

DE LA VISTA NORTH

A Brief History

“Every group has a story to tell...welcome to ours”

It may seem ironic that “newbies” such as ourselves were asked to write the history of the De La Vista North Association; as co-editors of the monthly newsletter, it seemed a daunting task. Learning how this wonderful group has grown into a family, became a labor of love. A group who celebrates together and pulls together in times of need is the true definition of “family”.

Let’s set the stage: In 1997 Bill Clinton was President; the price of gasoline was \$1.22/gallon; the average cost of a new house was \$124,100; average income was \$37,000/year. Princess Diana was killed in a tragic car accident; OJ Simpson was found guilty in the civil trial; Tiger Woods became the youngest ever to win the Masters; the first book of the Harry Potter series was published. Movies that year included “Titanic”, “Jurassic Park”, “Airforce One”, and “Men in Black”. There were 8,340 “dwelling units” in the Villages; by 2015 there were more than 54,180 and The Daily Sun began publishing on June 24th.

On that stage, the residents of the neighborhood of De La Vista North were buying land, building houses, retiring from their jobs, and leaving their home towns to start a new chapter of their lives. They were meeting new people from all walks of life and literally watching the area grow up around them. Only history knows who actually began this social club, but in the fall of 1997 the new neighbors were paying their dues and a family called the DLVN Association is born.

Because our own history in The Villages began only three years ago, we started by interviewing past presidents. After twenty years, all of them are still living in the neighborhood with the exception of two who are deceased. That has got to be a record in itself. Enthusiasm and laughter were the highlight of each interview and, oh my, the pictures.

Kathy Langley and Joe Datillo served as Co-chairpersons from the fall of 1997 to 1999. Kathy and husband Carl have lived on Del Rosario Drive since July of 1997. When they arrived, there was no “Santo Domingo”, “Santiago” or “Palo Alto” village; and Spanish Springs square had nothing but a tent. There were no houses on the “preserve” side of Durango Drive. County Road 441 was four lanes; County Road 466 only two, mostly bordered by grazing land and a few houses here and there. Kathy recalled there being about 50 people at the first meeting of the new neighbors, initiated by Ken Riley and Mary Chaplin.

Joe Datillo of Antonia Lane was elected the first President of the DLVN Neighborhood Association and served during 1999 and 2000. The original Charter and By-Laws were developed and adopted by the membership. Activities beginning during this period included the Christmas Dance, Halloween Party, Pool Parties, 4th of July Parties, any excuse for a party. As in all the early years, new neighbors lead to new golf groups, some quite competitive, others completely social.

Carlo Deluca took over the reins in 2001. He and wife Ginger have lived on San Marino Drive since December 1997; both recall how it rained for “40 days and 40 nights” following their

arrival. They also remember the alligator on their front porch in the spring of 2014; the picture is part of neighborhood lore. Carlo set out to achieve three goals: A mail station “in the neighborhood”, a traffic signal at the San Marino Drive-Morse Boulevard intersection and a golf cart path on the north side of San Marino Drive; he accomplished two out of three! When Carlo was asked how he would describe the neighborhood, he replied “We are not here waiting for God to call us, he is waiting for us to go!”

In 2001, Ken “Sargeant” Riley was elected as President. Ken is universally remembered as a vibrant, fun-loving, extrovert of the first order. His friend, Pat Patterson is credited with the creation of the neighborhood “Kazoo Band”. At the group’s first appearance, the “Sargeant” marched the band into the meeting room to the sounds of songs representing the four branches of the U.S military. The band continues to be a fun activity at association meetings. Only months after assuming office, the “Sargeant” passed away and Vice-President Tom Young, moved into the president’s chair.

Tom considers himself a relative introvert, particularly compared to his friend Ken Riley. However, he added, “the neighborhood had more than its share of extroverts”. Tom recalled the block parties on Melendez Way as well as those for St. Patrick’s Day, Memorial Day, and Labor Day. He recalled the monthly Men’s Luncheon held at the Chula Vista Restaurant, more recently becoming the Men’s Breakfast held at Hacienda Country Club. Tom thinks DLVN grew mostly out of the “fellowship” of the neighborhood women. He spoke of the multiple “Ladies Golf Groups: Executive, 18 Hole Championship and 9 Hole Championship”. Though Tom no longer keeps track of these groups they were, and likely remain, the real “heart” of the neighborhood.

Tom O’Neil became President in 2002. Both he and wife Barbara recalled being welcomed to the neighborhood by the “Welcoming Committee”, Mary Chaplin. They remember many neighborhood activities originating in spontaneous conversations among a few neighbors: a talent show, a hobby show, 4 guys dressed up as hula dancers, (including coconut bras), a 1998 neighborhood picnic at Tierra Del Sol (before the Recreation Center was built), and a “Moonlight Golf” outing. Tom spoke of many “game starters”; people with an idea and making it happen. He and Barbara also remember returning from an extended trip “up north” and driving past their own house, on Durango Drive, because so many had been added while they were gone!

Tom and Barbara referred to the neighborhood as a “group of equals”; any reference to there being “cliques” is likely the result of perception rather than fact. People generally speak most often to those living “next door”, or in close proximity to one another. Some formed as a result of golf groups started as people arrived in the area.

Judy Stanislaw stepped forward in 2005 to replace Tom O’Neill as President when Tom was unable to continue into another term. Judy had served as Vice President during the previous four years so the transition of leadership went smoothly. Judy orchestrated the first, and only, absentee ballot process for the election of officers in 1998 so as to include neighbors who were “up north” at the time of the DLVN election. Judy recalled the then new Tierra Del Sol Country

Club being viewed by many neighbors as “our place” almost like “Cheers”; “where everybody knows your name”.

In 2007, Phil Rizzo of Durango Drive became president of DLVN. Phil spoke of being “blessed” by two dynamic, highly effective Vice Presidents during the years of his term: Priscilla Ramsey, the “take charge, get it done” driver/planner of a wide variety of activities and her successor, Linda King, who got more people involved in generating ideas and making activities happen. Over time, Linda advocated the dissolution of the office of Vice President and replacing it with a “Social Events Committee”. The recommendation was implemented and this committee still organizes the “social aspects” of our monthly meetings. Membership of the committee is dynamic and always looking for new members and new ideas for activities. Phil added that his term in office was privileged to have had the support and participation of long-time Secretary, Jerrye Miles and Treasurer, Charlie Robinson as board members.

Phil and his wife Laura remember entering the empty house they were watching for a neighbor and spending the day decorating it for three upcoming holidays (with the help of the Ramsey’s, the Kings and the Bailey’s). They then sent pictures of their handiwork to the owners, away in England! They recalled looking for lawn ornaments in a “Golf Cart Scavenger Hunt” and trying to get the best poker hand in the “Poker Run”. Phil’s term saw a change from the “Christmas Dinner Dance” to a “Christmas Party” reflecting the changing population in the neighborhood. Phil and Laura created the “Sunday Couples Golf Group” which is still active. They recall the “St. Johns River Cruise”, and the “Dancing with the Stars” event. Having been president from 2007 to 2014, Phil credits much of the association’s recent success to our current “Welcome Committee”, Lucienne Robinson. She single-handedly welcomes every new neighbor and encourages them to come to the meetings and get to know their new neighbors and friends. Her efforts go a long way to keep the neighborhood association current and active.

Our current president, JoAnn Keys was first elected in March 2015 and re-elected on March 25, 2017. JoAnn was a member of a self-named group called “The Three Musketeers” which took over leading the organization after Phil Rizzo’s term ended and there seemed to be no one interested in serving in the office. At the urging of the other 2 “musketeers”, JoAnn agreed to take on the challenge, despite her fear of public speaking. She says she was so thrilled with the job done by Vice-President turned “Social Events Committee” Chairwoman Linda King, she could not let the association disappear for lack of someone to lead; and lead she has. From the “Farewell Cake” she arranged to thank Phil Rizzo and Charlie Robinson for their efforts over many years to a variety of new sources of entertainment, JoAnn has presided over two and a half years of fun for every member. JoAnn has decided she will not seek another term in office, but will continue to support and be involved in the future of the “De La Vista North” (DLVN) Neighborhood Association. She continued:

“I would like to say how honored I am to be your President and say how much satisfaction I get seeing everyone enjoy our club events. I have learned a great deal on the job and have really been enjoying my position. The members of our Social Club as well as everyone in our DLVN neighborhood are wonderful people and most enjoyable to be around. I thank them all for their continued support.”

What we learned through our interviews has given us a glimpse at the path to today. Each president talked about those around them who were the source of the ideas, the plans and the enthusiasm that really “make” the organization what it is! We heard about the initial, formal structure of “Robert’s Rules” for meetings evolving to a more relaxed, “social” atmosphere of discussion and “neighborliness”. The story of how the role of the vice presidency, eventually became the “Social Events Committee”, expanding participation beyond just a few “officers”. We spent about an hour each with this small sample of our neighbors doing the interviews for this publication. In that short time, we learned that “every house has a story to tell”, we need only take the time to listen.

So where does the future take us? Younger people are moving in as fast as houses go up for sale. What once were custom-built dream homes are now getting makeovers. The group excitement of “starting a new chapter” has become the source of memories, stories and good natured ribbing. Those who once relished dancing and costume parties, golf tournaments and cruises, now desire slower, quieter entertainment. Today, this is a family living with constant change. Close friends have moved away, dear friends have suffered tragic losses and young people move in with new ideas. Yet, in this “sea of change”, this resilient group remains constant in the love and support for each other and their community. They recognize the value of both “old friends” and new equally, judging none, welcoming all.

Much of our world has changed since The Daily Sun published its first edition in the summer of 1997 and our neighborhood sprang to life. The personal computer became a necessity; access to the internet became a requirement. Our “smartphones” now allow us access to all of it, “in the palm of our hand”. As that technological explosion was occurring, the trailblazers made their dreams a reality. When the love of a lifetime was lost, new singles remained welcome participants in new ways. As new neighbors and new interests arrived, new creativity was encouraged to keep events fresh and fun. But something important remained constant:

What continues to make De La Vista North special is the people who live in this “family of neighbors”. Even as The Villages offered an increasing variety of entertainment, the friends in De La Vista North remained interested in one another and made a conscious effort to remain a neighborhood. The positive, realistic attitude of each household gels together as a vibrant, living entity expressing itself as a wondrous mixture of its parts. Living things perpetuate themselves by their strength, ability to adapt to change and capacity to accept new circumstances. This is the “unknown” the “newbies” discovered when they arrived and what they were made part of shortly after.

The world will continue to evolve; The Villages will continue to grow. By knowing a little of how the foot path became a gravel road we benefit by the experience of those who hauled the dirt. As we pave the once gravel road, we would do well to remember the destination remains the same: Have Fun! Enjoy your friends! Smile! Laugh! You’re living in the best neighborhood, Ever!!!!

“And suddenly you know: It’s time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings.”
Meister Eckhart, German theologian, philosopher and mystic.

Note from the authors: Time and availability did not allow us to hear and record the story of every house. However, we recognize there are many more stories that would help complete the picture outlined here. Don and Betsey