

Skyline Lakes Property-holders Association

www.skylinelakes.org

Late winter greetings to all of you.

Much like last year, winter seems to withhold its hardest punch on the mountain until late in the season. We were lucky until mid-February getting by with cold temperatures and little snow. Snow plowing was minimal and your Board was cautiously optimistic the Association could reach spring without significant snow removal costs as occurred last March. Then it started to snow on February 12th ... Skyline Lakes received 30" in less than a day which prompted over 50 hours of plowing, including 13 hours straight at the wheel by longtime, hardy mountain resident and SLPA Vice-President Regina Austin who backed up her husband Larry "Goozle" Austin and another driver. While this year's storm did not match the intensity of last March's event--which prompted herculean efforts including the extended use of a bull dozer—it did further damaged the Association's budget which was still recovering from last winter's extraordinary cost. I sincerely hope we're done with snow this year!

The Board-appointed Building Committee which I mentioned in a recent letter followed through with drawings for the proposed equipment shed—size, materials, number of doors, etc. Unfortunately, our weather-related expenses have most likely put off this desirable project for at least a year, if not longer while we rebuild financially. I and the Board are committed to erecting this needed structure, as an overwhelming majority of you as reflected in last September's referendum, but it will have to wait.

On a more positive note, the development's road network is in good shape and growing better as Maintenance and Improvements Chairman Andy Kent works through his five-year maintenance plan. Recently, Andy arranged at no expense to the Association for the local power company to remove about 50 encroaching roadside trees, especially along Cliff Heights and Pine Tree Rd. leading down to the lake. This will allow widening of the sharp curves on those roads, making the lake accessible to fire trucks and other first responders, and reducing the risk of black outs from falling limbs hitting power lines. Similarly, Treasurer Crystal Liebenow has secured a new *Firewise* grant of \$4,900 to underwrite the rental of a boom mower with 22' reach to cut down overgrown roadside vegetation along road banks. Looking ahead to our spring road maintenance campaign, it appears no new culvert pipes will be needed this year to aid drainage and this is good financial news.

Best regards with a fond wish for warmer weather,

Eugene Skotzko
President, SLPA Board of Directors

Can a property-owner get money from Firewise?

That's a common question. It ranks right up there with "Just what in the *@## is Firewise?" So here goes an attempt to answer some questions by providing background information explaining Firewise.

First, No, an individual property owner cannot get money from Firewise because the program only makes awards to communities and only to communities which are recognized/registered in the Firewise Communities Program. This program is a project of the National Fire Protection Association directed toward fire prevention in woodland communities such as ours. It's a nationwide program co-sponsored and funded by the USDA Forest Service, the US Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters. Currently Virginia has more than 50 recognized Firewise Communities that are eligible to submit requests for funding annually. Pat Burns submitted our first request in 2004 and, in 2005, Skyline Lakes received an award becoming one of the two first recognized Firewise Communities in the state. Since then Orv Lee has carried the torch (no pun intended) submitting a succession of requests on behalf of our community and receiving a number of awards. This year Crystal Liebenow has assumed that responsibility, successfully bringing in an award for 2014.

But receiving an award doesn't mean the Firewise program just hands over money to Skyline Lakes. The community has to earn the award first by what's called an in-kind contribution, meaning documented work hours performed by community members (work can also be done by contracted workers but such an arrangement is an undesirable expense for this community whose budget keeps being eaten by extreme snow removal costs). Community members document their work hours by noting on the work sheets each of the dates and times they spend clearing fire hazard materials from roadsides or their own lots (again this spring work sheets will be available on both sides of the bath house). The 6-month interval to earn our 2014 Firewise award begins in March so start working early - before the brambles are flourishing to impede progress. The more clearing we do the more we look like an actively participating Firewise Community putting us in a better light with the officials who must make those annual choices of where best to invest limited funding.

Maybe you've already been working hard in the past couple years and have cleared fire hazards from your own property. Still, there is one more important thing you can do: **educate your neighbors** and maybe even offer to help them in clearing. For properties with a house or other structure (those now marked by green reflective numerals) the recommended Firewise safety distance to clear is a minimum of 30 feet around the dwelling and 100 feet in all directions is preferable. Neglected woodlots without a structure pose an additional risk. Remember, if fire occurred and a lot adjacent to yours was full of tinder that could pose a hazard to your property and possibly to the entire community.

And this year the brush-eating tractor is coming!

Each year a request for funding must propose a specific plan concerning how to enhance fire safety in the community if an award were to be made. Since the first award in 2005, a series of Firewise proposals have led to awards making valuable contributions to reducing the hazard of fire in Skyline Lakes. Prior awards have funded a Dry Hydrant in the lower lake to make water accessible by the Fire Department, a bridge to allow fire trucks to reach the lake, repeated roadside clearing and chipping, road widening to create firebreaks, major expansion of cul-de-sacs to make fire truck turning possible and the posting of house numerals throughout the community for emergency response identification purposes.

This year the Firewise award for 2014 will bring a major piece of equipment into Skyline Lakes. It's a Large heavy tractor with a mounted cutting boom such as that used by VDOT to clear roadsides, especially steep ones like those found throughout our community. Reportedly it can chew right through brush and trees up to 3 inches in diameter.

This rented equipment will be operating in Skyline Lakes for two weeks. The rental and delivery fees plus fuel costs to operate the unit will consume virtually all of the \$4,900 available in the 2014 award.

So, as soon as the snow clears, let's get busy with spring cleanup and clearing of our properties to be able to report enough hours to earn this year's award and, in the process, place Skyline Lakes in a good light to apply for a subsequent award. Completed work sheets documenting hours worked should be turned in to Andy Kent, Chairman of the Maintenance and Improvements Committee or to other committee members (Regina Austin, Evans Painter, Jimmy Painter and Doug Southers).



Orv and Laloie Lee are special citizens:

The tall, lanky fellow in the leather hat decked with a jaunty turkey feather and his petite wife who always seems to have a bright scarf or some other accessory completing her outfit have been serving the Skyline Lakes community in so many ways ever since they first came here in the 1980's (some of their early parties are the stuff of legends). New property owners often meet this couple early on as they are out and about and seem to form an unofficial welcoming committee of two.

As already mentioned (see Firewise item above), Orv committed time over several years to writing and submitting grant proposals to keep our subdivision in good standing as a recognized Firewise Community. He also served on the Governing Board, including terms as Vice President and President, and stayed committed as Editor of the Newsletter for an extended period, 1995-2005. But the length-of-service award surely must go to Laloie who served as the dutiful Secretary of the Association from 1992 until 2006. She also often has shared her love of wild flowers with seasonal reports in the Newsletter about what might be found blooming and her Mason jar bouquet, presented at the 2012 Annual Meeting with a narrative on the lore and uses of the flowers included, was a true delight. Plants and gardening are something Orv and Loie enjoy together, as can be seen on their own well-groomed properties as well as in the community's gate garden that they helped establish and maintained for many years.

Because this couple has given such strength and spirit to the community, so generously sharing their energy and enthusiasm for so many years, the Board passed a resolution at its 9 February 2013 meeting that all their various contributions be recognized and applauded in the Newsletter. However, what would be even better than Newsletter mention is this: when you see them out walking with their little Cairn Terrier Foxy, be sure to stop, talk, reminisce and voice your own version of the Board's recognition.

Crystal needs your help.

If you live some distance away and don't know her – or possibly are even local and just haven't met her yet – Crystal Liebenow is the current treasurer for Skyline Lakes and she has quite a job to do keeping the books for the Association and keeping property ownership information updated. So here's what you can do to help:

1. Provide the new owner information whenever you sell any property within the community. This will insure that you won't receive assessment notices which should be sent to the new owner.

2. Make sure your own contact information is up to date. If you've moved to a new address or gotten a new or additional telephone number in the past five years, please provide this current information, if you haven't done so already. Send it directly to the attention of Crystal Liebenow at 13607 Ryton Ridge Lane Gainesville VA 20155; 124 Suzanne Road Skyline Lakes Stanley VA 22851; or cliebenow@comcast.net.

3. Write the name of the property owner of record on the check. When payment for an annual Property-holders Association fee comes in on a business check or if someone else writes a personal check to cover the fee, it is often difficult if not impossible to associate the payment with the appropriate lot or lots. This problem could even lead to assessment of a late fee when the fee has actually been paid but is unrecognizable as such.

An address change brings sad news.

Recently, Dagmar Bang wrote to change her address and, most sadly, to report the loss of her husband Otto. She stated: "Otto was the nicest man I have ever known, we had our Crown Diamond Anniversary May 2, 2013 and danced "Could I have this Dance for the rest of my life" --- for the last time; he died October 5, 2013." The couple had a busy life and 65 wonderful years together. Otto is survived by his wife Dagmar, three children and six grandchildren.

A newspaper ad about opening of the Skyline Lakes subdivision caught Otto's eye so they decided to drive up and take a look. Dagmar recalls Tanners Ridge Rd as unpaved and "quite awful" leading her to exclaim: "Who on earth would buy a lot up there?" However, once they got to the top of Parkline Dr., they were sold by the view and bought their lot that very day. At that point in time Skyline Lakes looked very unlike it does today. According to Dagmar "the view was great then, we could see all the way down in the Meadow, no trees to take away the view." However, shortly afterwards, they also bought 10 acres in Oakton, VA. That was their home for over 30 years where the children had horses and Dagmar maintained a one acre garden and served as secretary for Otto's general contracting business, leaving little time free to come and enjoy their mountain view. Nonetheless, the family is likely to remain as members of the Skyline Lakes community as one of the granddaughters, Lisa, and her husband Fritz may be interested in taking over the property.

Beware of the bears!

Bear populations seem to be building up in our community. In the summer of 2013 broad trails through berry patches and slides along steep roadsides were seen commonly. And care had to be taken when hiking to avoid stepping in soft, seed-laden evidence of their passing. The bears seem to be getting bolder as well as more numerous being seen commonly in open lots in broad daylight. Last fall, a large bear almost came to breakfast at your editor's cabin, shuffling as far as the screen door. Slamming the

big door didn't seem to alarm it much; it ambled off the deck and began rolling rocks out of the retaining wall and eating ants just a few yards away on the other side of the driveway.

Despite the cold of this winter, bear tracks in the snow offer testimony to their activity during moderate intervals. Mother bears especially must venture out in search of food to strengthen them for nursing cubs which are born in January and February. If bear population numbers truly are increasing, the odds will be good of encountering a mother with cubs when warm weather comes. So stay alert to such a possibility. If you are unfortunate enough to find yourself between a mother and cubs, that's the classic danger position and she is likely to charge to defend them. However, if they are together and you don't appear to be a threat to the cubs, a loud noise will usually get them to move on. Personal experience found banging on a frying pan with a hammer worked one time. Another time, when a mother with cubs was encountered unexpectedly in the woods, talking continuously in a loud, demanding voice also worked. Perhaps, wearing a shrill whistle when hiking might be a good idea.

Motion passed at the 9 February 2014 SLPA Board meeting:

That the next Newsletter shall include a proclamation of thanks to Orv and Laloie Lee for their numerous contributions made to the community, especially Orv's efforts in securing funding of several Firewise awards to Skyline Lakes.

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