



community of excellence
winner—disaster preparedness, larger communities



Shadow Wood

Bonita Springs, FL

by Kathy Danforth

When the emergency sirens howl and megaphones blare, the Shadow Wood Community Association in Bonita Springs is an excellent place to be. They are putting the protection of their residents and employees foremost, in word and in deed, and were named the Community of Excellence for larger communities in the Disaster Preparedness category.

Shadow Wood is a lushly landscaped master association for 34 individual neighborhoods with 1,481 homes. About two thirds of these are villas and

custom estate homes, while the remaining 448 are condominiums. Shadow Wood, together with three other communities, make up The Brooks Community Development District, which maintains 30 acres of turf grass, 25 acres of plant beds, roadways, waterways, and over 384 acres of wetlands. Shadow Wood was built by the Bonita Bay Group (BBG) over the last eleven years and general manager Sheryl Hilburn says, "In the midst of the boom, houses couldn't be built fast enough." BBG continues to own and operate the Shadow Wood Country Club and golf course within the Shadow Wood boundaries.

The Shadow Wood Community Association is responsible for the two points of entry and thoroughfares, common areas, and heavy plantings up to the entrance to each street. Sheryl outlines their property, saying, "We cover almost seven miles of right-of-way, two miles of boundary berms, one-and-a-half miles of boundary walls, 68 acres with turf grass, and 32 acres of plant beds." It is the extensive plantings that provide the distinct natural look for the community, and also demand much of the labor.

In addition to Sheryl, who came to Shadow Wood when it was turned over from the developer in 2006, there is a staff of 33. This includes two administrative personnel, 13 landscape operations staff, and 18 community patrol personnel. "We have 24-hour coverage of the two gatehouses for access control," Sheryl explains, "and also



roving patrols. We feel strongly about the gatehouse and landscape personnel working directly for the association. They have a personal interest in the community and the residents," Sheryl states. "Most employees have been here five to ten years and they have a vested interest in Shadow Wood."

Shadow Wood is responsible for enforcement of traffic regulations on its property. Sheryl observes, "We have stringent traffic rules. Our homeowners want us to enforce the traffic rules, especially the speeding and stop sign issues. We have a very active community that utilizes our pedestrian path and observance of the traffic rules helps provide a safer atmosphere for interaction with vehicles. We actually receive calls from neighborhoods saying, 'Can you have the patrol monitor our neighborhood because we're seeing a lot of speeding?' As a matter of fact, we were approached by another neighborhood within The Brooks asking if we could provide the same service for them because it's been so effective at Shadow Wood." Traffic and other legal issues are handled by the covenants committee.

The architectural review committee is seeing more action due to the shift in housing economics. Sheryl observes, "With the current economy, we've seen less movement in people purchasing new homes and an increase in owners refurbishing or expanding, so the committee is very active."

The landscape/hardscape committee has the task of blending the community with nature. Sheryl explains, "Hardscape includes signage, lighting, water features, and other outdoor items that are non-organic." The outdoors space is not wasted, as there are 13 miles of pedestrian paths throughout Shadow Wood and the Brooks. "Bicyclists, joggers, walkers, and dog walkers all take advantage of the pedestrian paths," Sheryl notes.

The financial committee and staff are contending with the challenge of managing finances intelligently, though Sheryl says they have had a few homeowners affected by foreclosures. "We're starting to see the effects of the economic conditions in our area," she adds. "Last year, we worked very hard at trimming costs. We combined efforts with other communities in The Brooks for cost leveraging on large purchases such as fertilizer and pesticides, for example. The three Shadow Wood departments try to utilize the same vendors, and we were aggressive with our service providers this past year requesting no increase in prices. We also reduced our fleet of vehicles for the gatehouse and landscape departments."

"But at this point," Sheryl predicts, "any additional expense reductions would begin to affect the services we provide to our residents. Our homeowners have said, 'We appreciate the savings

you've achieved; please strive to investigate further options, but we want to continue to maintain the outstanding appearance and service levels in our community."

One large savings has come about as a result of their disaster preparedness work, in the form of a workers' compensation insurance rebate of \$33,000. "It's an incentive rebate we're able to enjoy due to our low loss ratio," explains Sheryl. "One of our primary goals is zero lost time, and we're up to over 540 days with zero lost-time accidents. We really do try to foster a safe environment for our staff and homeowners."

The force behind Shadow Wood's extensive disaster preparedness is the Health, Safety, Environment, and



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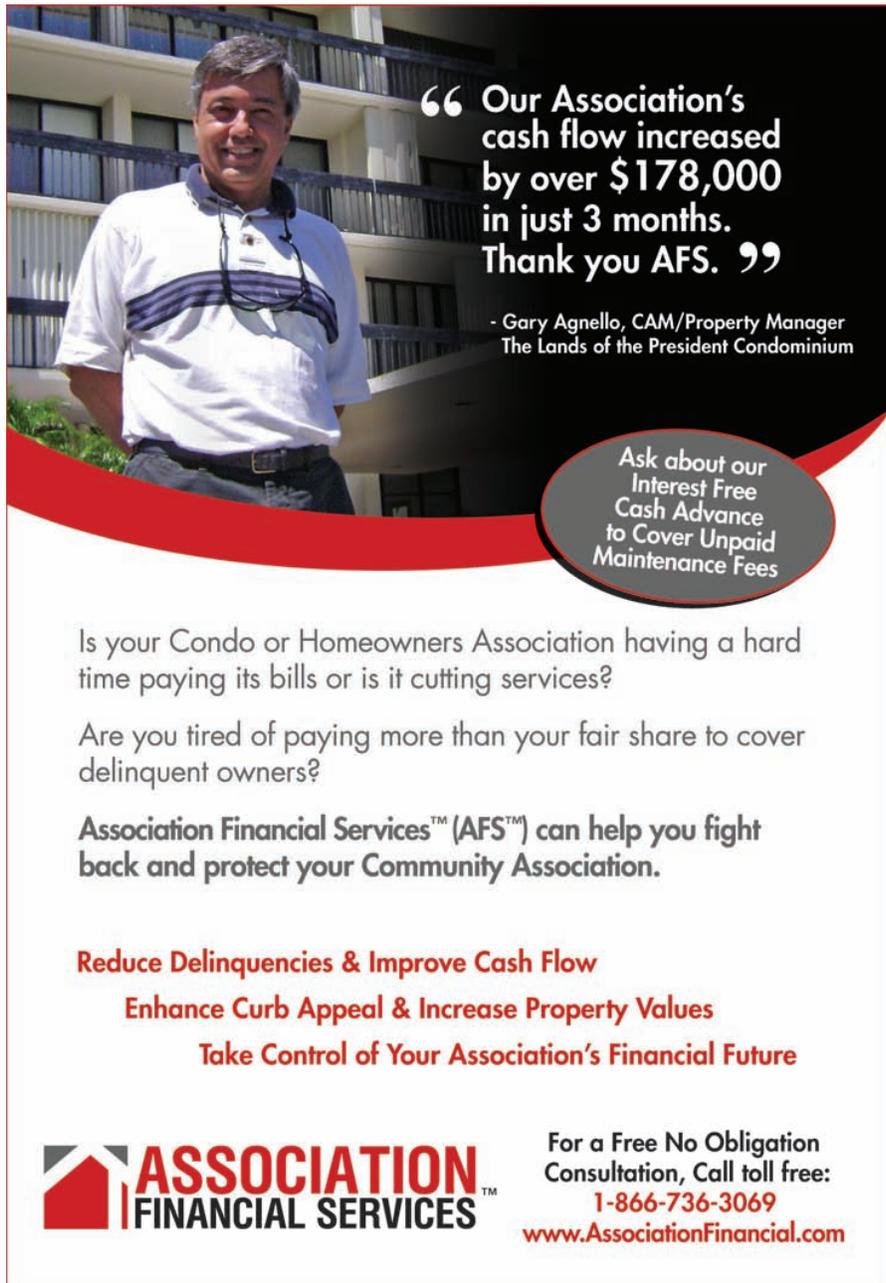
Transportation (HSET) Committee. "Members of the committee have had some work experience in related fields, and they were a very strong committee even during transition from the developer," says Sheryl. "The committee's objectives include emphasis on the social/physical environment, conservation measures, proper use and disposal of hazardous materials, and the safety and healthy well-being of residents and staff with the expectation of zero internal or agency violations. We lead the pack with our disaster preparedness plan, though implementing it initially was daunting."

With their experience in the field, the HSET committee members assessed potential disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, fires, and hazardous materials incidents. Nearby major thoroughfares, freight trains, and the county water plant are seen as sources for hazardous materials, as well as the fuels and landscape management chemicals which Shadow Wood itself stores and uses.

"Soon after transition from the developer, we hired a consulting firm to help us develop and implement our plan," Sheryl reports. "We refined work practices and procedures, and now audit our Chemical Management Plan annually. We continually try to include Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)

for chemicals used and stored in the facility, in Spanish when possible. We feel this may help our Spanish-speaking employees comprehend the information quickly and efficiently. We also conduct annual safety awareness training in English and Spanish." These seventeen modules cover safety issues from blood-borne pathogens to ladder safety. Shadow Wood does not allow any highly toxic chemicals to be used on-site, including arsenic-containing compounds.

The Shadow Wood Preparedness Plan, which is reviewed annually and submitted to Lee County, delineates responsibilities and preventive actions for a tropical storm (winds 39-73 mph) watch and warning, and a hurricane watch or warning. Before hurricane season, all supplies are stocked and the community is photographed. All residents are likewise



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Supplies to be maintained include storm advisory flags, flashlights, batteries, safety vests, first aid kits, shovel, camera, plastic lawn bags, duct tape, scissors, water, and a weather radio.

In addition to regular website updates and email and phone communication, the community utilizes a color-coded flag alert system at the gatehouses to communicate weather conditions: yellow designates a tropical storm or hurricane watch, meaning its arrival is 36 hours away; a red flag designates warning, meaning arrival is 24 hours away; blue indicates an evacuation order with the shelter closed; and white indicates all clear. Evacuation decisions are made by the local government.

The Shadow Wood Country Club, maintained by the Bonita Bay Group, is a designated hurricane shelter designed to withstand winds of at least 120 mph. The facility has 30,000 square feet at an elevation of 16½ feet and is equipped with emergency power generation and potable water.

The plan includes site-specific steps, suited to the timeframe for an anticipated storm, including the following tasks:

- Top off fuel and water containers
- Notify residents of weather status by flags, email, phone, and website
- Secure loose items (including construction areas; deny access to building material deliveries)
- Turn off power, water, irrigation systems, and fuel pumps
- Leave entry gates open and remove arms
- Install shutters
- Place materials in waterproof bags
- Wrap computers and elevate

If a hurricane is predicted to strike within 48 hours, storm preparation duties are conducted and non-essential staff is dismissed. The remaining employees continue working, but are dismissed if winds reach 30 mph, as driving becomes unsafe by the time winds reach 40 mph.

All Shadow Wood residents are informed of Weather Emergency Seminars presented annually by the Lee County Emergency

Management Team. Emergency Preparedness brochures are available throughout the property and residents are informed of the Emergency Preparedness Plan when they purchase their home. Ultimately, residents are responsible for their own responsibilities, decisions, and actions.

"You can't over-prepare for hazardous material type disasters and clean-up emergencies," says Sheryl, "so each year we conduct a mock drill. It's observed by our consultants and committee volunteers and then is critiqued. This year the scenario included a chemical spill that resulted in the landscape building (allegedly) catching fire." And even though Sheryl knew a drill was in the works, she admits, "A chill went down my back when I received the call saying the 'building was on fire.' I realized it was the drill, but still...Then I put my portion of the plan into action." They try to capture as much of an emergency situation as possible, and Sheryl recalls,

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Sheryl points out, "When storm season normally occurs in our area, homeowners are often at their second home or traveling." To help those off-site keep up with their belongings and what is actually happening in the Shadow Wood locale, the staff posts updates and links to local weather sites on the Shadow Wood website. Additionally, Sheryl says, "We've purchased video cameras so we can stream pictures of the local situation on the website. Within 48 hours after an event, our gatehouse patrol conducts a visual exterior walk of every home in Shadow Wood and that's posted on the website. The employees will call a homeowner if there's a problem."

Planning for an emergency demands cooperation, and that is one of Sheryl's priorities for her staff. "Our primary goal is to work as a team with the board, committees, and homeowners. I derive a great satisfaction in that cooperative feeling. My ultimate goal is to continue to create a better environment for our residents and staff alike." And even the difficult times will be much better as Shadow Wood sets the standard for emergency preparedness. ■



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