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EARLY HISTORY OF UCO

Early History of the United Civic Organization by Bill Snyder

It should be noted that the activities and the experiences of the writer are closely related to the history of Century Village, and in many cases are part of the history of this Village.

Let me take you back to the time that Century Village was being built. Construction began in 1967 or 1968, and finished with the completion of the Dover buildings at or about 1974. At its completion, it had 7,854 units, ten or more swimming pools, a golf course, tennis courts, shuffleboard courts, two clubhouses, an administration building, a doctor's office, and several laundry installations throughout the Village.

At that time, Century Village was probably the largest condominium complex in the state of Florida. All of the recreational facilities in the Village were owned and controlled by the developer, and the residents were required to pay a recreational fee, whether or not they used the facilities. As the building of condominiums was a fairly new concept in the late 1960s, the laws governing condominium living were developed for the most part at the suggestion of the developers and, in my opinion, favored that group.

The philosophy of condominium living is sharing with and caring for your neighbors. The residents must work in unison with their neighbors for the betterment of the Village. If residents are not prepared to adopt this philosophy, then they are not prepared to live in a condominium community.

In 1972, when the writer moved into the Village, the residents were paying one recreational fee to management, which included the costs of transportation, security, recreational facilities and whatever else Management had to offer at that time. The transportation system consisted of open air carts pulled by a tractor-type vehicle. There was no protection against the rain and cold winds. Outside transportation consisted of two old buses which broke down frequently.

It should be mentioned, however, that during all of the 1970s, there were four different organizations that were active at that time. These were the CAR (Council of Area Residents), COA (Condominium Owners Association), the Alliance and the Village Mutual Association, who dropped out of this group and became involved in selling appliance insurance to CV residents. Of course, these organizations were organized for the purpose of helping the residents to obtain and retain those services from Management for which they were paying.

These organizations operated independently of each other, and if one organization devised a plan that would benefit the residents of this Village, it could not get support from the other organizations, and since none of these organizations had a majority of residents as members, none could put their plans into

operation.

Further, there was no plan from any of the above organizations to pass any news to the residents, despite the fact that these organizations were having periodic meetings with the developer in an effort to improve conditions in the Village. At that time, there was no newspaper or newsletter from which the residents could be informed of what was going on.

When Century Village construction started on or about 1969, there were four areas that were built from 1969 to 1971, namely, Golf's Edge, Plymouth, Oxford and Stratford. These were called "Independents." However, from 1971 to 1975, Century Village built the majority of the units numbering approximately 7000, contained in 284 separate condominiums. Village Management Inc. was a subsidiary of the Developer and was created to manage the numerous condominiums. This corporate entity was sometimes referred to as "Management" or "the Developer."

While the Developer was building and marketing its condominium units, it initiated a transportation system in Century Village to carry residents from their units to the central Clubhouse. In addition, the Developer initiated bus services from the Clubhouse to various areas surrounding the Village in order to meet the needs of the residents in the matter of shopping, restaurants, and also the need of these residents to obtain medical and other needs without the necessity of an automobile.

From 1971 through August of 1981, the transportation system was operated by Village Management Inc., a solely owned subsidiary of Century Village, Inc. Most of the 284 Condominium Associations gave Village Management the authority to handle all affairs of the Associations. From 1971 to 1975, Village Management included transportation services as items in each Association's budget and unit owners made mandatory maintenance payments based on this budget. Later, a dispute was to arise on whether transportation was part of this maintenance payment or was covered under a separate recreation lease paid to the Developer. At any rate, from 1971 through 1975, transportation was a mandated common expense payment paid by unit owners, either as part of maintenance or recreation, or a combination of both.

After the development was sold out in 1975, Village Management Inc. wanted to turn over the transportation system to the Associations for their own management and operation. The Associations took the position that transportation was part of the recreation lease common expense payment to Century Village Inc. and, therefore, should not be turned over to the unit owners to operate at their own additional expense. Village Management disagreed and filed an action in the Circuit Court of Palm Beach County, styled Village Management Inc. vs. Waltham A. Condominium Association, et al, wherein all 284 Associations were sued as defendants.

Since this lawsuit did not, however, include the so-called "Independents" such as Plymouth, Golf's Edge, et al; Village Management's lawsuit sought a declaratory judgment that transportation services should be

paid for by unit owners as a maintenance common expense and was not part of the recreational common expense payments. As an interim solution, the Trial Court entered an order on April 2, 1975, directing all Associations to pay for transportation. Transportation continued under this Court Order for the next five years.

It should be noted, however, that from 1972, when the writer moved into the Village, until 1975, conditions in the Village were fairly good. The residents were paying Management an assessment of approximately \$35 per month, which included transportation, security and whatever else the residents were entitled to receive.

During this time and through the balance of the 1970s, the CAR organization had periodic meetings with Management in order to seek improvements in the Village and to obtain those items to which the residents were entitled.

As was previously mentioned, during the 1970s, there was no newspaper or newsletter issued and the residents were at a loss as to what was happening between Management and the organizations representing the residents. The writer, who was President of the overall Windsor Association, decided to hold monthly open-air meetings in order to inform the residents of what was taking place between Management and the organization representing the residents. These meetings were open to all Associations, and the attendance amounted to 300 to 400 residents, mostly from Windsor, who brought their own folding chairs and sometimes sat in the hot sun for two hours or more in order to hear the latest news as to what was happening in the Village.

On June 8, 1979, and after four weeks of trial, Circuit Court Judge Timothy Poulton entered a final judgment on the transportation issues. He found that the parties failed in a meeting of the minds on whether transportation services should be paid as a common expense maintenance or as a common expense recreation payment. The Court then concluded that both the recreation lease and Management contract should be invalidated, as the parties did not gain a mutual meeting of minds on the important issue of transportation. And finally, the Court dissolved its interim order of April 2, 1973, leaving its Association free to contract for its transportation.

After Judge Poulton entered this Judgment, the parties entered into negotiations, which resulted in settlement of all issues. A Stipulated Settlement was entered into by all parties, which declared "community services," including transportation, to be an essential quasi-governmental service. The Court then reserved jurisdiction over these essential services. No appeal was taken from this Final Judgment.

After Judge Poulton had entered his Final Judgment in the transportation litigation in June 1979, the transportation system continued as in the past. Village Management continued to operate the system and collected funds from Associations who wanted the service. The prior litigation had divided Century Village

into two camps known as the "CAR" group, or active litigants against Management, and the "COA" group who, although they were defendants, did not actively oppose Management.

Following Judge Poulton's initial order invalidating the recreation leases for the CAR litigants, Village Management did cut off services to the CAR Associations. The COA Associations continued to receive the transportation services. However, unit owners, regardless of their affiliations, wishing to use the transportation service, were free to do so by paying their transportation payment directly to Village Management.

The conversion from a mandatory payment system to an individual payment system soon began to cause problems for Village Management Inc. Management sent notices to the residents that it was losing money on the system. Finally, Management announced that effective August 31, 1981, they would be transferring the entire transportation system, including the trams and buses, to a company called Merchant Police of the Palm Beaches. It should be noted that Merchant Police was also supplying the security for the Village at that time.

Inasmuch as Management refused to permit the CAR members to ride the buses, it became essential that transportation be made available for these residents. As a result, the writer negotiated a contract with Seacrest Maintenance Company, who was supplying lawn and building maintenance to most of the residents at that time. This service started shortly after Management declared that CAR residents could not use the transportation service. The CAR residents, who wished to take advantage of this service, paid their transportation costs to Seacrest.

Merchant Police operated the transportation system from September 1, 1981, to August 31, 1982, and was bound to operate the system under the same schedules and equipment as Management had used in the past. Merchant Police relied on individual contracts from individual unit owners to pay for the service. Like Village Management, Merchant Police found it could not make money operating a voluntary payment system. It became obvious to many people at Century Village that a voluntary payment system could not survive.

It was about 1980 or 1981, that CAR requested that their members, and others in the Village, withhold recreation payments to Management until certain issues between CAR and Management could be settled. As a result, Management fenced in the Clubhouse and all of the swimming pools in the Village that belonged to Management. Also, the golf course was not available to the CAR members. This caused quite a havoc in the Village in that Management dismissed the security people and boarded up the security offices at both gates, leaving the Village open to anyone who chose to come into the Village. As a result, the residents who moved into the Village previously had to seek other means of recreation on the outside of the Village.

Management then issued a notice saying that any resident who wishes to use the facilities would have to

pay the assessment and any back assessments that were due to Management. These residents who moved into the Village to enjoy the facilities, such as the bingo games and whatever else was available, rushed to pay the assessments and the back dues and were permitted to use the facilities. Needless to say that this group included many of the CAR members, which at that time amounted to approximately 3,600 unit owners, or about 45% of the Village.

Representatives of COA decided to meet with Management for the purpose of preparing a new Amendment to the Recreation Lease. This they did and after some negotiations, a new Amendment between COA and Management was established. This Amendment was passed on to the COA members, and others who wished to sign the Amendment. The CAR representatives, noting that they were losing a considerable number of their members, decided, two weeks after the COA Amendment was negotiated, that they would also meet with Management in an effort to establish an Amendment for their members. This they did, and after some negotiations, a Lease Amendment for the CAR members was established.

At that time, the residents of Century Village now had two separate and distinct Lease Amendments. This was not a good situation for the residents, despite the fact that some of the items in both Amendments were similar, two of the most important factors in those Amendments differed considerably.

For example: The COA Amendment called for an assessment which was considerably higher than the assessment contained in the CAR Amendment. Also, this Amendment called for a \$10 per month increase, starting January 1, 1990. The CAR Amendment called for an assessment which was considerably lower than the COA Amendment. This Amendment also called for a \$10 per month increase starting January 1, 1990. Both of these Amendments called for an additional increase in the years after 1990. As the writer recalls, the CAR Amendment called for an increase of \$1.50 per month in each year after 1990 until 1999. The monthly increase after 1990 in the COA Amendment was considerably higher than the increase for the CAR members.

In view of this situation, Management notified both parties that they had to resolve these differences and set a date as of July 1, 1985, wherein the differences should be resolved, otherwise the Amendments would remain the same until 1999. (It should be noted that during the administration of the writer, who was President of UCO at that time, the differences were resolved, and a new Lease Amendment was established for all of the unit owners in the Village.)

From 1980 to 1982, there was considerable turmoil in the Village. There was no cooperation between CAR and COA, and as far as leadership was concerned, there was none. Other than negotiating the two Lease Amendments, there was no plan to improve the living conditions in the Village. Further, there was a bad feeling between most of the residents and Management.

The residents were reminded that in CV Deerfield, an organization was formulated during the construction

of that Village that truly represented all of the residents of that Village. When that Village was completed, the organization was in a position to deal with management and were successful in obtaining their demands. Not so here in CV West Palm Beach, where the residents did not know what was in store for them in the coming years.

In 1982, from the thousands of residents who were living here at that time, one man decided that something had to be done in order to make this Village a decent place in which to live. That man was Hy Ruchlis. He took it upon himself to meet with several residents, who were also concerned about the future of the residents in the Village. This meeting proved to be very successful, and resulted in the formation of the United Civic Organization.

The first step of this committee was to obtain qualified people who would become officers of this newly-formed organization. This was done, and at the first meeting of UCO, officers and board members were selected and approved, thus started the task of UCO to represent all of the residents in the Village.

The first President of UCO was Philip Sokol, whom we felt was highly qualified to do the job of organizing the residents and to handle whatever problems confronted the people. Also selected at the first meeting were four Vice Presidents, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and ten Board Members.

In March 1983, at the first meeting of the United Civic Organization, which was held at the auditorium of the Clubhouse, all new officers were sworn in and UCO started the task of representing the residents of this Village. It was a very difficult task, since several of the units in the Village were not in favor of the new organization. However, the new officers and members of UCO worked very hard at making a success of this organization and were gradually obtaining some of the units who were opposed to UCO previously.

With the coming of UCO, there was no further need for CAR or COA. As a result, they were disbanded and UCO started the task of dealing with problems that affected all of the residents of the Village, some of whom did not approve of the organization of UCO or some of the methods or plans that UCO was taking on in order to organize the Village.

As of March 1984, I was elected President of UCO and continued the work of the former President. We installed the gates and fences around the Village, improved the transportation system, improved the security and started to make some progress with Management in obtaining some of the things to which we were entitled.

I retired in March 1987 after serving three terms as President of UCO. Following my retirement as President, I became a Board Member for the next 14 years.

Think of it: For millennia, most people had basically lived and died in the hometowns where they were born. Later, young folks left to build new homesteads or to find work in distant places. But here were parents and grandparents, couples and singles, including widows and widowers, who chose to move away from people they loved, people whose company they enjoyed, plus the security that comes from being in a safe, familiar environment. They trusted that in mingling with peers roughly their own age, they would become "born again." Despite their advanced years in comparison with the general population, these Century Villagers were optimists. They had a pioneer spirit, much like Israelis in the 1940s and 1950s or like most Chinese today, or indeed, like 19th century Americans who had crossed open territory to settle in the West.

Choosing to relocate to a different, distant place solely on the basis of age, they were participants in a brand-new social phenomenon that has yet to be fully appreciated by the media or documented by historians. Century Village, West Palm Beach, was the first of its kind. Other CVs came later. Today, retirement communities are an accepted part of America's landscape.

Not all was paradise, of course. Adjustments to a new environment, to a new life had to be made. Not every neighbor loved every other neighbor, although personality differences were more or less overcome, since everyone understood that they had essentially the same reason for coming here. And even if they were unhappy, if their new surroundings failed to meet their expectations, they couldn't go home again, for that would be an admission of misjudgment or defeat.

The new life was harder on women. Most of their generation had been traditional "homemakers," nurturing children, bolstering their men. When they were "back home," wherever that had been, they had seen their husbands twice a day and fed them at night. Now the men were constantly around, expecting to have both lunch and dinner, moreover, expecting the wife to prepare it. They'd not anticipated that. There were divorces as well. Two of my mother's dearest friends were a newly married couple. But "she" had been "the other woman" in a nasty divorce case. What became of the wife I don't know, but the scandal was such that the newlyweds stayed in Century Village for little more than a year before moving to another Florida condominium. This was hardly a unique occurrence.

Another problem which emerged was anti-Semitism.

Century Village was open to everyone. The developers didn't care who bought a home so long as they were paid. And initially, the Village had rather a diverse population. Yet, fairly quickly, Jewish newcomers became the majority (hence the on-premises synagogue).

During the American Civil War, Floridians had fought on the side of the Confederate States. Until Congress passed the Civil Rights Acts in the 1960s, Florida was still "southern." West Palm Beach was a springtime training camp for the old Brooklyn Dodgers or its then-Montreal farm club. The first blacks, or "Negroes" as

they were still called, who integrated the team, were not allowed to stay in the same hotel as their white teammates. The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach was "restricted": no Jews or blacks allowed. The same rules were applied by Palm Beach's exclusive social clubs. When it was evident that Jews were establishing a sizeable presence in Century Village, anti-Semitism surfaced. The editor of The Palm Beach Post predicted that riots would ensue. The Cox family, then as now the newspaper's publisher, shipped him off to Texas, or so I was told.

Cooler heads of course prevailed. The business community, for one, realized that an increased population would vitalize the dormant local economy. Accordingly, new bank branches opened just outside Century Village: retirees would want someplace to put their Social Security checks. The Palm Beach Mall opened with a heady mixture of upscale-downscale stores, most of which initially did very well. (The decline of the mall — becoming a hang-out for youngsters — is another story waiting to be told.) New furniture and home furnishing stores opened their doors. Supermarkets came and pharmacies and doctors and gas stations, which were needed to help everyone get to all those other places. Every bit of this was new. And sure enough, the local economy grew.

Century Village and the Palm Beach Mall were built on reclaimed marshlands, drained and made ready for people-use. They also pointed the way to western expansion in Palm Beach County, especially along Southern Boulevard and Okeechobee Boulevard. When I first arrived, there were still cows to be seen on Haverhill Road, Jog Road and all the way out to the Glades. Century Village literally broke new ground!

Politically, most of the new arrivals were self-styled "liberal Democrats." Throughout almost all its history, Florida had been a Democratic state — Republicans did not even appear on election ballots — but a backlash in "the old South" to the civil rights movements of the 1950s and '60s helped to revive the Florida Republican Party. In Palm Beach County, the local powers-that-be gerrymandered, divided Century Village into two voting districts, thereby diluting Democratic Party votes.

Despite the Democratic majority in Century Village, Republicans could always be found here (including my mother, a contrarian when she wanted to be). Throughout the eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency, the parents of his Chief of Staff (who is still active in Washington), lived in Century Village. I sat next to them at the opera.

Similarly, the mother of Mr. Reagan's first director of the Office of Management and Budget was a Century Village resident and a friend of mine. The son even now teaches at Harvard. Century Village always had an intellectual component. A syndicated Washington columnist, whose columns frequently appear in The Palm Beach Post, had parents who lived here and attended my "Weekly News Summary" course. A current class member has a son who teaches at Princeton University: He is one of less than a half dozen people given full access by the University to all of Albert Einstein's scientific papers.

Some of the first people I met in Century Village were truly memorable. There was a non-resident American

woman, a guest of a friend of my mother, who had married a Japanese man and been in Hiroshima when Americans dropped the A-bomb. There was a man who claimed to have belonged to the Stern Gang, a group which in the 1940s bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing many British soldiers, when the city was still part of a British Mandate. That terrorist act has long been held to be a main reason for Britain throwing the whole question of Israeli independence into the lap of the United Nations.

I was introduced to a tiny circle of friends whose conversation invariably turned to the Spanish Civil War. Their talk always fascinated me. World War Two had passed. The Korean War had passed. The Vietnam War was being fought. And they were still debating 1930s Spain!

Much, much later, I met Walter Schanzer, the only one I name here, because he passed away not too long ago and had other friends besides myself in Century Village. Columnist, playwright, poet, Walter had been born in Vienna. Although he loved the city of his birth, in Nazi times, he knew he had to leave. That knowledge led him to pore through every American telephone book he could get his hands on. He picked out names at random and wrote, asking for help, asking someone to sponsor him so he could come to America and survive. Few people replied, yet some did. One person wrote, "All of your kind should be gassed." But Walter, who was Jewish, received another response. "Come. We'll be glad to have you." His sponsors were Christian, and Walter lived with them in Missouri until the old folks passed on. Until Walter died, even when he lived in Century Village, he kept up a running conversation, in letters, with the children of his sponsors.

Century Villagers' greatest contribution to Palm Beach County — other than bolstering the local economy and paving the way for others —arguably came in the realm of Arts and Entertainment. Especially among those who had lived in the museum-theater-concert hall northeast, they saw a West Palm Beach and surrounding cities and towns that to them were a "cultural wasteland." And they raised their voices in communal protest. The theme was picked up by members of the local media, who spoke and wrote about the need for cultural upgrading.

Naturally enough, there had always been locals who had hungered for more cultural outlets, but they'd not been united. The Kravis Center ultimately was paid for mostly by Palm Beachers, but the hue and cry for such a concert hall began in Century Village.

Palm Beach Opera firmly established its toehold in the Village. So did Regional Arts, which still presents great symphonic concerts. And so, to a large extent, did WXEL, National Public Radio and television in Palm Beach County. The Palm Beach Post initially editorialized against Channel 42 (our Channel 6) on the grounds there already existed PBS facilities broadcasting from Miami. The principal mover and shaker for the new channel, one Sam Marantz, didn't live in the Village, but he came here often to promote it, and promote it he did until the new stations became a reality.

From the time I came here, I basically held two job positions, talking and writing. At Palm Beach Community College (and briefly, at Northwood University), I taught a variety of history and social science courses: The Great Religions, Foreign Cultures Around the World, Current Events and the like. I was a frequent guest on radio talk shows. And at one time or another I wrote columns for numbers of local magazines and newspapers.

Primarily, but not exclusively, I wrote Arts and Entertainment pieces. In this latter capacity, I was always delighted when people I interviewed told me that their parents or aunt and uncle or someone else close to them lived in Century Village. We still have people active in Arts and Entertainment living here. And I'm told, although I haven't checked it out, we have staff people from The Palm Beach Post also residing here.

Times change. Today Century Village is once again a multi-ethnic community. In my unit alone, we have French-speaking, Italian-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. We have several Spanish-speaking people, including one who actually came from Spain. We have an Irish-born lady. We even have two illegal immigrants, a cat and a dog, whose masters brought them into our buildings despite the fact we have several people who are allergic to animals and voted "No" to household pets. I thought that the debates over The Spanish Civil War were intense! They were nothing compared to the Battle of the Critters!

Posted by UCO President at [11:35 PM](#)

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