

Community Watch provides 24/7 support to residents

By MISTY MORNINGSTAR

As 2014 draws to a close, and an exciting brand new year approaches, your Community Watch members have treasured the well wishes and appreciation extended to us. We have received phone calls, letters and every once in a while, a high-five or two.

As with our own family and friends, we care about your safety and well-being. Community Watch is a division of The Villages Public Safety Department, operating 24/7 to make Florida's Friendliest Hometown also the safest.

Have you ever wondered just what it is that we do in those 24 hours, seven days a week? We are so much more than "drivers." Community Watch is made up of multiple components to provide a global, 360-degree safety support service to the residents and visitors of The Villages. We provide patrol, gate operations, dispatching and special programs.

Patrol

Sure, each patrol driver spends about eight hours a day roving through neighborhoods, but what are they doing? Well, believe it or not, they are multitasking.

Our main duty is to observe and report. If we notice something out of the ordinary or perhaps suspicious, our job is to report issues to the proper authorities.

It is also our responsibility to remain as safe as possible while on watch. If we observe any suspicious activity or dangerous situations, they are reported immediately to 911.

Patrols support local responders during emergency events like traffic accidents and house fires. We are there to provide traffic

direction, obtain needed information, or to simply sit with a person to ensure they are safe until a friend arrives.

Besides emergency incidents, much of what we handle are non-emergency types of situations.

You may notice a truck near an unmanned gate or parked in an "odd" location. Our patrols are tasked with assisting visitors with operating gates during special events such as voting and public appearances. We want to ensure their visit to The Villages is a welcoming experience.

From picking up roadway debris to picking up a BSD (bad squirrel decision), we help keep our roads clear so you have a safe ride home.

When you're home, sound asleep, we still are working hard to deter would-be criminals by continuous patrolling and conducting door checks at commercial buildings.

Day and night, we are there, watching over our community.

Gate operations

Gate attendants are another component of our overall safety here in The Villages. They are more than just that friendly face greeting you as you pass through the dueling lanes.

The gate attendants are responsible for aiding traffic flow through the gates, preventing you and the lane next to you from merging at an inopportune time. They also protect the golf carts crossing four hazardous lanes of traffic behind the gates.

Although we can control gates going up, the gates close automatically. So, be sure to wait for us to tell you it's safe to proceed before coming off that starting line.

Gate attendants help the flow of traffic by providing visitors

and workers with much-needed directions. Leaving semi-trailers to navigate unknown territories by themselves is a traffic issue waiting to happen. Besides, we want to make sure that the new washing machine you wanted for Christmas doesn't get lost!

So, as you see our smile and friendly wave, give us a big wave back and know that we are here to help you get home safely.

Dispatch

Communications is essential to all public safety operations. Here in dispatch, we provide you with a contact 24 hours a day, seven days a week for a variety of needs.

Our dispatchers and call-takers perform unbelievable feats of multi-tasking. They field all kinds of calls, from emergency assistance to taking after-hours messages for other departments so that you are never without a live person to help you with your need.

Although we are for non-emergency assistance, there are times when we may need to contact law enforcement, the fire department or EMS because they are equipped to provide you with the best solution to your situation.

Our dispatchers take caller information, call 911 and dispatch Community Watch patrol units simultaneously to get help there as quickly as possible.

We work in tandem with patrol to ensure their safety, as well as ensuring a quick response to your needs.

We are happy to answer your call any time, day or night. We may not be the department you wish to speak with, but we will take your message and pass it on during regular business hours. So thank you for calling!

Our community is unique. With seasonal residents and single-living situations, Community

Special programs

Watch offers programs to help mitigate our community's special risks.

One such program is Adult Watch. Residents who would like to receive daily well-being checks may sign up with Community Watch. Dispatch will contact you each day to make sure you are

safe.

If you don't answer, dispatch will notify authorities and send patrol to your house. The cavalry is coming, so don't forget to tell us you're going to be safe and sound in Hawaii on vacation.

Speaking of vacations, our House Watch program keeps

an extra-special watch on your home while away. Just call us or stop by for more information about these and other safe-community programs.

For information concerning Community Watch and our services, feel free to contact us at any time. You can reach our

administrative office at 750-8201 or our 24-hour dispatch at 753-0550. We would love to hear from you!

Misty Morningstar is the captain of administrative operations for The Villages Public Safety and Community Watch.