

Sentinel News



A newsletter for owners and residents

February 2006

Message from the Association President

Please accept my warm wishes to everyone as the Association President for the 2005-2006 term! I feel very excited in addressing the many priorities facing our Association in the coming year, some of which I will briefly outline for the near-term below and will address other priorities in future newsletters.

First and foremost, I plan to proactively guide Management and the Board in the course of a thorough decision-making process on the proposed interior renovation project. I will encourage Management and the Board to be both methodical and decisive during our deliberations on the project. At the same time, I highly encourage residents to submit written comments to me or the Board through e-mail (sentinel.pres@comcast.net) or directly through the Management Office. We will make a sincere effort to balance the opinions of all 272 unit owners and the continual physical upkeep of our building.

Secondly, during the next year, I will encourage Management and the Board to think of innovative ways to communicate with the Association. Our first initiative will be a Board Social scheduled for Sunday, February 26. I hope many of you can join us to drink coffee and chat with me and members of the Board. I also encourage everyone to regularly visit the Association's website, www.sentinelcondos.org. You will find many of the Management messages, Board minutes, and House Rules and Regulations posted to the website that can be accessed at your leisure.

Lastly, I will focus Management and the Board's attention to our security needs. Being proactive and preventative will pay dividends to our Association in the long-term. As many of you have noticed recently, the security company increased their daily presence by two more hours per day. To report any suspicious activities, contact the on-duty security guard (571-214-5207), or call the 24-hour Management number (703-823-1951) to have the guard paged. Also, please be mindful of "tailgaters" at the public entryways. If you do not recognize a person behind you at the public entryways, please do not allow them to enter the building. A legitimate visitor will eventually be able to gain entry.

Best Wishes,

Rob

FYI

*Meet the Board on
Sunday Feb. 26*

**Meet the Board of Directors,
and your fellow residents, in
the Community Room
beginning at 2 p.m.
Snacks and beverages
will be served.**

2006 Board of Directors

**Rob Rapanut
President**

**Marisa Mullen
Vice President**

**Bruce Wilmot
Treasurer**

**Jonathan Shinn
Secretary**

**George Huff
Director**

So, You Want To Remodel Your Unit? Here's Some Scoop That Can Help You!

By Bruce Wilmot

As the Sentinel Board of Directors considers renovating the interior hallways of the building, some of us coincidentally have remodeled – or are considering remodeling – our own units. I am among them. In October, I finished (finally) a top-to-bottom makeover of my place. And now I figure anyone who wants to do some major home improvement can benefit from my experiences.

I guess the first thing that must be faced is: This is not an inexpensive undertaking. In particular, it costs a lot of money to remodel kitchens and bathrooms. When I first decided I wanted to do this, I visited with a design consultant who told me that to secure her services to coordinate and buy everything, it probably would cost me about \$60,000. When I finally picked my jaw up off the floor, I left her office hoping for a better (read: cheaper) way. And I found it.

Although it was still a very expensive undertaking, I managed to do it for about a third less by subcontracting everything myself. Of course, your costs might vary significantly, depending on such questions as: What construction materials are you going to use? Granite costs a lot more than Formica, to cite one obvious example. What grade of carpet and carpet backing will you have? How much of your furniture will you replace? And will you make use of an interior designer?

Organizing the renovation myself as I did took some time, because I was learning as I went. If you are considering renovating all or part of your unit, I think I can save you some time by sharing with you what I learned. The good news is that it was a very positive experience for me. The contractors I hired were virtually all *aces*, and I would recommend almost all of them *highly*. There were no nasty surprises, no horror stories. I would give all except one four stars on a four-star scale!

Here they are, more or less in the order in which they were hired, and my star (☆) ratings:

Bill Connelly (Dr. Drywall) ★★★★★
703-922-3839

Bill is our “go-to guy” at the Sentinel for drywall repairs in the common areas, but I discovered he can do much more than that. He has done lots of work in various units in this building. Kitchens are his particular specialty. He really functioned as my co-coordinator on this project,

recommending other contractors for different pieces of the job and also helping with design ideas. I was very specific about some of the things I wanted, and not quite sure what would work best in other areas, but Bill worked with me patiently on all of it. In addition to the kitchen, he did work in every other room.

Harv Rutnik (One-Call Remodeling) ★★★★★
571-237-1240

Working closely with Bill, Harv and his colleagues were responsible for most of the heavy lifting in the bathrooms. Like Bill, he was able to find materials at a discount in some instances. What was most impressive was that after some initial difficulty, he was able to fit a taller-than-standard bathtub into the master bath.

Electrical Dynamics Inc. ★★★★★
800-851-1020

I did not work with this company directly; they were subcontracted by Dr. Drywall. They do pretty much any sort of electrical work. Bill describes them as reasonably-priced and very professional. They will have my lasting gratitude for figuring out how to install a Jacuzzi-style tub that maintains water temperature.

Lowe's ★★
Stores Everywhere

Lowe's was responsible for replacing my doors. The installers did a reasonably good job making them fit, though it turns out one of them doesn't fit quite right and is a little difficult to close without making noise. Also, Lowe's was the *only* contractor that refused to do the work without me, or someone representing me, on the premises. A major plus to living in a high-rise condo is that contractors can check in at the Management office, get the keys, come do their work and leave. I figured if every other contractor, including cleaning services, can function this way, why couldn't Lowe's? But they wouldn't budge. The problem is they didn't tell me this *before* I had gone to the store and spent considerable time filling out the paperwork to get this job done!

The custom-fit doors didn't cost so much, but the installation was about three times that! Bottom line is: If you know how to install your own doors, *then* it's a good idea to go to Lowe's.

Vinyl-Lite Windows ★★★★★
703-550-7766

The original windows at the Sentinel are the product of ABC Glass. Like many of you, several years ago I began to notice the condensation that was forming between the

panes of glass in the double-paned living room window. So, I had the living room window replaced. And the condensation formed again! Not content with the five-year guarantee ABC Glass offers, I had new windows installed by Vinyl-Lite – which offered a 30-year guarantee.

The company has done work in this building before, so it knows how to install new windows consistent with our covenants. And these windows are nicer. Also, the company is aptly named; the windows are indeed “lite” – very easy to open and close. They are more expensive, of course, but I think they are worth it.

GBC Floors ★★★★★
703-451-5070 (Ask for Taner Aslan)

I think my unit was a particular challenge for the installers, because I had so much stuff in it. Many of my belongings were packed in boxes in every room, and the installers had to work around all of that, as well as several pieces of furniture I intended to keep. The company charges extra for working around furniture, but there is a maximum additional charge for this service, and it isn't *that* much extra. I am sure working in my furniture-and-box filled unit cost them some time, but they stayed past 8 p.m. without complaint.

By the way, on carpet and backing, you will have several choices of grade. I think this is not a place to skimp – either on the carpet *or the backing!* The good stuff should look and feel better much longer.

Paul Miller (Makenest Interiors) ★★★★★
540-664-1284; www.makenestinteriors.com

After all of that, it was time to buy some new window treatments and furniture. An unfruitful trip to Gallahan's in Fredericksburg convinced me that it would take me far too long to pick out all that I needed by myself, so I decided to find an interior designer. I went on-line (bless the Internet Age) and made what turned out to be just the right choice: Paul Miller of Makenest Interiors in Winchester. He does lots of work in this area, so the distance from Alexandria is not a problem. Also, I liked the fact he was easily accessible by e-mail.

Once again, I had some fairly strict criteria in some areas, but I wasn't sure what would work in others. All I knew is the furniture must be durable, and easy to keep looking clean. Working within my relatively limited furniture budget, Paul did an excellent job of choosing pieces that fit the bill, and also fit in with other pieces I had chosen to keep. Paul also chose exactly the right window treatments/blinds.

And there you have it: everything I ever needed to know about renovating a condominium unit – or, more

accurately, *everyone* I needed to know. If you are embarking on a complete remodeling job or just a piece of it, I trust this information will prove helpful. If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail them to me, c/o the Management office, or drop me a note at the office window.

Bruce Wilmot
February 2006

P.S.: As complex as my remodeling job was, it was an individual undertaking, not the multi-faceted team effort that any renovation of the Sentinel's common area interior will be. I regard myself as fairly careful with my money, but occasionally I splurged on my home project. I can assure you that as a member of your Board of Directors, I will strive to be more careful and conservative with *your* money in any renovation we approve.

West Garage Breezeways/Bridges

The work in this area was to address the water infiltration issues at each of these doors, and around the doors from the three levels (referred to as Level 2, 3 and 4).

The scope of the initial repairs included replacement of the thresholds at each of the bridgeway doors to help prevent water infiltration under the doorframes. This work was performed and water spray-tests were conducted, which indicated that the amount of water infiltrated was reduced. However, water was also found to be penetrating the exterior wall finishing around the doors. Also, a sealed joint running parallel to the door and wall in the concrete floor was found to be leaking.

The expanded work on level 2 was completed. On level 2 the area was retested with water sprayed from a garden hose. This additional work helped protect against moisture penetration during driving rains.

The remaining work on the level 2 bridge is to restore the interior finish (drywall) and repair the concrete below the level 2 bridge. The doors and exterior finish (EIFS) on levels 3 and 4 bridges will be repaired in a similar fashion. We will notify you as to when this work will take place, as we are awaiting a start date from the contractor.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation and we apologize for the inconvenience during this project.

Help The Sentinel Make \$40,000 By Doing Something You Do Anyway!

By Bruce Wilmot

Imagine if the Sentinel could add \$40,000 a year to its budget earnings every year, without raising condo fees by one dollar and by doing something you have to do anyway. That's my kind of deal. And if we can get everyone in the Sentinel participating, it can happen.

The Problem. As you are all too aware, there has been a lot of upward pressure on condo fees in the past few years. Rapidly rising energy and insurance costs, along with such major expenses as garage rehabilitation projects, have conspired to drive your condo fee up. And while we appear to be on track to increase our savings considerably over the next few years, there likely will also be some significant expenses. Everyone is aware by now that the Board of Directors is contemplating a major renovation of the interior hallways, and we have our eye as well on the elevators, which are expensive to maintain and whose parts will, when the time comes, be very expensive to replace.

So, making an additional \$40,000 a year -- the equivalent of about 7½ two-bedroom condo fees each year! -- is a big deal.

Part of the Solution. And how can we earn this money? The answer is something called a Grocery Scrip program, which is being offered by our local Giant food store. Here is how it works: The Sentinel buys grocery "scrip" from Giant, entitling us to buy \$1.00 worth of groceries for every 90 cents worth of scrip we buy. The Sentinel, in turn, sells the scrip to our residents at face value. Residents then use the scrip, rather than money, to buy our groceries. Residents could buy as little or as much scrip as they wish at the Management Office any time. While individual residents would not save directly on groceries, the Sentinel would make 10 cents for every dollar of scrip you buy. By our admittedly very rough estimate, if the groceries and other supermarket products bought by everyone at the Sentinel were purchased through this scrip program, your Association would be the beneficiary of \$40,000 each year! Who knows -- maybe we could make more!!

We Need Your Participation. To make the program worth our while, we need participants -- lots of them. Please take a moment to let us know whether you would participate, by filling out the form below and returning it to the Management Office.

Note: We are researching whether other stores might also offer such programs. Safeway, unfortunately, does not.

**SENTINEL OF LANDMARK
GROCERY SCRIP PROGRAM**

Yes, I am interested in participating.

Name: _____

Unit Number: _____

Management Office Reminders

Balconies

There are still some balconies that have inappropriate balcony furnishings and are cluttered. Balconies are not to be used as storage areas. Notices will be sent to residents with inappropriate furnishings and they will be given a time frame in which to remove these items.

Please remember that barbecuing of any type is prohibited on balconies. If you have a grill stored on your balcony it must be removed.

If you must smoke on the balcony, please refrain from throwing cigarette butts or matches off the balcony. We have had several incidents of small brush fires near the building which could have been very dangerous if they had not been caught early.

Elevators

Please do not prop the elevator doors open with packages or other objects, as this can cause damage to the elevator mechanisms. Also, please remember that some residents live directly across from the elevators, and they are subjected to noises that other residents don't have to cope with, such as loud conversations, elevator doors banging and beeping when propped open, and the sound of the alarm bells when activated. Please be courteous when waiting for the elevator, especially during the evening hours.

Trash Rooms

Please do NOT place trash bags on the floor of the trash rooms. All trash must be placed in plastic bags and tied shut. All trash bags must be placed in the trash chute, or taken to one of the main trash rooms at the loading docks if they will not fit in the chute. Do not leave anything on the floor of the trash rooms. Trash left on the floors will create unwanted odors and attract bugs. All newspapers and recycling materials are to be taken to the receptacles in the loading dock areas and not left on the trash room floors.

Sentinel News – February 2006

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Condominium Association Board of Directors
and the Sentinel Management Staff

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Please direct comments and submissions to
the Sentinel Management Office, 703-823-1951
or sentinel.condo@comcast.net

The FITT Group @ RE/MAX Regal

February 2006

Dear Sentinel Owners,

I want to express to you my pleasure at having been asked to serve on our Board. It was a rewarding experience and I am grateful for the opportunity. I hope that each of you will take the time this year to attend Board and Committee meetings and get involved in your community. Your participation is needed.

Before I talk about the spring market 2006, let me give you year-end 2005 results: A total of 25 condos were listed and sold. Five were one-bedrooms, three were two-bedroom one-bath units, and 17 were two-bedroom, two-bath units.

I've been asked if sales at The Tuscany, The Ridgeleigh or The Exchange at Van Dorn may negatively affect our market at the Sentinel. My answer regarding The Tuscany and The Ridgeleigh is a resounding "no." The Exchange, however, is another matter entirely.

The Tuscany and The Ridgeleigh pricing is significantly higher than the Sentinel for much less square footage. Further, most consumers that are qualified to pay \$390,000 to \$450,000 are unlikely to make a <\$300,000 purchase. So very few buyers will be "lost" to either of those places.

The Exchange at Van Dorn, however, is another matter. Their one- and two- bedroom prices are within \$50,000 of ours, and they are now advertising a second garage space "free" for anyone writing a contract. We all know just how appealing a second garage space is and typically the cost is anywhere from \$8,500 to \$26,000. So we will lose some business to The Exchange at Van Dorn.

Since mid-January the activity has increased substantially and indications continue to reflect that the spring market will be robust. One of our one-bedroom units is under contract and three of the two-bedrooms are under contract.

As a reminder, condition is now very important. To compete, ensure your home shows well. If you can afford new carpet, new appliances or faucet updates, do spend the money.

Best regards,
Dorinda Fitt
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