

HERITAGE HUNT CONDOMINIUM I UNIT OWNERS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1, 2008

INTRODUCTION

A challenge for any condominium board is how to communicate effectively with the residents. About two dozen of you regularly attend Board meetings, but a majority do not. We put notices on the bulletin boards in the garage elevator lobbies and, for especially important matters, on the sideboards in the main lobbies. Nevertheless, the above avenues do not reach everybody and this newsletter is an additional approach.

On this occasion we wish to discuss some condominium issues as well as give you recent news and some tips. We ask you to take the time to read all of it and consider carefully whether a given item might involve you. The Board wants to hear from you, so please contact us should you have comments or questions. Our phones are as follows:

Edwin Plummer, x 1656 President
Kay Franklin, x 2319 Vice President
Warren Miller, x 1833 Treasurer

OCTOBER 15TH FIRE ALARM IN BLDG B

On the morning of October 15th, we had an impromptu fire drill when a sprinkler valve malfunction in the basement and tripped the alarm. Fortunately, the problem was easily identified and corrected by Noon. Unfortunately, the resident response to the alarm was not encouraging with less than half a dozen residents assembling outside.

While we have had a “false” alarm in each building in the past year, they basically have been rare occurrences. One can never be sure that an alarm isn’t for something serious, so you owe it to yourself to take any alarm seriously.

Back in July, Prince William County Fire & Safety personnel conducted a fire and safety presentation specifically for our condos. It was

televised on Ch. 18 and is available on VHS tape or DVD, upon request to Ed Plummer, x 1656.

TRASH & RECYCLING – WE NEED EVERYONE’S HELP

We are having a problem with smell from the dumpsters. There are two issues: one that residents can help with and one the trash company will hopefully address. When bags containing garbage split or come open, the contents end up loose in the dumpster, forming a smelly goo. Many of you re-use the plastic bags from your grocery and retail shopping for trash that goes down the chute. However, we **strongly** encourage the use of only 13-gallon, white kitchen trash bags as they are relatively strong and can, and should, be tied tightly shut.

The problem is compounded when the trash men sometimes hand transfer bags from the rear dumpster to the front one and then take only the front dumpster out to the truck for emptying. We have complained to AAA Trash about this and hopefully the practice will cease. In addition, AAA has promised to exchange and/or clean the dirty dumpsters.

Our recycle bins fill up before the weekly pickup day. We are considering a third bin in each building or a second pickup. As our present trash contract runs through next February, any change will likely take place then.

In the meantime, please abide by the rule that, when the recycle bins are full, put recyclables in the regular trash dumpsters in the garage trash rooms.

Recyclables should **never** be left on floor of the Recycle Rooms. The picture below illustrates what we don’t want to happen. Boxes as large as those in the picture should go in the regular dumpsters; they take up too much room in the recycle bins. And, remember, no plastic bags, no plastic food/deli trays, no juice cartons and no pizza boxes.

Detailed rules are posted on the garage Trash Room Doors and our web site; if in doubt, read them.



Building A Recycle Room, September 24th

We are presently reviewing bids for trash and recycling. When it comes to picking a vendor, we may have a quandary. AAA Trash service has not been as reliable nor to the standard we would prefer, but they have cleaned up messes, such as the one pictured above, and have taken some things that stretch the definition of household trash. A new vendor might want us to adhere more closely to their rules. We need to be more responsible in our disposal of trash and recyclables.

BUDGET

The Budget & Finance Committee together with the Board has completed the 2009 budget, which will be formally adopted at the November Board meeting and then forwarded to our management company, SCS. Monthly assessments will rise next year, but only by \$5, to \$355 per month. This is less than a 1.5% increase.

Increasing utility rates were a big factor in our budget but were offset by a number of savings. SCS has negotiated an increased reimbursement from HOA for trash pickup, we have changed vendors or re-negotiated some contracts at reduced rates, and just last month we replaced the regular light bulbs in the lobby sconce lights with energy-saving LED bulbs, with an estimated saving of about \$900 per year.

In a basic sense, our condo has two kinds of

money: operating funds and reserves. Our budget estimates operating expenses, including a contribution to reserves, and is intended to maintain our operating funds at a level that is essentially even from year to year. This in turn determines the required annual assessment each of us has to pay. By contrast, we make annual deposits to reserves to anticipate future, major repairs. We use outside engineering studies to guide us as to what our reserves need to be. Adequate reserves avoid the need for special assessments.

This year, for example, we have spent \$63,158 that we were able to draw from reserves. Had we not had the reserves, these expenses would have had to be covered by a Special Assessment of \$831 per unit owner.

FLOODING IN STORE ROOMS AND HALLWAYS

Each of our buildings has three heat pumps for the common areas. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for debris to form/collect on the cooling coils and clog the drains. When this happens, condensate water drips onto the floor and can lead to flooding of adjacent store rooms and hallway. To address this problem, we have installed flood sensor alarms on the heat pumps. So, should you hear a “squealing-like” alarm in the garage hallway, at either end or across from the Recycle Room, it may be one of the flood alarms and we ask that you let Ed Plummer, x 1656, or George Field, x 1390, know about it.

NEWSPAPERS DISAPPEARING

There have been recent instances in both buildings with newspapers disappearing. *The Washington Post* carrier usually writes the resident’s unit number on each resident’s copy of the paper and often leaves one or two extra copies. As most of you know, we have an informal system where individuals take it upon themselves either to distribute the papers to their end of the hallway or bring their hallway’s papers up to the elevator lobbies. In any case, no one should take another resident’s paper nor take a paper for themselves **if they do not subscribe.**

If your paper is missing, the carrier asks that you call him (Anthony Vazquez) at 703-897-1066 rather than complain to the *Post* as calls to the newspaper result in the carrier getting demerits.

PLUMBING & GARBAGE DISPOSAL USE

Living in a condo community carries with it the potential that virtually everything we do can affect others. This becomes painfully true when there are plumbing blockages. In our buildings, each unit is part of a 3-story tier and should the plumbing become clogged, there is the potential for water from an upper unit in the tier to back up into a lower unit.

In the past nine months this has happened twice in one tier in Building A. Each time the clog was in the drains for the kitchen and way down in the garage. The backups involved water coming up into the kitchen sink of the first-floor unit, but the water came from the upstairs units.

As the clog was in pipes that served multiple units, the association so far has spent approximately \$1000 to clean the drains. It is not clear exactly what caused the clogs, but should the cause of such a problem be traceable to a specific unit, that unit owner could be held financially responsible. The biggest fear, which was not realized in these cases, is that enough water could backup so as to flood onto the floors of the “victim” unit.

What we suspect is happening is that cooking grease or debris from garbage disposals is the culprit. We offer the following tips and comments and ask all of you to review what you put down the kitchen sink:

- Do not allow excessive grease to go down the drain. Either collect it in a can for appropriate disposal or sop up as much grease as possible with paper towels.
- Clean greasy pans with plenty of dish detergent to carry the grease away.
- Run plenty of water through the disposal with each use. The flow from the kitchen faucet is not enough by itself for a thorough flushing; once a week partially fill the sink with a gallon or two of hot water and release it all at once so that a slug of water goes

down the drain. Better yet, turn on your disposal to help this slug of water along.

- Plumbers say the disposal is really only for scraps left on the plates. Large amounts of waste food, fibrous foods such as potato & banana peels and corn husks, and rice & pastas should be put in the trash.

Your cooperation can help avoid problems.

GAS FIREPLACES (Building B)

Gas fireplaces need periodic maintenance to be sure that they operate efficiently and **safely**. One company known to service both our electric and gas fireplaces is Eternal Flame, Winchester, VA. PH: 888-535-1999.

Gas fireplaces have batteries in both the remote control and the remote’s receiver, mounted at the bottom front of the fireplace. Unless your unit has been upgraded, a low battery in the receiver can cause the fireplace to self-ignite! Change your batteries every year and consider shutting off the fireplace at the remote receiver or gas valve when you are away or it is not the heating season.

BUILDING B FURNANCE THERMOSTATS

The furnace thermostats in Building B have batteries in them. Check them should your furnace or A/C fail to work properly, or just replace them yearly.

CARBON MONOXIDE AND EXPLOSIVE GAS ALARMS

All of our units have smoke detectors, which should be maintained by vacuuming for dust and changing batteries periodically. All of our units also have natural gas appliances: furnaces, definitely, and, possibly, gas fireplaces and gas stoves. We have had incidents where gas leaks have occurred in units; in one case, a loose gas pipe connection and in another, a broken knob on the range. For about \$60 Lowe’s has a Kidde Night Hawk combination Carbon Monoxide and Explosive Gas Alarm. Consider getting and installing one in your unit; they are good peace of

mind insurance. This would be in addition to the smoke alarms already in your unit.

COLD WEATHER TIP

Don't forget to verify that the electric heater in your hot water closet is working for the winter. The control only needs to be set for about 40 degrees, or about 1/3 of the way up from the cold end of the adjustment range. And be sure your hot water closet door is completely closed. You do not want your water pipes to freeze during a really cold spell.

While you are at it, inspect your hot water heater for any signs of rust streaks or water leakage. If you have any questions about this, check with George Field or Ed Plummer.

BOARD ELECTIONS

At our association's Annual Meeting in March, 2009, we will have an election to fill an opening on the Board of Directors. That is four months away and it seems like a long time. But it is time to consider running for office.

Warren Miller's term expires this election cycle and, at age 89, he says he will not run for, nor accept, another term. Thankfully, he has agreed to serve on our Budget and Finance Committee.

While Warren Miller is the current treasurer, upon election of the new Board member, the Board members will determine among themselves which office each will fill.

What this means is that we need unit owners to step up and express their willingness to participate in governing our community. The nomination process will formally begin in January when SCS will send out requests for candidates. In the meantime, think about it. Our condo is a mini-government and depends on owner involvement for success.

EMERGENCY CONTACT & PET INFORMATION FORM

Along with this newsletter, the Board will distribute to each resident's door a resident

Emergency Contact and Pet Information form. It will have pre-printed on it the information that we have on file for you and your pet(s). Please update the form and return it promptly as indicated at the bottom of the form.

It is important for the Board to have the information available for emergencies. Rest assured, however, that we keep your information private and share it only with the management company and emergency responders, should the need arise.

TIME CHANGE REMINDER

We go back to standard time at 2 AM on Sunday morning, November 2nd; so don't forget to re-set your clocks. And, time change is also a good time to check or replace your smoke detector batteries.