

District operates with transparent changes to better itself for residents

This is the time of year that is full of hopes and dreams as so many of my friends' children and grandchildren are heading off to college. What an exciting time.

And if you are like me, thinking about their new experiences brings back memories of a time when we looked at the world with a belief that we could achieve just about everything!

Although my father did not have a college education, between his hard work, student loans and our working through college, my two brothers and I achieved his, and our, dream of diplomas from the universities we each chose.

While my dad assured us we could succeed in life with hard work, his most important and repeated lesson to us is one I carry today: Respect others, do the right thing and keep a positive attitude.

One of the reasons I took the job with the Village Community Development Districts is that it provided an opportunity to be part of something unique in an environment of respect, and doing the right thing with a positive attitude. This place is amazing and over the last 10 years it has not disappointed.

Mr. Harold Schwartz's vision, the Morse family's remarkable implementation and the cooperative approach among The Villages of Lake-Sumter, the District governments and positive proactive groups like The Villages Homeowners Association and so many Resident Lifestyle Volunteers have allowed this community to become second to none.

What amazes me, however, is that there are residents in the community who find it their mission to find the negative, expound on every stumble, negatively impact the resident lifestyle and



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take action for the sake of achieving a win at the expense of others: instead of communicating and working together toward improvements.

A perfect example of this is the recent class action suit, initiated by three residents, against the Sumter Landing Community Development District. Although the case was dismissed with prejudice and the plaintiffs were ordered to pay the SLCDD a portion of the attorney fees, the legal action ultimately cost the residents \$324,455 in amenity fees, in addition to the extensive staff time working with the attorneys.

The allegations by the three residents (which were dismissed with prejudice) included a number of items including civil theft and criminal behavior. However, over the last couple of weeks since the court's order of dismissal, a few residents have commented to me and others that the real purpose behind the suit was to establish an Amenity Authority Committee south of CR466.

This explanation is especially interesting and confusing to me considering the Sumter Landing Community Development District owns only 6,604 amenity fees as compared to 22,707 owned by the Village Center Community Development District and 25,918 owned by The Villages of Lake-Sumter (as of July).

It is hard for me to understand how a lawsuit claiming, among other things, misappropriation

of amenity fees and asking for \$396,672,486 plus their attorney's fees was to develop an Amenity Authority Committee with all the related time and expenses to manage 6,604 amenity fees.

For what purpose? Better financial accountability? All the financial records are on the website and the SLCDD currently has \$9 million in reserve, another \$2.5 million budgeted to be added this coming year to an estimated \$6.6 million in working capital. That is more than \$18 million. The district is financially sound.

And there are no resident concerns, problems or issues that have come before the Sumter Landing District Board or are pending to be addressed.

I have also heard that the residents and the group urging an Amenity Authority Committee for all residents south of CR466 are doing so because Mr. H.G. Morse, in a 2007 publication, indicated he supported an Amenity Authority Committee and that resident control was his preferred direction.

However, what those individuals who continue to restate this 2007 publication fail to recognize (or choose not to) is that it was eight years ago. While I do not know what The Villages of Lake-Sumter (better known as "the Developer") is planning, the article and comments by Mr. Morse were before the Internal Revenue Service changed the business model for the sale of amenity fees to the Sumter Landing Community Development District and before eight years transpired.

As many of you are retired business owners or employees of corporations, I do not have to remind you that those businesses

that did not change, adjust to new demands to meet challenges with innovation, or took advantage of opportunities, are those businesses no longer in existence.

That is not the case in The Villages. In my 10 years, I have seen The Villages of Lake-Sumter

improve each time it endeavored on a new project: learning from mistakes and always changing to do it even better the next time in all aspects of its operation. Your District government strives to do the same.

The Villages of Lake-Sumter has been an inspiration to me and our District staff. Their core values of hard work, hospitality, creativity and stewardship are the Districts' core values.. Our

employees and elected officials have been dedicated to sustaining all of the reasons you moved to The Villages. And I believe the current public-private partnership is working extremely well.

Yes, there may be weeds somewhere, high grass in places, water quality problems in some ponds, some debris in some tunnels and other problems. However, in a community of 110,000 residents, spanning nearly 40 square miles,

the number of problems is low.

That is not to say each issue is still not important. We want to know if there is a problem or concern. We will address it as quickly and efficiently as we are able. Our dedicated staff is passionate about this. As I stated, we have a responsibility to sustain this great community. And as long as I am district manager, I and my staff will do it my dad's way: with respect to all while

doing the right thing with a positive attitude.

And hopefully, my dad's way can be a lesson for all!

See you here, next time, at Our Place.

For information regarding the class action suit referred to in this column, call the District office at 751-3939 and we will provide a summary to you.

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