

# VALUABLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON WEB SITE

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Who said it? Why was it said? OK, the first part of the question is a slow, arching softball pitch. It was Benjamin Franklin, and he is unquestionably recognized as the father of the American fire service. The second part may not be as easy. It seems the father of American firefighting was specifically talking about fire prevention efforts in colonial times. It seems that ol' Ben recognized the fact that fighting a fire that never occurs is easier and cheaper than fighting a full-blown structure fire. Unfortunately, the challenge is to communicate to the citizen the importance of this principle and then get the needed buy-in.

The main tenet of a principle is that it is true time in and time out. This means this same principle applies to preventing accidents and injuries as well. The Villages Public Safety Department (VPSD) spends a significant part of its time trying to improve the quality of life in this community, and to educate its residents on safety and health issues that can cause irreparable harm.

Some of those issues include prevention of falls among seniors, how to make the most of using the 911 system in The Villages, and golf cart safety. Our message is delivered through a variety of public forums as the staff attends community and club meetings. This allowed the staff to communicate the prevention mantra to more than 2,000 people last year. We have found this “in-person” method of communicating our prevention effort to the community has been both well received and highly successful. If you, or a member of your club, are interested in having VPSD staff attend a meeting, we can be reached at 205-8280. Unfortunately this effort,



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while effective, still leaves many people who don't hear the message.

In an effort to spread the prevention message to as many people as possible, the VPSD has turned to technology and the Internet. We have placed a variety of informational documents onto the District's Web site at [district.gov.org](http://district.gov.org) that can be easily viewed, downloaded and shared. The challenge with this form of communication is that it requires the individual to intentionally look for the information.

However, the best part of this communication forum is that it allows for the communication of consistent information. Anyone who has ever played the child's game of whispering something in a friend's ear in a circle and watching it progress through the chain until it comes back will recognize that as people pass along information it morphs and takes on new meaning. Unfortunately, this can lead to out-of-control rumors that cause more harm than good. The placement of this information onto the District Web site ensures that anyone desiring to find the information can find that same information each time they go to the Web site.

In looking at the District's Web site, you will find information about stroke, fall prevention, advanced directives and flu prevention and more. I would encourage everyone to take the time and “walk” through the site to get even more information to become better prepared to prevent a catastrophe. Take the time to become informed.

Another important part of the District Web site deals with fire hydrants in The Villages. You can't imagine the number of times that one of my officers is questioned about hydrant testing. Frequently, the conversation begins with a statement from the resident that goes something like this: “There's a fire hydrant in front of my neighbor's house, but it's never been tested. I've lived in my home for six years. How do I know that it even works?”

The Web site gives the location of every hydrant in the Lake and Sumter County portions of The Villages and identifies the date it was last tested. Marion County Fire Rescue maintains similar information on its Web site for the Marion County section of The Villages. If you take a quick look at the Web site – even if you're not looking for a neighborhood hydrant – you'll see that every hydrant in The Villages was tested in 2009. In fact, every hydrant in The Villages is tested twice a year. Crews from each station and each shift are assigned a specific number of hydrants that must be tested (flowed) on a regular basis. Hydrants that are found to be defective are noted for immediate repair. I would remind you, just because you didn't see the crew test “your” hydrant, doesn't mean it wasn't done. All you have to do is check the Web site.

The Web site also provides a tremendous amount of information about the Public Safety Department. The 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 annual reports are available for you to review, and the 2009 report will be added soon. These documents will tell you how we've done in the past and the types of improvements we've made each year. You'll get a feel for what's happening in both EMS and fire training,

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statistics on the number and types of calls we run, and who's who in the department.

We not only live in an

information age, we live in an "instant information" age.

Computers, Google, the Internet, and a myriad number of search tools have made it so information is only a few keystrokes away. We encourage you to visit the District's

Web site and the Public Safety Department's portion in particular. The venerable Dr. Franklin may have introduced the fire service to America, but it's Bill Gates and a host of other computer wizards who have brought The Villages fire

service information into each and every home.

Finally, I have the opportunity to author next week's Our Place article as well. It is my intention to address questions and issues residents have raised regarding recent fires

that have occurred in The Villages, Fire and Emergency Medical Response and the VPSD insurance rating. See you next week.

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