

District vigilant about educating and informing residents about issues

Isn't it amazing that the more things change, the more they stay the same? This certainly is true when reading historical accounts and quotes from so many wise men who came before us in this country. The founders of this country may not have gotten everything right, but they sure did a heck of a good job.

Of course, the many men and women who have fought for the freedoms first envisioned by farmers, lawyers, blacksmiths, tradesmen and so many more are the ones we truly owe a debt of appreciation to for preserving this great place we call America!

I know this is the week after the Fourth of July, but it is one of my favorite holidays of the year and one whose message should be remembered and celebrated throughout the year.

Unlike other countries that celebrate their national events with a show of power (tanks, guns and military force), our country chooses to celebrate with fun activities, food and getting together with family.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people ... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

Those of you who have read my column, heard me speak or seen my efforts in the District can attest to the fact that I adhere to his belief. The District provides so many avenues of information that not being informed is one's own choice. However, it is critical for sustainability that residents are informed, accurately, regarding what is transpiring in your government. While we may not always agree on an outcome, if we begin our discussions with everyone knowing the correct facts, we can usually arrive at a better solution than spending



JANET
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time arguing.

An example of how well this process works in District government took place two weeks ago. Kudos to the residents who came out to the public meeting regarding the possibility of a shaded pool facility! After some residents expressed an interest in an indoor or shaded pool area, the Amenity Authority Committee asked staff to research and analyze the possibilities. In response to the AAC direction, staff provided an overview, options and a recommendation. After the information was presented, the AAC directed staff to hold a public meeting for all residents, and stakeholders at the pool being considered, to gain input regarding the option of shading La Hacienda Sports Pool.

While the final report will not be provided to the AAC until its August meeting, the process is working. Staff outlined the ideas and facts pertaining to a shaded pool and then received comments and input. As a result, the AAC will have resident input and additional information upon which to base any decision.

This is not the first time this process has been used in the community. Paradise Park, Tierra De Sol and El Santiago recreation centers, non-resident ID policy and other projects have been successful because of your great resident input, ideas and suggestions.

While it may seem like it takes a long time to accomplish something, it is critical it is done right: with professional guidance,

resident input and good policy established by the various boards of supervisors and committees.

Unfortunately, during some of these projects, the Internet and social media provide misinformation and then residents weigh in on the topic with more misinformation, until the facts are so distorted it is hard to determine the original topic that was being addressed.

So, before you arrive at an opinion based on these "conversations," just get in touch with us first to get the history and facts. We have more and more residents doing so and I think Thomas Jefferson would be happy about all the information and education being provided!

Speaking of education, did you know it is against the law to park on the wrong side of the street? There has been an increase in the number of drivers who see a spot in one of the downtown squares, cross the traffic lane and park opposite of the movement of traffic. This is a dangerous maneuver and one that can lead to your getting a traffic ticket. So, please stay on your side of the road.

Also, did you know all of the districts' board meetings are open to the public? I have had a couple of residents recently ask if they were "allowed" to come to one of the District meetings. Please know that all business conducted by your elected officials, or any meeting they have, is open to the public.

As a government entity in the State of Florida, we adhere to the Sunshine Law. While I will not get into the details of the law here, please know that you are welcome to all meetings and we hope to see you there.

Speaking of the State of

Florida, there is a new law that passed this year pertaining to what we, as a government entity, must have posted on our website. What is interesting is that other than a few minor tweaks, we already had been adhering to what now is required to be on

the Internet by Oct. 1, 2015.

Have you visited the website lately? There are so many avenues you can take to get the information you want or never knew you needed! Just check it out at districtgov.org.

Finally, I did want to speak to the issue pertaining to the IRS audit that began more than seven and a half years ago. We have tried very hard to keep residents

informed along the way.

While at no time were your amenities in jeopardy, or were you ever going to pay a higher amenity fee as a result of the audit or possible outcome, residents were quite concerned.

We provided updates in this column, posted information on the website and answered hundreds and hundreds of questions at public meetings, all in an attempt

to explain what was transpiring.

As those of you have read The Villages Daily Sun and other publications know, we have taken a substantial move forward in hopefully resolving this expensive and time-consuming effort.

While there are still a number of issues to resolve and address, it is clear from this most recent communication from IRS that our legal position and efforts

pertaining to the District were correct. Thomas Jefferson was right that it is important to “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people . . . They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.” In this case, however, it was to educate and inform the IRS! So, until next time, here at Our Place, keep checking the facts and continue to be informed and educated!