

Neighbor Notes to Address Neighborhood Watch Organizational Meeting February, 2008

INTRODUCTION

- I'm really honored & humbled and actually a little nervous to be asked to talk to you tonight so please excuse me if I use a few notes & stumble a bit.
- As you can see I'm probably one of the oldest homeowners here but I think we all moved here because of the beautiful homes and the expectation that this community seemed to offer the feeling of a modern-day Mayberry like no other. And yes, I think it has lived up to its promise.
- My husband & I moved here in May of '06 we considered ourselves Pioneers of The Villages neighborhood because so few homes existed here in The Villages when we moved in.

STARTED NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- In November of that first year we heard a Neighborhood Watch officer speak at the Annual Homeowners Association meeting. The talk was about how starting Neighborhood Watch groups here would be a good idea because we were a new community and it would help us prevent crime before it had a chance to take hold.
- When we lived in our old neighborhood in Southern California, where we had about twice the number of police officers per capita as they have here in the Springs, they patrolled the neighborhood streets 2 or 3 times a week but we still had several brushes with crimes in our home.

GOOD REASON FOR NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAMS

- Our California next door neighbor prevented a robbery of our home running out of his house in the middle of the night in his boxer shorts and shouting "What are you doing there" to 4 or 5 young men approaching our home while we were away on vacation after his dogs had awakened him.
- And on 2 separate occasions our children were victims of felony crimes in and around our home in California.
- The last time in California it resulted in police and news helicopter flying overhead, traffic stopped in all directions, the SWAT team setting off flash-bangs, and crashing through two of our doors trying to capture a 3rd strike criminal who had just robbed a bank and entered our home. He held our son captive for there for nearly an hour before our son was able to escape.

WOLF RANCH NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- After hearing about Neighborhood Watch at the Wolf Ranch meeting in our new Colorado Springs neighborhood, I started walking door-to-door to invite others to participate. I went around and found 24 families to invite to my home for a meeting with the CSPD Neighborhood Watch officer in January, 2008. The officer completely took charge of the meeting and gave us many valuable tips and tricks and ideas for preventing our homes from being attractive to criminals. He also gave us some ideas about what we might do to help one another.
- However, the most valuable thing he told us was that the thing that makes Neighborhood Watch work is the people really getting to know each other and everyone becoming aware of what was going on in the neighborhood.
- So after the officer left, nearly everyone stayed on for a while. We got to know one another and brainstormed lots of ways we could help each other. We got to know one another better and talked about how to become more aware of what was happening in our neighborhood.

ESSENCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH IS GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER, OR MIXING SKILLS, RESOURCES AND IDEAS

- We talked about the special skills and resources some of us had.
- I think one of the great things that Neighborhood Watch did for us, besides helping us to get to know our neighbors as friends, was that it gave each of us a BOLDNESS that many of us didn't have before. We could now go out and talk to all of our neighbors, not just the ones who look like they might have things in common with us, but everyone in an attempt to be more neighborly.
- Just by gathering people together for our first home meeting, there seemed to be a sense of community spirit that grew, something I don't think exists anywhere else.
- Random acts of kindness are everyday things now. Things like:
- In the early morning after the first major snowfall last year, we woke to find that two neighbors had already cleared our driveway and were working on the walkways.
- During a high wind a 600-700 pound trampoline that belongs to our backyard neighbor was picked up and tumbled end over end across four back yards, across a street and fortunately got hung up on a lamppost before it crashed into a house in its path. Within minutes, the owner was called. Eight strong young men were waiting to help drag and hoist it back to her yard and help secure it with rocks and boulders to prevent it from blow away again.

OTHER NEW ACTIVITIES EVOLVED FROM NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- Planned get-togethers, like Bunko, cheese and wine tastings, July 4th celebration and other creative Watch Group events are regular.
- One of our members decide to take his boys to an Air Force Hockey game and when he discovered how cheap the tickets were he called a neighbor and offered to buy a block of 50 tickets if the neighbor would help him round up a neighborhood group. Together within a day and a half they had sold every ticket for The Villages Father/Son Night Out with of sprinkling of moms and daughters mixed in. Some volunteers even went early to reserve an area for the group.
- Two “pioneer” residents of the Villages held an Ice Cream Social on the patio of one of the first homes to be landscaped for the dozen or so first families to occupy homes. Nearly 50 people (parents, children and owners not yet moved in) attended.
- An open men’s Ping Pong Tournament (The Ping Pong Dudes) is held every month at the home of one resident.
- Frisbee Golf games at the Park are held on a regular basis.
- Neighborhood Wine-Tasting Party was held at a resident’s home.
- A Graduation Party for a new resident was celebrated by new friends in the neighborhood.
- The Annual Village People’ Neighborhood Fourth of July Party exploded from the idea of a small block party to become an all-inclusive Villages Party attended by more than 300 people.
- Two annual Day-After-Thanksgiving Dads vs. Kids Football games.
- Regular open get-togethers for sporting events shown on family big-screen TVs.
- A large neighborhood Super-Bowl Open House Party at the home of a new resident.
- Multiple Neighborhood Christmas Parties
- A large New Year’s Eve Game Night Pot Luck (appetizers and desserts) Party

The main focus of Neighborhood Watch as we understood it is to get to know your neighbors so that you can care for and watch out for one another. It’s important to know one another’s habits, skills, resources, and special vulnerabilities. We believe all the fun neighborhood activities outlined above help to strengthen that safety connection to one another.

REAL SAFETY ISSUES OUR NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ADDRESSED

- One resident got an accurate description of the truck and its license number so that he was able to supply the information to the police when he was awakened by a truck at one of the nearby model homes some time after midnight and he saw things being moved from a home.
- Three of our Neighborhood Watch Block Captains went together to send a letter to City officials that outlined the unique severe problems we faced here in Wolf Ranch during a horrible year of snow storms. We’d like to believe

that our letter helped our City Councilman, and Wolf Ranch resident, Daryl Glenn, helped upgrade the priority of the city's snow removal in WR.

- Also, in last year's surprise blizzards, a member of our Watch group who is a landscaper and who has lots of heavy equipment, called out his crew from other parts of the city to come help him. And they spent the entire day digging out cars and rescuing dozens of people stranded along Research Parkway. They even found two separate people who had left their cars to try to walk home and were so disoriented they were walking aimlessly on the wrong side of Research in neighborhoods far from their homes.
- The developer's maintenance staff and contractors also helped in the snow removal efforts when the city services were overwhelmed in that blizzard.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT THROUGHOUT ALL OF WOLF RANCH

- The community spirit in all of Wolf Ranch is already simply awesome! Neighborhood Watch has sparked the actions of many, many more people who might ordinarily have been hesitating to act and it provides residents with the resources that are available through their neighbors.
- For example, this past very cold New Year's Eve when the reverse 911 call went out to all of Wolf Ranch regarding the lost Alzheimer's resident. The response from this entire community was absolutely incredible. Hundreds of people went outside immediately to check their yards and lots of others got in their cars, trucks and ATVs to help look for him. So many people called the police department to ask how they could help, that CSPD were stunned by the response. They told one of my neighbors they had never seen that kind of response before nor had a community pulled together in the way that Wolf Ranch had. The resident was found and was safe.
- So, yes, we are unique.
- Last year, during the first blizzard, when a Westcreek baby stopped breathing, it was the actions of a neighbor that saved her life. While the ambulance was in route the neighbor continued CPR and went to the hospital with the family. She was an ER nurse and we all think she is a hero.

MY IDEAS ABOUT THE WOLF RANCH NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- There's an old proverb that says, "better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away" and I believe that sums up the ultimate purpose of Neighborhood Watch, and mostly, about what it means to be a neighbor.
- I'm sure the safety aspect is the most important part of Neighborhood Watch as far as the police department is concerned, but for us here in Wolf Ranch, I think the way it magnifies and ignites the community spirit is of equal or greater importance. Because of that I have a few thoughts about how we might enhance the program from the way it currently exists and tailor it to our needs here in Wolf Ranch. One suggestion I'd make now is that you make the groups rather large, maybe 20-25 people. That's because in any group there are always many levels of participation and in a larger group no one person will ever feel that they have to carry too much of load. Actually this is the

easiest group you will ever belong to and everyone only does what the volunteer to do.

- We also hope that some of you will volunteer to be Block Captains. Those of you in Westcreek will probably want to start your own Neighborhood Watch groups but we hope you try to keep contact with us in The Villages. It's also just my opinion, but I think the Neighborhood Watch groups ought to start with a relatively large group that consists of maybe 20 or more people. That's because in any group some people are more willing or able to participate than others, but it with a little size no one feels that if they volunteer to do something that they have to carry the load alone. But still everyone in the group feels like a part of a great community.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF WATCH CAPTAINS

- Actually there are really very few responsibilities, for Watch or Block Captains. Once the names and information is collected, most of which we hope to do tonight, you only have to arrange a couple of meetings a year with the Neighborhood Watch officer. An occasional e-mail from the Police Department should be passed along to the members of the group and you're invited to attend some quarterly meetings held at the police department. Everything else is purely whatever members of the group volunteer to do.
- I really believe that Neighborhood Watch provides an awesome opportunity to really make a difference in our community.