

VHA Town Hall

July 2023

The VHA wants to thank the following people for participating in this VHA Town Hall meeting and providing information to VHA members and Villages residents. Dr. Gary Lester – Vice President Community Relations; Carrie Duckett – Deputy District Manager; Pat Breeden – Undersheriff Sumter County Sheriff's Department; Capt. Robert Siemer – Villages District Supervisor Sumter County Sheriff's Department; Ofc. Garth Layne and Ofc. Kaitlyn Lemonanwicz – Wildwood Police; Interim Chief Steven Hunt – Lady Lake Police.

VHA President Peter Russell welcomed all and explained the new format of this quarterly meeting. Previously, questions from VHA members collected during a three-month period received responses during the VHA Town Hall. A VHA Issues Team is now in place to respond to members' questions as soon as they are received. Rich Cole will respond to North region questions, Phil Walker for Central and Roger Kass will respond to South questions. The VHA Issues Team will then select one or two common topics / concerns to address at the Town Hall meeting to provide in depth information the VHA will bring to members and Villages residents.

Introducing this meeting's topic, Peter reported that during a panel of District Supervisors July 17, 2023 he announced the VHA partnership with Florida Department of Transportation's program Safe Mobility for Life. A program focused on reducing fatalities and bodily injuries. The VHA will be presenting programs to help educate VHA members and Villages residents. The question for this meeting's discussion: How do you see this initiative moving forward and making an impact on the community?

Dr. Gary Lester: Safety in our community begins with safe transportation and strong law enforcement. The Villages's transportation plan, including our golf car accessibility, is the Gold Standard in terms of people being able to move about their community conveniently and safely. That safety and convenience is the result of a master plan, which continues to be executed throughout the community. The Villages has the opportunity to design from a clean slate, which enable the creation of features like roundabouts, golf car trails and curved roadways designed to slow traffic. Roundabouts also calm traffic and when accidents do occur, they are typically less serious than at normal, four way, signaled intersections.

Walls, fences and gates all mark entry into the community and they also slow traffic and act as a deterrent to criminals. Law enforcement provided by Sumter, Lake and Marion counties along with the police departments in Wildwood and Lady Lake patrol and respond throughout The Villages. The number one deterrent to crime within our residential areas is the social connectivity in the neighborhoods. Villagers are typically good neighbors who recognize who belongs and send alerts when suspicious people or situations appear.

Undersheriff Pat Breeden: We push the phrase "See Something, Say Something." We encourage people to report when issues occur. We promote the "9:00 pm Routine" to develop the habit of checking that cars and doors are locked and make safety checks. Perpetrators look for unlocked vehicles and houses. Follow the Sumter Sheriff website and Facebook for information and safety.

Capt. Robert Siemer: Driving is safer with roundabouts which slow traffic and injuries are less serious when accidents occur. Side-impact / "t-bone" crashes occur at intersections but do not happen in roundabouts. When you follow the 9:00 pm Routine, be sure to check that the garage door is closed. Watch that items are stored away. A cell phone in a cup holder may attract a parked car break-in. Put cell phones away while driving and please watch for all vehicles, golf cart and bicycles.

Ofc. Garth Layne: We have increased Wildwood Police presence to watch for speeders as we patrol through the community.

Carrie Duckett: The master plan for this community is certainly designed for safety. The District government oversees maintenance of this property to maintain high standards. In the audience, there are AAC members and thirteen (13) district representatives. As you hold each other accountable, we are all working together. Those who attended yesterday's (July 17th) meeting and today's meeting can bring this information out to others. If residents see anything that needs attention, we urge them to contact us immediately through the District website www.districtgov.org or call Customer Service 352-753-4508.

Interim Chief Steve Hunt: We ask that you have reasonable expectations of the police department. We are working to fill positions for officers. There are 30 positions allocated with 23 filled. We work with residents and encourage civil discourse when you come to speak to us. We try to solve hard problems.

Peter closed this portion of the meeting thanking the Partners as we all work together for VHA members and Villages residents. The VHA prides itself in working with a positive, productive dialogue to provide education and philanthropy.