

Community Watch will provide the same services through the holidays

Happy holidays to everyone from your friendly neighborhood Community Watch employees. We at Community Watch wish you a happy and safe holiday season.

The holiday season can be a very joyous time of year. Celebrating the holidays with family and friends is always a special time in my life and I'm sure in your life as well. I can't think of a better period of time than the holiday season, enjoying family and friends, great food, college football bowl season (Go Michigan State!) and, of course, getting a present or two under the tree.

Since this is my first Christmas in Florida and my house does not have a chimney, I am wondering how Santa will deliver my presents!

Community Watch will be working around the clock during the holiday season to provide the same services as we do throughout the year with regard to serving our residents and their guests. We will be at full staffing levels in all four phases of our operation: patrol drivers, gate attendants, dispatchers and gate operations personnel.

As we approach the holiday season, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest a few things that might make your holiday season a little more safe and enjoyable.

First of all, if you are going to be away for the holidays, please consider using the House Check program that we have available to you. If you are going to be away from your home in The Villages for more than seven days, you can register with us at our office at 1135 Bonita Boulevard. Our office hours are Monday through



**BILL
ELLIOTT**
COLUMNIST

Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For a fee of only \$5 per week, we will send out a patrol driver three times per week to check your home. The patrol driver will actually walk the perimeter of your home to look for anything that seems out of place or suspicious. If there is any concern, our patrol driver will request local law enforcement to respond to your home. The Community Watch patrol driver will not enter your home.

When law enforcement arrives, they will be advised if a key was left with a neighbor or someone who can respond to your home. This information is contained on the registration form that you would have filled out with Community Watch.

Local law enforcement then will check the home to determine if there is a problem and you will be contacted with the final status.

The House Check program is something that is available year-round but it seems to be very popular during the holiday season and, of course, the summer season. If you don't feel that the House Check program is something you are interested in, I would suggest that you ask one of your neighbors to keep an eye on your home while you are away.

There are a few other helpful tips you could use while you are away:

- Use timers for your indoor lights. Oftentimes giving the

impression that someone is home is enough to discourage someone from targeting your home.

- Cancel paper deliveries or have your neighbor pick up your papers from the driveway. Again, a driveway clear of newspapers gives the impression that someone is home.

- Track the delivery of packages being delivered to your home. Many of the delivery companies have a practice of leaving a package at your door if no one is at home. By tracking the delivery's scheduled time, you either can make arrangements to be at home or ask a neighbor to be on the lookout for the package.

If you plan to stay in The Villages area for the holidays, perhaps you will be having family or friends visiting. Many visitors, especially first-time visitors, can be a bit intimidated by the size of The Villages and the number of neighborhoods.

The attendants at the gates are able to assist visitors who need help finding an address. Community Watch uses a system called "Word Maps," which essentially is written directions from that gatehouse to the street where the requested residence is located.

In addition to having Word Maps to the neighborhoods behind the gatehouse, many of the staffed gates have Word Maps for the neighborhoods accessed through a neighboring unstaffed gate.

Finally, if a visitor arrives at the wrong gatehouse needed to locate the requested address, the gate attendant will direct the visitor to the proper gatehouse where they can obtain a Word Map.

We currently have 19 staffed gates, and 11 are staffed 24 hours. Listed below is the gate location by county and the current hours of operation:

Lake County

Boone – 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.
El Cortez – 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.
Shay – 24 hours

Marion County

Briar Meadow – 24 hours
Chatham – 24 hours

Sumter County

Alhambra – 24 hours
Bonnybrook – 24 hours
Caroline – 6 a.m. to noon
Duval – 6 a.m. to noon
El Santiago – 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.
Glenbrook – 24 hours
Hadley – 6 a.m. to noon
Hillsborough – 24 hours

Morse North – 24 hours
Morse South – 24 hours
Pinellas – 24 hours
Sanibel – 24 hours
Santo Domingo – 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.
Sunset Pointe – 6 a.m. to noon

We hope you have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

If you need any assistance from your Community Watch Department, call us at 753-0550 any time – 24/7. We hope to see you next week, here, at Our Place.

Bill Elliott is the division chief for Community Watch. He can be reached at 750-8201.