quality, frequency, character and duration as is currently provided as of the Closing Date."

5. When the majority of the recreation facilities and amenity fee contracts were transferred to the VCCDD, we had pool monitors at the recreation pools, not just the developer-owned country club pools. According to the Purchase Agreements quoted above, the VCCDD should have continued to provide this service. Budgeting for increasing salary costs that would come with the increasing number of swimming pools under its budget should have been planned for by the VCCDD Board of Supervisors when it established the price for the transaction, but it was not done.

6. As a result of this lack of planning, when residents requested the return of the pool monitors, they were informed there was not enough money in the budget to cover them. This is verified in the September 7, 2006, REPORTER article on the newly created VCCDD focus group wherein John Rohan is quoted as stating: "The answer concerns cost.... If you put one pool monitor at 40 pools for 365 days a year, it's going to run you about $270,000 in salaries."

7. SALARIES FOR POOL MONITORS SHOULD STILL BE COVERED BY OUR AMENITY FEES just like they were when the developer signed the Agreement for Purchase and Sale.

Additionally, when the majority of the amenity fee contracts were transferred to the VCCDD there was a real presence of Neighborhood Watch patrols throughout our Villages. These services have not grown as the population and land mass of coverage have increased.

When the developer was originally providing these services, he initially agreed to pay 7.25% of the amenity fees he was receiving from 'future residents' to the VCCDD in consideration of the Center District providing Security Services for them. It was mutually agreed that this was reasonable compensation for the services. Furthermore, there was an agreement for adjustments in this rate according to the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index.

We are all certainly aware that our monthly amenity fees go up, but the portion

of amenity fee money expended on neighborhood watch services has decreased to less than 5%. Not only have we had a reduction in the number of patrols per capita, but now the VCCDD charges for Neighborhood Watch to do the weekly house checks for which there was no charge when most of us moved here.

VCCDD FAILURE TO PERFORM DUE DILIGENCE ON BEHALF OF RESIDENTS

The VCCDD Board of Supervisors accepted a report stating that the Paradise Center was in excellent condition at the time it was transferred in 1996. How could that possibly have been true when just nine years later it had to be totally gutted and replaced? If it is true that a building could deteriorate that rapidly, how can the Board of Supervisors, in good conscience, take out bonds with the assumption that our buildings will last for 30 or more years? Or, did the VCCDD not provide adequate funds for maintenance? EITHER WAY, THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS GROSSLY FAILED THE RESIDENTS.

The VCCDD Board of Supervisors has failed to develop an adequate reserve fund for repair and replacement of our recreation facilities. It has only been retaining the minimum 2% required bond reserve fund and a two months equivalent operating reserve fund. When it was finally determined that something had to be done with the Paradise Center, the VCCDD had to take out a $4 million dollar loan against our amenity fees to pay for it since no reserves were available.

The Recreational Amenity Division (RAD) consistently shows million dollar surpluses each year (on a modified cash basis), yet these surpluses never are used to fund pool monitors, Neighborhood Watch, recreation trails, or find their way into reserves, early payoff of debt, or flow into the next fiscal year. When questioned as to where the surplus money went, no one is able to provide a satisfactory answer.

The VCCDD Board of Supervisors has failed to properly oversee the amenity fee service program. It had to be pointed out to the board by residents that the developer had not been charged for his room rentals at the Savannah Center FOR YEARS. The developer simply stated that he had never received a bill, and the VCCDD Board brushed it off. Eventually, the developer paid $111,283 in back due rental charges. No attempt was made by the Board of Supervisors to determine how such a billing error could occur or put plans in place to see that the same error would not occur again.

The developer sold the Savannah Center to the VCCDD for an inflated price and now the VCCDD has to pay for all of the operating and maintenance cost of the building. The VCCDD Board of Supervisors now rents our Savannah Center Theater to the developer for ridiculously low prices. The rent is $135.00 per hour, and there is no agreement for a percentage of the gate as there should be for venues such as this which bring in outside shows. The developer could not get that good a deal anywhere else. A percentage of the gate receipts should be coming in to the amenity fee budget and used to pay for pool monitors, Neighborhood Watch, etc. (Although we don't have exact figures, a rough estimate of the annual income from developer sponsored outside shows is probably in the neighborhood of $600,000 a year. If the VCCDD were to receive 25% of the gross profits, that would be $150,000 a year of additional funds to go towards the payment of recreational services that we are supposed to be receiving.)

The VCCDD Board of Supervisors is overcharging for the use of exercise

rooms in the recreational centers. Residents asked that separate budgets be used so that the amount of fees was based on the cost of repair and replacement of equipment and monitors - not as a money making project. But the request was denied by the Board.

The VCCDD Board recently agreed to pay the trash collection and cable service bills of residents on the East side that were guaranteed as a developer promotion back in the 1980s. THIS YEAR ALONE $147,200 OF THE AMENITY FEE BUDGET WILL BE USED TO PAY FOR THOSE SERVICES.

Recently, the developer made the decision to limit guest passes for renters to two per home and to charge them $50 for the two passes to go towards the cost of providing the amenities. Since the VCCDD now maintains and operates all of the amenity services on the north side of Rt. 466, one would reasonably think that such passes would be issued by the VCCDD, as they do all other guest passes and that the money collected would go into the VCCDD amenity fee operating budget. Investigations found that neither of these is happening. The developer requires the renters to go to his sales office to pay for and receive the guest passes and then he keeps the money. We are estimating that rental guest passes in the VCCDD geographic area probably are generating in the neighborhood of $50,000 annually. There is no record that this was discussed at a VCCDD meeting.

Do you have trouble getting a tee time on the executive courses during the winter months when all of the snowbirds and prospective buyers are in town? Did you know that the VCCDD Board of Supervisors has been giving the developer approximately 50 tee times (200 golfers) EVERY DAY for use by its sales staff supposedly in exchange for use of the tee time reservation service. HOWEVER, IN THE AGREEMENT FOR SERVICES executed in connection with the various property transfers, the developer, "agrees to provide for the Purchaser, the VCCDD, tee time reservation services for the golf courses acquired by the Purchaser.... The District agrees to pay to Seller the initial sum of $26,000 per year for the Golf Tee Time Reservation Services provided to the District pursuant to this agreement, which the District has determined is a reasonable sum for the services provided. The annual sum shall be automatically increased by the same percentage as any and all increases in the Amenities fees charged by the Purchaser." The 2006-07 budget shows this amount at $28,500. THIS BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HAS GIVEN AWAY TEE TIMES MUCH SOUGHT AFTER BY CURRENT RESIDENTS PAYING AMENITY FEES EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NO CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT REQUIRING THEM TO DO SO.

The developer no longer builds homes north of Rt. 466. It's time this practice is discontinued.

Are you concerned for your safety when you use the narrow and broken recreation trails which run adjacent to Buena Vista Boulevard and El Camino Real? The VCCDD Board of Supervisors refuses to pay for their maintenance even though the developer has specifically stated in his promotional literature the last several years that the recreational trails are covered by our amenity fees. Their reasons were varied, as follows:

Mike Berning, Executive Sales Manager for the Villages of Lake Sumter, Inc. (the developer) said: "It's not possible for the Board to speak towards what the Developer refers to in the market place."

The POA believes that this statement is troublesome because we have no written guarantee that executive golf will continue to be free other than the

same promotional literature that states the recreation trails are covered by our amenity fees.

Mike Berning continues: "To me, my observation is that the primary use of these trails, especially for residents outside of a given district, is not for recreation. It is for transportation."

Mr. Berning is not a resident who uses these trails. He doesn't see that they are used by walkers, joggers, bicyclists, rollerbladers, etc. -- yet he voiced "his observation."

Gary Moyer, Vice President for Development of the Villages of Lake-Sumter, Inc., and a VCCDD supervisor said: "We could have done everything absolutely differently, you know, 10 or 12 years ago, but that isn't what was done." Mr. Moyer summarized his fixed position by saying: "WHAT IS - IS."

The truth of the matter is that the recreation trails should be treated just like the fitness trail was. It was acknowledged in February, 2006, that the fitness trail was inadvertently platted to District 4. A quit claim deed was executed transferring the property to the VCCDD. The same should be done with the developer identified recreation trails.

John Wise, Chief Financial Officer for The Villages of Lake-Sumter, and a VCCDD supervisor said: "...I have a basic problem and that is that in Lake County there really aren't any golf cart trails or paths or whatever you call them... Why should somebody in Lake County have a portion of their amenity fee used to pay for the fitness trails in Districts 1 thru 4?"

A member of the audience responded to Mr. Wise as follows: "I'm astounded at the comment you made.... The whole concept of The Villages, which I'm sure you're quite familiar with, is that everybody pays roughly the same amenity fee... whether they live in a numbered district or Lady Lake, and then, based on that, they are able to use all of the facilities of The Villages."

An audience member asked Mr. Moyer: "If the Authority Board (straw ballot issue) was established and these people came back and say we want amenity fees to be used to maintain and improve these recreation trails, would that Authority Board have the authority to consent to that?" Mr. Moyer responded: "Yes, and please understand we have to pay bondholders monies that come in that door. OUR FIRST PLEDGE OF THAT GOES TO BONDHOLDERS. WE HAVE TO PAY BONDHOLDERS, SO THAT'S OFF THE TABLE. That's why I qualified my answer. We have to operate and maintain the assets that we own as a district to provide those recreation facilities. That's off the table. We have to operate and maintain those, that is a bond covenant. TO THE DEGREE THERE ARE DISCRETIONARY FUNDS, THEN THAT BOARD COULD USE THOSE DISCRETIONARY FUNDS."

If that is the case then it appears that the various excuses given as to why the VCCDD is not responsible or cannot be responsible for the maintenance of the recreation trails are not valid. THE REASON IS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HAVE THE MONEY TO PAY FOR IT BECAUSE OF THE HUGE VCCDD DEBT WHICH IS DUE TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGREEING TO PAY THE DEVELOPER INFLATED PRICES FOR THE VARIOUS FACILITIES.

In the budget year 2005-06, the income from our amenity fees totaled $29,623,000; debt service on bond principal totaled $4,853,417 and interest charges on these bond debts were $12,051,749 for a total of 16,905,166.

THUS, 57% OF EVERY MONTHLY AMENITY FEE YOU PAY GOES TO SERVICE THE DEBT, not to maintain and operate the facilities and services as promised by the developer.

So, how would it be different if we created an Authority Board? There are several major factors to consider:

First, five of the six members of this Board (except one VCCDD representative) would be residents.

Second, residents will elect their representatives and if said individuals failed to properly represent the residents, they would not be reelected when their term expires.

Third, and most important, the Authority Board would be established under Florida Statute 163, not F. S. 190. THE MAJOR PROBLEM WITH 190 IS THAT IT STATES THAT: "IT SHALL NOT BE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR A BOARD MEMBER OR THE DISTRICT MANAGER OR ANOTHER EMPLOYEE OF THE DISTRICT TO BE A STOCKHOLDER, OFFICER, OR EMPLOYEE OF A LANDOWNER." That is why the developer was able to fill the current Board of Supervisor positions with his high ranking employees and business associates. It should be pretty obvious that their allegiance has been to the developer and not to the residents. Under Chapter 163, there is no such conflict of interest exemption.

Fourth, an Authority Board would have the authority to overturn past decisions made by the current Board of Supervisors which have disenfranchised the residents and put money in the developer's pocket instead of our amenity fee budget. Examples include:

- Positive cash flow balances could be used for facilities reserves, to pay down the debt or moved forward as revenue for the next year. THEY WOULD BE ACCOUNTED FOR. (Estimate $500,000 to $1,000,000 annually)

- A percentage of the gate receipts for shows at the Savannah Center could be part of the contract for use for any shows which were not comprised mainly of residents or which were 100% for a specific charity. (Estimate $150,000 annually.)

- It could be determined that the payment of trash collection and cable service bills of residents by the VCCDD were not permitted by Statute 190, thus making them the continued responsibility of the developer. ($147,200 annually)

- A request could be made to the developer that renters' guest passes be issued by the VCCDD and that proceeds from the sale go to the amenity fee budget. If the developer disagreed, the Authority Board could assess usage charges on individuals using renter guest passes. (Apx. $50,000 annually.)

- Fifth, the Authority Board could terminate the granting of tee times for the developer's sales office at its ten executive courses which are open to non-residents, thus freeing up approximately 200 spaces a day for golfers who are paying a monthly amenity fee for the use of these facilities.

IN CONCLUSION, WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU VOTE "NO" ON THE STRAW BALLOT ISSUE. WE NEED TO BE REPRESENTED BY RESIDENTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE SUBJECT TO THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST LAWS IN THE FLORIDA STATUTES, AND WE, THE RESIDENTS, NEED TO BE ABLE TO ELECT OUR REPRESENTATIVES.

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Amendment 3 on The November Ballot

This is a reprint of an article published in the Miami Herald on October 15, written by Carl Hiaasen, about the special interests behind the push for Amendment 3 on the November 7 ballot:

One of the most audacious and cynical attacks on the rights of Florida voters will appear as "Amendment 3" on the ballot.

A coalition of powerful special interest groups wants to amend the state Constitution to make it harder to -- of all things -- amend the state Constitution.

To thwart grass-roots movements that threaten their chokehold on the Tallahassee power structure, the promoters of Amendment 3 want the rules changed so that all future amendments will require 60 percent of the popular vote, instead of the current simple majority.

Those conspiring in this power grab are hiding behind a lofty-sounding front called "Protect Our Constitution," which more truthfully ought to be named ``Protect Our Political Connections."

Among the industry lobby groups and big-name companies that don't trust Floridians to shape their own constitution: The National Association of Home Builders, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, The Florida Association of Realtors, U.S. Sugar, The St. Joe Co., Lykes Bros. Inc., the Florida Chamber of Commerce and Publix (where shopping might be a pleasure, but civic activism is apparently an annoyance).

Most corporate donors to the Amendment 3 campaign aren't publicizing their involvement because they don't want Floridians to get the right idea -- that it's a sucker punch disguised as reform.

The entire point of citizens' initiatives is to enable frustrated voters to press an issue that their elected representatives have chosen to ignore. In Florida, the only way to do that is to change the Constitution.

A watershed example was the amendment banning the use of large commercial gill nets, which had been wiping out vast schools of game fish while indiscriminately killing other species, including turtles.

Top state lawmakers, several of whom were taking campaign contributions from the commercial fishing industry, refused for years to do anything about the nets.

Conservation groups then joined with recreational anglers and circulated

hundreds of petitions to put the issue on a state ballot. The measure passed overwhelmingly in 1994.

Scrolling the list of Amendment 3's donors, you can understand why they're eager to shut the public out of lawmaking business.

Ten years ago, Big Sugar spent millions to defeat a proposed amendment that would have levied a penny-per-pound tax on sugar, the revenue to be used for cleaning up the Everglades.

Publix and the Florida Chamber of Commerce were both stung by a 2004 amendment raising the minimum wage to $6.15 an hour -- something their toadies in the Legislature had loyally declined to do.

The construction and real-estate industries are desperately nervous about the growing push for a "Hometown Democracy" amendment that would give voters a direct voice in major growth decisions in their communities.

If Amendment 3 passes, Florida would be the only state in the nation requiring 60 percent voter approval for a citizen initiative. That means a minority of 41 percent could defeat any proposed change in the Constitution.

Supporters of that idea say that too many frivolous amendments are getting on the ballot these days. Their favorite target of scorn is the recent ban on cages for pregnant pigs, although it's not clear how that has inconvenienced anybody but a few hog farmers.

More irksome to well-connected special interests are the substantive amendments spawned by citizen groups -- the ban on indoor smoking, the limit on class sizes, the hike in the minimum wage, mandatory term limits for officeholders and the cap on tax hikes on homestead property.

In every instance, the reason that public activists got involved is because those elected to speak for the public wouldn't step to the plate. Not all those amendments were perfectly crafted, but neither are many of the laws passed by the Legislature.

Corporate players in Tallahassee know they can't seduce the majority of voters as easily as they seduce politicians. There's a certain scornful confidence, however, that 41 percent of the people can be persuaded to vote against just about anything, if enough money is spent on a slick media blitz.

That's how the folks behind Amendment 3 plan to sell the idea that it's an overdue refinement of the Constitution, when in truth it's a gift to big businesses and their lobbyists.

Voters do make mistakes -- look at some of the lightweights and losers who get elected to office. Eventually the people get wise.

That's what happened to the 2000 amendment approving a high-speed bullet train. The concept looked nifty on paper, but in reality it was a recipe for a half-baked, budget-breaking boondoggle.

Thanks to vigorous campaigning by Gov. Jeb Bush, Floridians eventually saw the light, and the train amendment was repealed before the first inch of track was laid.

Opposition to Amendment 3 is bipartisan and diverse, from former Sen. Bob

Graham to ultraconservative religious leaders. They're united in the view that any law that makes it more difficult for citizens to be heard -- and easier for special interests to stack the political deck -- is bad.

Amendment 3's supporters are hoping most people won't bother to read the fine print on the ballot item, and will instead fall for the well-financed hype.

The magic number to prove them wrong is 50.1 percent, at least for now. If you honestly want to protect Florida's Constitution, vote "No" on Amendment 3.

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VCCDD Governance Issues

The previous issue of the Bulletin made the point that the developer has done a good job of building The Villages but has taken advantage of residents on governance issues with his hand-appointed VCCDD supervisors. Here is a restatement of those governance issues in which the POA feels the developer and/or the VCCDD supervisors failed to represent the best interests of residents.

Common Property - The developer has sold over $500 million of common property to the VCCDD and his hand-appointed supervisors without resident approval. We are forced to assume the debt repayment obligation; we have no say in the matter; we cannot vote for the supervisors who are employees, friends, or business associates of the developer. Without these sales, the 55% or so of our amenity fees north of hwy. 466 now going for debt service could go for building reserves. The POA believes this is a serious example of abuse of trust and poor governance by the developer and the VCCDD.

1. The Paradise Center - The VCCDD resisted the idea of renovation the Paradise Center until the deterioration was evident and the outcry from residents was loud. Why did the VCCDD wait so long? By the time it finally decided to proceed with the work, the cost was close to $5 million. And, the VCCDD supervisors neglected to provide reserves for the cost and had to secure a separate loan to pay for the work.

2. Nancy Lopez Pond Sinkhole - The developer tried to force a $168,000 repair bill on the residents of CDD4 to repair a sinkhole on his Nancy Lopez golf course. Although he eventually paid the bill, the developer cited a mistake by his and VCCDD attorneys who failed to complete the necessary paperwork which should have formalized the requirement for residents to pay.

3. Mulberry Lawn Maintenance - The developer and the VCCDD stuck CDD4 residents with the obligation to pay for lawn maintenance for the Mulberry commercial areas. The developer and the VCCDD finally agreed to proper future billing, but said "no" for reimbursing the District for past erroneous charges.

4. Sewer Water - The developer and the VCCDD tried to convert Lago Del Luna in Palo Alto into a holding pond for treated discharge water from The Villages Sewer treatment facility. The plan was to use this water to irrigate the developer's Tierra Del Sol golf course. And, they started this without telling residents or the local CDD supervisors about the plan. When residents found out, the developer and the VCCDD backed down.

5. The Activity Policy - The developer's VCCDD and SLCDD supervisors passed an "Activity Policy" that severely restricted our Constitutional Rights of Free Speech and Assembly. A key requirement was that any gathering of two or more residents to protest or demonstrate required an insurance policy of $1 million. The supervisors rescinded it unanimously when faced with the residents' objections. Had residents not spoken out, we would be saddled with the onerous policy.

6. VCCDD Supervisors - Now, 80% of the VCCDD supervisors, elected basically by the developer, do not even live in The Villages. We should have residents on the board who live here, understand our local problems, and have ties to our community. Since the formation of the VCCDD, the developer's record of appointment of independent Villagers to the board has been dismal.

7. Foreign Control of the VCCDD - The developer just sold his share in the Rolling Acres Shopping Center to a German company. Now, a foreign company controls 15.6% of the votes in the VCCDD. If and when the developer sells his other holdings on the downtown square, we could find the VCCDD controlled by companies with no knowledge of or appreciation for our community. Residents should be in control.

Bob Evans Restaurant Location - The developer wanted to locate the Bob Evans restaurant on the east side of highway 441/27 at the Wales Gate. This would have required a change in deeded restrictions approved by residents. The developer, with a heavy hand, threatened to force this change through court proceedings and suggested that residents comply with his change order ... or else.

8. Promotional Incentives - The developer promised a variety of incentives to residents on the historic side of The Villages when buying or building their homes in the 1980s. Then, he unilaterally reneged and cancelled the benefits given to residents via contracts. It took a three-year court fight to get the developer to fully reinstate the benefits originally promised. But, he did try to take advantage of residents, and only a court fight turned him around.

Summary - We could go on to talk about eliminated pool monitors, increased RV storage fees, charges for the "free" neighborhood watch service, the closing of popular restaurants, etc. But, you get the idea.

The POA is quite disappointed with the governance activities of the developer and the VCCDD. We believe they have not been fair with residents and have taken advantage of residents on many occasions.

The best solution for these problems is to have residents in charge of the decision-making process in the VCCDD though the Resident Authority Board.

We urge residents to vote for the second alternative, the "No" alternative, to "Make a Change" for the benefit of all Villagers. Remember, this is your home town now.

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Cheers and Jeers

Jeers - To the Recreation Department for having the Oct 14 Craft Show on for just one four-hour period. At the least it should be an all-day event; maybe even two days.

Jeers - To the Daily Sun for censoring the factual information about the recent crime spree in The Villages. The Reporter newspaper mentioned that 45 homes have been broken into, most of these south of highway 466, in the Village of Caroline. We think the Sun censors this information to protect the wholesome Villages image for the sales department but to the detriment of residents.

Cheers - To the ambassadors on the golf courses for their cheerful greetings and their cool water. Why is it, however, that they never have that jug of Margaritas?

Jeers - To the Daily Sun for printing a Letter to the Editor from Winton and Mary Jane Petersen regarding the upcoming Straw Vote. The crux of their scare-tactic letter was that if we switch to a Resident Authority Board we run the risk of having what they used to have where they last lived: ... broken down cars sitting on lawns ... 20 year old potholes ... huge garbage cans sitting curbside ... trash that could sit curbside for weeks before pickup ... drugs being sold next door ... rude policemen ... ego-driven government officials .... The Sun should be ashamed of condoning and publishing such hysterical and emotionally-charged nonsense. This is classic Yellow Journalism. ("Yellow Journalism" is a pejorative reference to journalism that features scandal-mongering, sensationalism, or other unethical or unprofessional practices by news media organizations or individual journalists as a way of advancing their viewpoint under the pretense of objective news reporting.)

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Letter About VCCDD Supervisors

I am glad to see your articles in the POA papers about the straw vote.

I have a hard time understanding how The Villages could get away with charging so much for the properties they want to sell or get rid of to us for such

huge profits. I guess it is to set them up with a lifetime income.

Is it listed anywhere about, how the people that are on the board get their jobs, like the banker etc. that have monthly meetings to run the VCCDD and do they get paid for this and if so how much? Do they really care about us and have our best interest at heart?

Keep up the good work and we will win.

Diane Garski

(Editor's note: The supervisors of the Center Districts are elected by the landowners in the Districts. The majority landowner is the developer. The boundaries of the Center Districts are carefully drawn so as to eliminate any residents; thus, the developer can in effect appoint his own supervisors forever. All the supervisors are friends, employees, or business associates of the developer. Chapter 190 allows payment to supervisors of up to $200 per meeting, or up to $5,000 per year per supervisor for each of five supervisors. The POA feels the Center District supervisors serve the best interests of the developer first, residents second.)

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Senator Baker Disclosure Reform

We spoke recently to Senator Baker about the POA's Disclosure Reform bill.

The Senator was interested and understood the issues. But, he was non-committal on the idea of sponsoring the bill in the next session of the Florida legislature. He wants to study it further and talk with other constituents before taking it any further.

The POA urges anyone interested in this Disclosure Reform bill to contact the senator at: 301 West Ward Street, Eustis, FL 32726-4024, phone 352-742-6490, or email to baker.carey.web@flsenate.gov.

You can contact Representative Hugh Gibson at: 916 Avenida Central, The Villages, FL 32159-5704, phone 352-750-1671. Mr. Gibson has already voiced his support.

If you favor passage of the Disclosure Reform bill, our elected representatives need to hear from you -- now. Any help you can give to the POA on this issue will be greatly appreciated. Thanks in advance.

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POA Elections

Annual election for POA officers and directors will be held at the general membership meeting on November 15.

Announced candidates are:

President - Joe Gorman
Vice President - Sue Michalson
Treasurer - Frank Carr
Secretary - Mary Paulsboe
Director - Jack Ryan

There are several director slots open. Additional nominations can still be made. Anyone wishing to consider running for an officer or director position should call Joe Gorman at 259-0999 for more information.

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Bulletins Left on Driveways

If you see the Bulletin delivered to a neighbor's house, which is unoccupied for the summer or vacations or a holiday period, it would be a big help to the POA if you would pick up the Bulletin and either save it for the person's return or discard it. Sometimes, also, the Bulletin may be in the gutter or the street and a likewise pick-up would also be greatly appreciated. Please call 259-0999 if you have any questions. Or, contact us directly at delivery@poa4us.org to stop delivery. If you are a snowbird, let us know at the email address and we can suspend delivery while you are away.

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Taxation Without Representation

One of the frequent comments of the POA is that Villagers are subject to "Taxation Without Representation."

What does this really mean?

First of all, our emphasis is on the "Without Representation" part of this phrase.

Our governments in the Center Districts have supervisors appointed by the developer and these supervisors have little or no allegiance to residents. There is no incentive to be responsive to the needs and interests of residents. The incentive for these friends, employees, and business associates of the developer is to keep the developer happy. Or else, they may lose the developer's favor and that would not be a good career move.

So, the "Without Representation" comments refers to the fact that residents have no ability to elect or recall the supervisors who make all the big money decisions for residents, without their approval.

The most serious example of the disconnect of these supervisors is their record of buying common property from the developer for inflated prices and requiring residents to repay almost $500 million of bonds issued to pay for the purchases. Residents cannot vote to assume this debt repayment obligation and have no say in the matter.

Second, the "Taxation" part of the phrase refers to the fact that the supervisors of the Center Districts collect our monthly amenity fees and spend those revenues just like any governmental authority would do for the residents within their area of authority. Technically, the monthly amenity fee is not "Taxation" - it is just a contractual service fee - but it sure smells like Taxation.

What's the solution, you might ask?

The POA feels the current proposal to allow formation of the Resident Authority Board to allow residents to make decisions on the use of the monthly amenity fee is a huge step in the right direction.

Actually, if the RAB straw vote proposal passes on November 7, the phrase "Taxation Without Representation" will no longer apply for the "Without Representation" part as soon as the RAB becomes active.

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The POA Forum

The POA now has a Forum on its website, http://www.poa4us.org.

A Forum is a cyberspace meeting place where residents can leave comments on any topic they wish to comment on.

If you want to comment on the recreation trail issue, you can on the POA Forum.

If you want to comment on the Straw Vote, you can on the POA Forum.

If you want to comment on the Villages Hospital, you can on the POA Forum.

If you want to start a new topic, you can on the POA Forum.

Just go to the POA website, click on the POA Forum, and follow the directions. Just select a topic, review the previous comments, and then, if you want to, leave your own comments. Start a new topic if you want.

If this Forum idea is popular, we will continue it for the indefinite future. So, if you have something on your mind that you want to talk about, the POA Forum is the place for you. Or, if you just want to see what your neighbors are saying, the POA Forum is still the place for you.

Give it a try at http://www.poa4us.org.

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Educational Superintendent

By Nancy Bell, Villages resident

Electing superintendents of schools occurs only in the South, and in these three states: Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. By September 2000, only 154 out of 15,000 superintendents nationwide were elected -- 43, or nearly one third, were in the state of Florida.

There are no credential requirements for a superintendent in the state of Florida. It is the only state in sixteen southern regional states which has no requirements. One has to be only 18 years old, a registered voter and a six month resident in the county. All but four states require a master's degree. Half of the states require teaching experience, and all but seven require administrative experience.

Virtually anyone can file to run in an election for superintendent in any of the 43 districts with elected superintendents. And a good politician can win, whether

he or she knows anything or nothing about managing a school district.

Do you see any connection with the fact that Florida ranks 39th in overall educational value and 50th in graduation rate? Or is it merely a coincidence?

It is sad that public education does not get the respect that it deserves. Somehow people think that it is only education and deals only with children, so it can't be very important!

Public education is the foundation of our future. We owe it to our children to ensure that their education is being guided by a professional educator.

Let's talk about the Lake Count School District, since this is an issue before the voters in November. It is the largest employer in the county with about 5,000 employees and a budget of about $500 million. The County Government and Lake Sumter Community College are two other employers with many employees. Would we dream of having a county manager or a college president with no requirements? I think not.

I have lived in Lake County for almost 11 years. In that time we have had four superintendents. In the district I lived in, in another state, in 34 years we had four hired superintendents who were professional educators with advanced degrees and educational administrative experience. This lent stability and continuity to a system and its teachers and other employees, to parents, and to children, and, indeed to the community. The role of the board was to make policy, and the role of the superintendent was to carry out those policies and the wishes of the board. All parties knew their roles.

It is the system in Lake County that is broken, and it needs to be fixed. What we have are two entities, both elected -- the board members and the superintendent. Both are beholden to the electorate. Who's the boss? Does the superintendent have to obey the direction of the board? It is the system that lends itself to a collision course. The schools suffer. The principals, the other administrators, the teachers, the support staff, the students, the parents, the community all are affected.

I have witnessed a few examples of chaos as I have attended almost all the school board meetings for 1 and ½ years now. The elected superintendent has shown that she does not have professional standards by the following actions:

- speaking in public against a school board policy;
- trying to hire a campaign contributor without a degree as assistant superintendent at $86,000, when the salary for a beginning teacher with a bachelor's degree was at that time $32,200;
- wasting $25,000 on a study without the approval or even the knowledge of the board;
- not allowing the board or the board attorney to speak to her administrative team on issues of concern;
- causing delays in much-needed construction projects for schools;
- refusing to place items on the meeting agenda at the request of a board member;

- Those examples are just some of the chaos I have witnessed, and the school board can do nothing about the infractions of the superintendent, because the superintendent is an elected official, just as the board members are. One elected official or an elected board cannot legally remove another elected official from office.

Yes, I believe the system is broken. The cast of characters can change every two to four years as elections occur, but we are still going to have the same problems when we have an elected, unqualified superintendent.

I join the following growing list of organizations which support the appointive or hired superintendent model: Citizens for Quality Education, South Lake Chamber of Commerce, VOICE, Lake County School Board, Florida League of Women Voters and South Lake Federated Women

If you care about the schools in Lake County, please vote to change the system.

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