

# The Ridges Landowners Association Newsletter

Number 34

Fall 2004

*In an effort to keep all landowners in The Ridges informed of the status of the development of the community and issues that may affect you, we are distributing this quarterly newsletter. We hope that you enjoy this periodic update and find it useful.*

## From the President's desk

### Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of The Ridges Landowners' Association is planned for Thursday evening October 28. Please see Dave Kingston's notice in this issue.

### Covenants

Some discussion among The Ridges residents, directors, and architectural committee members has occurred regarding compliance with our covenants and possible amendments.

One issue regards signs. Many of our properties are not in strict compliance with Section 7.09 of the covenants; for example, our security service and no-trespassing signs are not permitted (without Association approval). Restrictions on the size of signs advertising real estate might in differing aspects be both too broad and too limited and might have been interpreted in one case by a contractor to erect what looked almost like a billboard. Contractors' signs often come and go almost faster than we can keep up. Finally, stick-on posters (rather than free-standing signs) sometimes appear in the political season—should these be controlled? These are examples of situations that have generated complaints to the directors this summer. We might draft an amendment to the covenants to present at the annual meeting, but we should not proceed down this route without broad agreement that these concerns warrant that formality rather than case-by-case application of judgment. Let's keep in mind that if we each try to keep this stuff to a minimum on our own lots, there'll be fewer occasions when we bug each other and less reason to add to our paper load.

Another issue regards setback incursions for landscaping earthworks. The covenants address the location only of *structures*, not landscaping features. With large houses being put on lots with difficult

terrain, the designer might find it useful to sculpt the lot around the house into the setback. Should the covenants be amended to regulate this, for example, by including earthworks inside the setback in the scope of the architectural review?

Although the directors may have some reservations about proposing these amendments, we'll probably have draft language for discussion and maybe voting at the general meeting. The covenants can be amended only by a positive vote representing 2/3 of the lots subject to the covenants.

### Thefts

Two property thefts occurred in The Ridges this summer. One involved breaking and entering a barn and theft of tack. The other was theft of a contractor's Bobcat tractor. Although in neither case was a house broken into, these cases remind us that vigilance is always necessary. A deterrent worth considering is motion-detector lights. These can be very intimidating when they pop on in the darkness. But they require some adjustment to minimize activation when the wind stirs the trees, or Rover goes chasing the coyotes.

### Trails

As real estate development around the US285 corridor continues, access to the old foot/bike/horse trails becomes more limited. Perhaps we could use our contacts in other subdivisions to build some agreement on mutual access for some kind of trail network that doesn't leave everybody stranded on subdivision islands. Keep this thought in mind when you talk to your friends elsewhere in the Simpson Ranch community.

Although we'd like to see trails kept open, motor vehicles are generally not the intended users but sometimes intrude. Keeping a lid on this nuisance probably will always require some attention. It is

possible that some of the trespassers are not aware that they are on private property and private easements, so we are considering whether additional signs should be installed.

### **Snakes**

Several rattlesnakes have been seen in yards in The Ridges. Be careful when wandering through the brambles. *(Remember, before you try to kill one, snakes are generally beneficial animals, much maligned. They eat rodents that otherwise carry diseases. – Ed.)*

*Olin van Dyck*

## **Annual meeting of landowners announced**

The annual meeting of members will be held Thursday, October 28 at the Steaksmith at El Gancho (same place as last year) from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

6–7 pm Cash bar including red and white wine by the glass

7–8 pm Dinner (details will be sent out shortly with the official notice of the meeting)

8–10 pm Meeting of members

The main items on the agenda for the meeting are:

- (1) review of the 2004 budget-to actual financial report and approval of the 2005 budget and assessment;
- (2) election of the board of directors for 2005;
- (3) any new business.

If you have some issues you wish to bring up, please notify Olin van Dyck or any other board member so we can be somewhat prepared to discuss it.

*Dave Kingston*

## **Roads**

### **Mowing**

The roadside along the first mile of Alma/Principe, where some of the thickest stands of weeds occur, was mowed recently by the new operator, Chuck Randall, of our usual tractor-mower business. Chuck was careful to leave the chamisa (rabbitbrush) and wildflowers such as asters, cowpen daisies, and sunflowers standing as best as he could, using our combined extensive horticultural knowledge that wildflowers are anything topped with red, yellow, or blue. *(It was with great relief when I first saw the results of the mowing that indeed such care was taken in preserving so much of the desirable vegetation. It would have been so much easier and quicker to cut everything in the mower's*

*path. That “extensive horticultural knowledge” Olin refers to worked! Thank you! – Ed.)*

### **Goatheads**

The goathead weed, or puncturevine, is making its annual appearance in The Ridges (see the Spring 2003 Newsletter). The plant thrives where there is extra rain runoff, as alongside roads. This habit makes it a particular nuisance to bicycle tires and dog paws but also means that it is easy to find and pull from wet soil. If we keep after it, it's a manageable nuisance. Left free to spread, as in so many places in Santa Fe city, it can make roadsides and sidewalks a terrible trail of thorns. Watch for it—pull it out—from your frontage. *(This ground-hugging vine is an exception to the rule in the article above: the flowers are small and yellow. Pull it and dispose of it in a manner it will not reseed. - Ed.)*

### **Speed Dips in EDU Easement**

El Dorado Utilities has an easement through The Ridges private property at the end of Hijo de Dios South to reach a water well. Residents noted that the service vehicles would often speed unsafely along this narrow, twisting path. The new local manager for EDU responded immediately to our complaint by directing his workers to dig speed dips into the trail, as well as cautioning the drivers to slow down. Thanks, EDU, and let's hope the problem is under control.

*Olin van Dyck*

## **Natural gas update**

During this past year there have been four new natural gas hookups in The Ridges and one in Cimarron. PNM has made their review of new hookups and soon should be sending us the rebates for distribution.

*Dave Kingston*

## **Old Las Vegas Highway plans**

At some point in time travelers who use Old Las Vegas Highway as a respite from the much busier I-25 on trips to or from Santa Fe will find road construction occurring. Most people in the area were unwilling to have the character of such a historic road altered into another almost-super highway.

Property owners Tom and Teresa Seamster (Lot 48), representing 285 South, have been serving on the Old Las Vegas Highway Community Task Force to develop a context-sensitive design for the Old Las Vegas Highway. Following is an excerpt from the letter regarding the work on the committee:

“We are pleased that our considerations for preserving the footprint of the road, maintaining its National Register eligibility, and protecting the night sky have been incorporated into the design. We further support the most recent refinements:

- The 40/50 MPH speed designations
- No lighting at El Gancho with conduit for possible future lighting
- Suspended traffic signal at El Gancho strung between poles
- Going with SHPO's position on shoulder coloring.

“The Task Force would like to continue as a part of the planning and implementation process and to be informed of further developments and decisions.

“Thank you for your significant role in this process with the NM Department of Transportation. We hope that this can serve as a model within a context sensitive design framework for future New Mexico projects.”

*Tom Seamster*

## **Another perspective on the dead piñon problem**

From resident Bill Waldman (Lot 38) and who is also the State Director of The Nature Conservancy, we received the following information in a letter written to the US Secretary of Agriculture and the US Secretary of Interior by several scientists in the west actively engaged in basic research and restoration of Southwestern forests and woodlands. It has been heavily excerpted for inclusion in the Newsletter and should be available in greater detail on The Ridges website.

“...As piñon trees decay, the potential energy content of the residual wood declines markedly. Downed woody fuel mass on the ground will indeed increase, and may result in locally intense burning if a fire is ignited, but these patchily distributed dead fuels probably will not carry severe fires over large areas in the way that an intact canopy of live piñon and juniper can do. Furthermore, our fire-fighting technology is generally effective at controlling surface fire, whereas crown fires are essentially uncontrollable. Thus, rather than elevating the risk of catastrophic fire, the recent episode of widespread tree mortality probably will be followed by *reduced* fire hazard for several decades, once the dead needles have fallen off the trees, because the canopy fuel bed has been effectively thinned.

“A more certain and potentially more serious ecological consequence of extensive piñon mortality than the possibility of elevated fire hazard is the loss of a critical

food resource for native wildlife. A host of animals, from mice and piñon jays to deer and wild turkeys, depend on the energy-rich nut of the piñon tree. Many local people also harvest and rely on piñon nuts to supplement other food sources. Where most of the piñons have died over large areas, we can anticipate potentially severe disruptions and shifts in local food chains, cascading from the direct consumers of piñon nuts through their predators and symbiotic species.

“A final concern about the ecological consequences of widespread piñon mortality is that the openings in woodland canopies may permit invasion by non-native weedy plants that thrive in open environments free of competition from native plant species. The expansion of aggressive weeds is one of the most serious ecological issues now facing the Southwest, because the weeds can displace native species and alter natural ecological processes like biogeochemical cycling and disturbance regimes.

### “What are Appropriate Responses to the Widespread Piñon Mortality Now Occurring?”

“We think it is important to critically evaluate the conventional wisdom about the connection between dead trees and fires, as we do above, because a natural reaction to the extensive tree mortality now occurring is to believe that we urgently need to remove all of that dead fuel and thereby prevent a catastrophic fire. We stress that there is no strong empirical support for this idea. Moreover, our assessment of fire behavior in piñon-juniper woodlands leads to the opposite conclusion — that the likelihood of severe fire behavior probably will not be elevated, but in fact will likely be reduced in the aftermath of the current piñon mortality event.

“On the other hand, an ambitious effort to remove the dead trees is likely to have at least two undesirable ecological consequences. First, the soil disturbance associated with any extensive salvage removal of dead wood would accelerate soil erosion, damage to archaeological sites, and weed invasion. An increase in the non-native species cheatgrass could elevate the fire risk, because cheatgrass readily carries fire through the forest floor and can lead to unnaturally frequent fires, as has occurred across millions of acres of sagebrush-dominated landscapes in the Great Basin. It would be ironic and unfortunate if we actually increased the risk of destructive fire in these stands by enhancing the spread of cheatgrass through well-intended but misinformed salvage efforts. A second hazard that would be associated with removing dead piñon trees is the potential for interfering with the planting of piñon seeds by native birds and small mammals, as well as

survival of young piñon seedlings that have germinated. Reestablishment of piñon and restoration of the damaged piñon-juniper stands over the next several years will be accomplished primarily through: (1) the growth of existing small piñon seedlings, and (2) the seed dispersal and caching activities of piñon jays, Clark's nutcrackers, and other animals. Removal of the dead trees may interfere with this process by eliminating cover and landmarks needed by these seed-burying animals. Moreover, the dead wood may perform the important function of protecting young piñon seedlings from excessive sun, desiccation, and browsing. Piñon seedlings that survive to adulthood almost always become established in the shade of another tree or shrub or next to large pieces of wood. For all of these reasons, we urge caution when contemplating any program to try to salvage or otherwise quickly remove the dead trees in Southwestern piñon-juniper woodlands. The presumed benefits of such programs would be doubtful, but the likely damages would be significant.

“Another management issue that is raised by the recent widespread mortality of piñon trees, has to do with current and upcoming plans to thin piñon-juniper woodlands across the Southwest, by mechanical means or with prescribed fire, in an attempt to reduce fire hazard and restore a more open stand structure. These well-meaning efforts made sense in many areas prior to the current mortality event, because of abnormal increases in tree density during the last 100 years as a result of grazing and fire exclusion. However, we should consider the possibility that the recent mortality episode has accomplished much of this desired thinning of stands. The more serious issue now may be the regional scarcity of healthy piñon trees. Rather than removing any of the piñon that have survived the effects of drought and insects, we probably should preserve all of the remaining trees, as sources of food for wildlife and people, and as sources of seed for restoring piñon populations where they have been drastically reduced or extirpated.

“In summary, a major mortality event is now occurring, and is significantly reducing the abundance of piñon trees across a huge portion of the Southwest. The principal causes of this extensive mortality are all climate-related, namely the past decade of drought and unusually high temperatures, and the preceding two decades of unusually wet weather. Thus, there appears to be little or nothing that managers can do at this time to prevent or influence the course of this mortality event; extensive mortality probably will continue until precipitation and temperatures return to more “normal” conditions in the Southwest. We urge managers to

resist pressures to launch ambitious salvage or tree-removal operations in the mistaken assumption that the dead trees constitute a serious fire hazard. On the contrary, future fire hazard, even in the most heavily affected areas, will likely be no greater than before the mortality event, and probably will be reduced because of the substantial decline in canopy fuels. Fire hazard also will tend to change from high-severity crown fires to lower-severity surface fires which are more easily controlled. Moreover, extensive tree removal is likely to increase the spread of damaging weeds, such as cheatgrass, and may impair the reestablishment of piñon populations by damaging existing seedlings and by reducing the success of natural dispersal and establishment processes. Finally, we urge a reevaluation of ongoing and planned piñon-juniper thinning operations, in the interest of preserving the healthy piñon trees that have managed to survive.”

*Thanks to Bill Waldman for this information*

## **Correction**

In the Summer Newsletter article about hummingbirds, the sentence regarding wing beats should have read:

This allows them to fly by waving their wings back and forth (from about 50 to 80 cycles per second) like a fan.

As was pointed out too late for correction, the 60 to 120 cycles per minute speed would have caused the little darlings to fall out of the sky with a thunk.

Apparently due to Senior Onset Dyslexia (SOD), I seem to have misappropriated the heart rate (at rest, in flight it goes up to 1200 beats per minute) and neither I nor she-who-must-be-the-Editor caught it before publication.

## **Addition for the “No good deed goes unpunished” file:**

Moving on to mid-August, we had the annual hummingbird in the garage skylight adventure. They fly in because they are nosey and then see the light and fly into the skylight well. Once in, they are not smart enough to go out the way they came in until totally exhausted and they fall out. They are, after all, the smallest of the birdbrains. Anyway, as always when this happens, I got out the ladder, caught the little bugger (a young Rufus male), and hauled him out.

Sure enough, when I opened up the hand to let him fly, he left the usual deposit and departed without thanks. A bird in the hand is worth...

*Jack LaRowe*

## Our neighbors

*(This column is about and for the residents of The Ridges. Input is welcomed from anyone who has news to include. Items may be e-mailed to the editor at any time, titled "newsletter article" and will be included in the subsequent newsletter. We also welcome timely articles.)*

Longtime resident Steve Cary (Lot 60) is leaving The Ridges. He has sold his house and will be moving to Mexico to pursue his interest in art. He will leave us his new E-mail address for those who wish to contact him in the future.

Steve has been one of the stalwarts in the management of The Ridges over the past years. He has served on the Board of Directors twice and was the longtime chairman of the Architectural Committee. He has been instrumental in solving some of the toughest problems that have confronted the Board, always being the voice of moderation and practicality. We will miss him. Steve, we all wish you Buen Viaje.

*Dave Kingston*

Ron Loch (Lot 26) is currently recovering from an extended illness. We wish Ron and his wife Kay well through this very difficult time.

Dave Kingston (Lot 43) is joining several other residents who have had joint replacements in mid-September. Welcome to the bionic world and we hope you have an uneventful recovery, Dave.

Jack and Marilyn LaRowe (Lot 47) made a trip to the East to bid their son farewell before his deployment to active military service in Iraq. We wish him a safe and speedy return.

A house addition on Lot 29 (Lanman) and new houses on lots 22 (Socea) and 37 (Becker) are nearing completion. Construction on Lot 30 (Welsch) is on hold for resolution of contractor issues. In the current iffy real estate market, some of The Ridges properties sold this summer and some did not. We don't wish anybody bad luck in making their move, but for those who didn't sell, we're glad to still have them as neighbors.

*Olin van Dyck*

***The Board of Directors and the Association officers are listed for your information.  
Please feel free to call for assistance or information.***

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