

# Become involved in this community you have chosen to call home

With only 55 days to go, I think we all are ready to say “Welcome, Autumn!” For those of you who were new to the Florida “summer experience,” you can dream about putting away your swimsuits and umbrellas and start thinking about cooler weather along with craft fairs and festivals.

This is the time of year for thunderstorms (written as I look out my window to black skies and torrential downpour) – followed by sunshine, followed by rain, more thunderstorms, a few mouth-opening, awe-inspiring bolts of lightning and thundering booms, followed by sunshine – all within 20 minutes, repeated as needed (or not) and possibly occurring only on your side of the street.

Sprinkle in an extra-special feature of high-heat temperatures and, if you are an ex-Northerner like me, you start asking yourself, “What was so bad about snow anyway?”

However, what makes up for Mother Nature’s temperamental spirit is her closing signature – typically a beautiful rainbow, sometimes two.

Whether you subscribe to biblical meanings or scientific causation, or just appreciate the beauty of nature, I think we can agree that a rainbow always brings a smile to our faces and adds a little joy to our day. And although each color in a rainbow stands separately, each is also united into a most beautiful creation.

We are a rainbow. (No, I am not having a flashback to the ‘70s.) Seriously, this community is a rainbow. Though you may come from Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, California, Oregon, England, Ireland or somewhere else in the world, we all have brought our individuality



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and thrown it into our own little 40-square-mile melting pot of a rainbow.

While we may stand individually in our personal opinions on some community issues, we – by virtue of the decision we made to move here – have made a commitment to work together to keep this community vibrant and beautiful. Like the colors in a rainbow, we each stand separately but also are united into a most beautiful creation.

I had the opportunity some time ago to speak with Miss Betty J. and her daughter Miss Katherine. Miss Betty became a resident when Harold Schwartz was still alive and had the pleasure of knowing him personally.

She recalled Mr. Schwartz walking by her home and stopping to chat enthusiastically about his vision of “a community that was safe for all ages, like one big family,” and enjoying the many block parties they had (“block” because they put tables up to block the street, not because it was the entire block).

She has witnessed the growth of this community from inception – from cow fields that have morphed into recreation centers, or Lake Sumter Landing, or even Brownwood.

This community has continued to grow and thrive from the seed of Mr. Schwartz’s initial vision. It has done so because of the combined efforts of you, the Developer, the District

government, the retailers, the educators, the resident lifestyle groups and many others – all separate colors but united into a most beautiful creation.

Tom Hanks said, “Truth is, I’ll never know all there is to know about you, just as you will never know all there is to know about me. Humans are by nature too complicated to be understood fully. So, we can choose either to approach our fellow human beings with suspicion or to approach them with an open mind, a dash of optimism and a great deal of candor.”

So how do we go about approaching each other in a positive way – with an open mind, a dash of optimism and a great deal of candor? Through education and collaborative efforts.

Reading various publications and attending board and committee meetings, it is not unusual to hear residents holding various organizations responsible for issues that are not under the control of that organization, or make statements based on what the resident believed was fact, without having checked the facts.

It is incumbent upon each of us to fully understand the community in which we chose to live. To understand our deed restrictions. To understand what the District government is and what it is responsible for. Fully understanding the big picture is what allows us to know, with certainty, what our parameters of change are.

I am reminded almost daily of one of life’s simpler tenets – that not everything is what it appears to be. You may have the most negative idea or opinion on something that you have heard, but once you have heard all the

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facts, you may realize it wasn't what you thought it was at all, and any upset or negative emotion you experienced was for naught.

The District provides many resources to help educate, openly explain and heartily encourage your participation in the care and

growing of our District governments. Yet it is always surprising to me how little they are utilized.

Have you attended a CDD Orientation? Or a District-sponsored Resident Academy? A hometown social? Have you read through your deed restrictions completely? "Surfed" the District website, [districtgov.org](http://districtgov.org)? (That in and of itself could take you a few days!) Attended a board meeting for the district where you reside?

Read the published minutes for the meetings referred to in the media to confirm fact from misinterpretation?

We need you to do that. And, while the billboards and signs indicate we are living in "Florida's Friendliest Hometown," in reading comments in the media, I think that some have forgotten what that means in practice.

We need you to participate, to understand what decisions are

made by which group, understand the processes to follow to have your concern or ideas heard, and to believe that you have the ability to make a positive impact.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships – the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace."

We need you to add your unique "color" of individuality to help ensure the perpetuity of this most beautiful creation called The Villages.

Thank you for your time today ... we're looking forward to seeing you not only at Our Place again, but also at many of our other meetings too!

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