

Inaccurate reports on websites, blogs contribute to spread of wrong information

The beginning of this summer will mark my 10-year anniversary of employment with the Village Center Community Development District. For those of you who have lived here for 10 or more years, you can appreciate how I am in awe of the changes we have experienced over that time.

As they did when I arrived, the District supervisors and District staff have continued their 110-percent commitment to this community. At 10 years, I still am a newbie compared to many of you. It is truly a testament to the Developer's vision and the establishment of a private and public mechanism to guarantee The Villages' strong future and sustainability.

It is exciting to have completed the Districts' audits with a clean report and analysis that reflects a strong financial position for all the Districts regardless of how long they have been in existence.

In addition to the financial strength, your elected officials and staff are successfully maintaining current infrastructure and are addressing long-range needs through capital improvement plans.

However, the best part of this job has been the opportunity to meet, develop friendships and work with so many wonderful residents and employees.

It truly has been a partnership and I credit any of my success to so many of you who have counseled, supported, explored opportunities and debated issues with me to find the best plans and solutions. Your cooperation and shared vision for this community is priceless. You are the reason this job is the best anyone could have.



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With the growth, however, comes one aspect of the community that has frustrated me both personally and professionally and it appears to be on the rise – RUMORS and MISINFORMATION!

I would like to thank all the residents who have searched out District-related information and have worked, along with District elected officials and staff, to share the correct information.

It is critical that, for the sustainability of our community, we do our best to inform, educate and communicate. If you follow this column, on a regular basis we discuss all the opportunities to learn about the Districts: the Recreation News and the District column, the website at districtgov.org, Resident Academy, CDD Orientation, e-notifications, Welcome Wednesday, District speakers for any group that contacts us, one-stop Customer Service at 753-4508, incident reporting on the website and the availability of District management to meet and address your questions.

What is most frustrating to me, however, is the belief by so many folks that if you read it in print, it must be true.

Those of you who know my background are aware my education roots are in journalism. I believe strongly in the importance of good journalism. Accurate reporting and facts are critical to keeping us moving forward and not getting

mired in discussions based on misinformation.

Yes, we all can disagree on an issue, but to argue over an issue when the basic facts are not correct is a waste of time, resources and energy.

While I understand how this can occur on a national level because of the challenge of "distance" to the source of accurate information and sheer volume of news and commentary, it is difficult for me to accept the same when it pertains to The Villages and your local government.

Internet sources of "news" and blogs and publications that choose to move forward their agenda serve no one if the facts are wrong, information is taken out of context or if the reporting chooses to take a position based on half-truths.

A recent "news" report about the El Santiago restaurant purchase for a recreation center stated, "In 2013, the Amenity Authority Committee spent \$350,000 to buy the restaurant building only to discover it in poor condition." This is a perfect example of inaccurate reporting.

The statement, of course, elicits a lot of responses to the article as readers weighed in on the issue. The fact is – the building was NOT in poor condition. The building very well could have been renovated into a recreation center and that was the direction the AAC was moving toward.

However, because of the AAC members' interest in providing a larger facility to provide more opportunities for resident use, the District's construction supervisor provided an analysis (yes, facts) to provide the cost differential

between renovation/expansion and a demolition and rebuild.

After a thorough review, the AAC determined a larger facility, without retrofitting and expanding the current building, would be a better alternative operationally and

financially: NOT because the building was in poor condition.

This is just one of many misstatements and misinformation that have been disseminated through a number of outlets. It starts with one statement and then blossoms into resident after resident weighing in on an issue that was not factual in the first place.

Doesn't this remind you

of the whisper game you played as a child? Just imagine not even using an accurate statement for the first whisper! By the time you made it around the room, the final whisper would not even be recognizable!

What can you do to help get accurate information disseminated? Let the publication know when something is

inaccurate. Call or email the District for facts. Read the District minutes. Attend board meetings. Question someone when they tell you something that just does not sound right.

My commitment to you is that I and all District management will work hard to guarantee that the facts and all necessary information are provided to help our elected

officials make the best possible decisions, and that you are kept informed to the best of our ability.

Thank you for a remarkable 10 years in The Villages and until next time, enjoy yourself, stay in touch, ask questions and get the facts.

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