

Utility billing department soon will be able to offer e-bills to customers

By SARAH KOSER

DISTRICT FINANCE DEPARTMENT

It is always exciting to welcome in a new year, full of hope for new and exciting experiences and attempting to make lifestyle changes. Since I never have been able to keep even one New Year's resolution past the first week, I have given up on making them, at least formally.

What I hope and wish for everyone in 2016 is a year filled with peace, harmony and most of all, good health. We all tend to burn the candle at both ends and sometimes even in the middle, especially with all of the opportunities here in The Villages. But sometimes we just need to slow down a bit and take life at an easier pace.

That easier pace will have to take a back seat right now for our Finance Department staff. We are in full swing, finishing up the last fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30. We have closed all of the books and the auditors are here making their lists and checking them twice. They will be finding out if we were naughty or nice! The answer will be nice, I'm sure.

The result of all of this work is the annual financial statements. This report for each district demonstrates the results of operations, how much money was received and how and where it was spent. A great deal of work goes into each report and we are always pleased when the process is complete and the finished product is made public.

That happens during the February board meetings. A representative from the external audit firm attends the meetings to present the audited financial statements to the

Board of Supervisors for each district. Once that happens, the documents are made public and are posted on the District website at districtgov.org.

While all of this work is happening on the Accounting side of the Finance Department, the Utility Billing and Customer Service side is working toward implementing new software. During its November meeting, the Village Center Community Development District Board approved the purchase of new software for the Utility Billing and Customer Service area; however, the software will benefit residents who receive services from all four utilities in The Villages.

This new software will enhance the process by giving residents the option to receive an e-bill instead of a paper bill. This is one of the most requested services that our staff hears regarding residents' monthly bills.

The new software also will provide our residents with the ability to look up their account on the District website and see their usage, prior bills, account information, etc. Along with these enhancements comes a more user-friendly system for our staff, which will enhance their ability to better serve our residents.

We are in the beginning stages of implementation and our current timeline anticipates the software will "go live" during the summer. So stay tuned for more information about this exciting new project in the Utility Billing area.

Both of these projects are occurring while all of the regular, day-to-day activities of the Finance Department continue. Did you know that our Utility Billing staff processes an

average 56,000 bills per month? This bill includes amenity, utility, trash and RV fees, all in one statement.

Did you know that our Accounts Payable staff processes on average 1,250 checks per month for all of the 15 districts? These checks pay the vendors that provide services such as landscaping, mowing, facility maintenance and many more.

Did you know that there are approximately 270 full-time and 780 part-time employees paid by the Village Center District every two weeks? We have one staff member in the Finance Department who processes the payroll for these employees, with the actual check processing being handled by a third-party provider.

Did you know that the Finance Department manages approximately \$273 million in deposits and investments for the 15 districts combined? We have one staff member who works with an outside investment advisory firm to make sure that the districts get the best return on their funds while utilizing what governments call the "SLY" principle. This principle says that we will use the principles of safety, liquidity and yield, in that order, when investing public funds. So the most important aspect is always looking to safely invest the funds in order to minimize loss of principal.

The above are just some of the duties performed by our dedicated staff in the Finance Department. If you would like to learn more about the duties we perform for citizens, a good place to start is the Resident Academy.

It is held over two days (four hours per day) and the goal is to provide an in-depth look at the various District

departments and how they work together to make this the best community in which to live, work and play. To attend, register with the Customer Service Center at 753-4508 or stop by the office, located at 984 Old Mill Run.

I wish you all the happiest and healthiest of new years and let's add safe, too. If one of your resolutions is to be more active in 2016, please stay safe by making sure drivers can see you at night by wearing light colors or reflective

clothing when walking or biking the multimodal paths and roadways.

So until next time, stay safe, happy and healthy, and meet us back here soon at Our Place.

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