

# Don't believe all you read, or hear, as fact

Life can be more than a little confusing! We Americans, particularly in this information age, have access to more information from more sources than ever before. With all of that information

available, one has to be extremely careful about selecting sources of information before filing it away as factual.

Unfortunately, many news organs, radio, television, newspapers and, now with the ease of the Internet, e-mail newsletters share opinions that are not clearly identified. What is really a statement of opinion comes across to the casual reader as a statement of fact.

The last edition of a newsletter generated by an organization here in The Villages is loaded with those kinds of items. In one article, the writer lists the occupations of the members of the Village Center District board of supervisors. Unfortunately, most of them are wrong.

The facts are as follows: George McCabe is chairman of the board and employed as director of Food Services in The Villages. Ron Hess, a home builder in The Villages, is vice chairman. Dodd McDowell is a home builder and has nothing to do with The Villages

Trash Busters. Mike Killingsworth is president of Citizens First Bank, and John Wise is not a home builder but the Chief Financial Officer of The Villages. All of this is public information and each of these board members is required to file an annual financial disclosure statement with the supervisor of elections in the county in which he resides.

In the same article, the writer states that because these board members have an employment relationship with The Villages of Lake/Sumter, Inc., there exists a conflict of interest. Unfortunately, that is an unidentified opinion of the writer, who has chosen to ignore specific language in Chapter 190.007 (1), Florida Statutes, that states: *"It shall not be a conflict of interest (emphasis added) under chapter 112 for a board member or the district manager or another employee of the district to be a stockholder, officer or employee of the landowners."* I don't mean to be argumentative, but I would encourage you to look up the law and check out the facts before you accept the opinion of any person.

The same writer also continually claims that Villages residents are responsible for the repayment of the bonds that are issued by the Village Center District for the acquisition of amenities. Apparently, this writer does not understand the difference between taxes, assessments and contractual fees.

The monthly amenity fee is a con-

tractual fee, which you agree to pay when you *choose* to purchase property in The Villages. It is a fee paid for an array of available services – those being the right to use and enjoy all the services and facilities provided under the recreation amenity function of the Village Center District. Given the fact that this is a contractual fee for services and facilities, you have no additional obligation other than to pay the contracted fee. You have *no* obligation for the payment of bonds issued by the District.

Compare it to the situation in which you *choose* to go to Walt Disney World. You pay a fee (a contractual fee if you read the back of a ticket) that gives you the right to enter, use and enjoy whatever is available in the particular park you choose to go to for a specific period of time. The fact that you pay that fee does not mean that you have any obligation to pay for any obligations incurred by WDW, Inc. Nor does it give you the right to participate in any election of WDW board members or have any say in what and how the WDW board of directors decides to operate their facilities.

With the Village Center District board, you do get the right to review all the records, including financial records of the District, to attend meetings of the board and to express your opinions at the monthly meetings. You gain those rights by virtue of the fact that the District is a unit of special purpose local

government. Since it is a governmental unit in Florida, you get rights that you would not have if the amenities continued to be held by a private corporate entity.

As a governmental unit, we have the right to charge assessments and/or taxes, but the Center District charges neither. Those would run with the property and would be the obligation of the property owner. The Center District does, however, charge and collect a variety of contractual fees for a variety of services provided. These are authorized in Chapter 190.011 (10), Florida Statutes. These accumulated revenues are used to pay all the authorized expenses, including debt services of the District.

I realize that now you have two pieces of information to deal with. In accordance with my first caution to you, check out the facts. I would suggest that you don't take my word for what I've said, check out Chapter 190 from your local library, or on the Internet, and read the law for yourself.

We discuss these issues and many more at CDD School, which is held 10 a.m. every Thursday through the summer at the District offices, 3231 Wedgwood Lane, just behind the new 76 gas station. If you've got questions, or you're confused by all that you hear, attend a session. If you can't make it, meet me every week here – right here – at Pete's Place.

## Pete's Place



Pete Wahl