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## Mail Theft Occurred in Casablanca

On April 27, three residents reported having mail removed from their mail boxes in the morning, before the mail man had arrived. One of the items stolen contained a check for a small amount (less than five dollars). That check was “washed” and cashed the same afternoon in an amount for over \$ 800.00! Included in this issue is more information in order to assist you in not becoming a victim of this type of fraud.

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### Board Meeting of June 21

The regular Board meeting started out with a presentation by an employee of the Labarre-Oksnee Insurance Agency. She gave a rundown on a proposal made to our Board on the Association Insurance coverage. Our current company, Farmer’s has raised the yearly premium by \$5000. For roughly the same price, Labarre-Oksnee, using Community Association Underwriters, can provide a policy with more liberal terms in the total amount that could be paid in liability claims in one year. Our current policy with Farmers expires in early July.

The meeting then started with the homeowners Forum. Only seven owners were present. One person asked if there were any plans to update or restore the monument sign we have on the corner of Portola and Hovley Ln.

The Secretary, John Medina, gave the Secretary’s report which consisted of the May meeting minutes. One correction was made and the minutes were accepted.

Lindsey Griffith gave the Treasurer’s Report. We actually have about \$10,000 more in funds than we did in April. A CD will come due in July but the proceeds will be kept in a “liquid” account to be available for the painting project. Delinquent accounts seem to be easing a bit. Only two accounts are in serious trouble.

#### Business/ New Business:

The insurance proposals were brought up for a vote. The new proposal from Labarre-Oksnee was accepted pending an adjustment in one coverage amount.

We have a proposal from Curb Creators to place edging curbs around pool areas #1 and 2 for approximately \$1800.00. The proposal was accepted by the Board.

## Your Casablanca June 2011

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**A** Miller Roofing had a proposal to replace 5 roofs with the Fibertite system, replacing some plastic drain covers with cast iron and installing new sky lights. The Board accepted the proposal to re-roof the five roofs.

On the proposed painting project, it seems we still do not have all the information in from one vendor, so the Board is requesting an additional proposal be made to another vendor. In preparation for the painting project, some owners have been notified that their garage and or utility doors need to be replaced before the painting project starts. Hopefully the excess decomposed granite stored on Calle Bisque will be taken care of soon and the street cleaning can be completed.

Our next Board meeting will be on October 18, at 11:30 AM in the US Bank Community Room.

**The Architectural Committee** had no report.

### **Casablanca HOA Communications Committee Meeting 6/14/2011**

**T**he Communications Committee met at the pool#1 area. Sixteen homeowners attended. The meeting was called to order by Syd Sonneborn at 10:00 AM

Syd started the meeting by giving out information on the mail theft/fraud incidents we had in our complex on April 17. He also gave a brief synopsis of information that he had downloaded from the internet on the issue. He will place an article in our June news letter on this subject. He also mentioned that the City of Palm Desert will be sponsoring two CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) workshops over the coming year (2011-12). The schedule will be announced by the City in

September. Much discussion followed on the mail fraud issue.

Gail Christiansen mentioned that Family Development has closed Escrow on the developed portion of Portofino to our North. The City Planning Commission will be taking up the issue on Tuesday, June 22, at 6 PM. As many homeowners as possible should attend this meeting.

The need for a handrail going down the steps of pool #4 was mentioned again. Gail said it most likely would not happen because of the expense and the entry to the pool from the back side has no steps.

Other issues brought up were people & animals walking through the decomposed granite areas and the flood in an unoccupied house on Armanac due to a broken pipe. Absentee owners need to have someone inspect their property on a regular basis. The palm trees are scheduled to be trimmed beginning on June 22. The impromptu Memorial Day party at pool #4 was praised and what we need is someone who would coordinate such events in the future. Pools #2 and #3 will be heated next winter season.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted by Syd Sonneborn, chair, Communications Committee

### **Landscape Committee HOA Board Report on Tuesday, June 21, 2011**

**P**alm tree trimming began Monday and will be completed in a few days.

With this hot weather the rye grass is dying and the Bermuda grass is coming back. The gardeners fertilized for the last time last week until fall.

## Your Casablanca June 2011

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The ground cover which we have used around the tennis courts, pools and our new desertscape mailbox areas is called DG [decomposed granite]. When the gardeners rake it, it looks beautiful. When you walk through it, or you allow your dogs to walk through it, it looks terrible. Please stay out of these areas.

Please don't remove or add any plants to the common area desertscape. Several were removed on Armanac. We all have to pay the price to replace them.

There was vandalism at the east gate entry. Someone broke one of the clay jugs in the dsertscape. A homeowner walking on Hovley heard it happen. When the perpetrator realized that someone had seen them, they ran and jumped over the wall and into the complex. We are investigating this based on the information given by the witness.

We had two other incidents of vandalism at the east gate . Someone kicked and broke one of the valves to our entryway fountains and someone stole the pump which operates these fountains. These were two separate incidents, both very costly to all of us.

The lawn will not be mowed next week due to weed killer that will be put on the lawn that can not be washed off before it takes effect on the weeds.

Please, if you have any landscape issues or requests, contact Rhonda at Management.

Have a great summer!

Respectfully submitted,

Howard Butzer, Landscape committee

Pending the painting project, a proposal has been made to place concrete lawn curbing around all homes. We have a quote from the Curb Creators to do the project on Colada Ct. for about \$2600. We could possible do an additional street each month. The proposal to do Colada Ct. plus three additional homes was approved by the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:33 PM.

## MAIL FRAUD IN CASABLANCA HOA!

**O**n April 17, three Casablanca Residents had mail taken from their mail boxes before the mailman arrived to deliver mail. One resident had a check "washed" and cashed.

### Mail Fraud: Check Washing What is It?

*The original article is from the National Check Fraud Center web site*

Check washing takes place to the tune of \$815 million every year in the U.S. And it is increasing at an alarming rate.

Using a process known as check washing, mail snatchers erase the ink on a check with chemicals found in common household cleaning products or on the shelves of your local Walmart and then rewrite the checks to themselves, increasing the amount payable by hundreds and even thousands of dollars.

### Types of Chemicals Reported Used:

1. Acetone, most widely used, is a highly volatile organic solvent used mainly as a hand-wipe solvent in cleaning applications. It is also a good drying agent for wet parts. But it will erase most inks from a stolen check without any noticeable effect.

## Your Casablanca June 2011

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2. Reading the remarks on side of a can of Acetone, you will find out it effectively removes some greases, oils, waxes, and inks. It is commonly used to remove uncured fiberglass resins, varnish, and lacquer and may be useful for applications that require a highly volatile cleaner. Acetone may be applied by hand wipe or immersion in an unheated tank.
3. Benzene, a solvent for grease and organic compounds. Works similar to Acetone.
4. Bleach, used in ever day cleaning in your home. Normally to whiten fibers in clothes washing.
5. Carbon Tetrachloride, most widely used in carpet cleaning,
6. Chloromice "T", a mild form of bleach, used normally in the soaking of baby diapers,
7. Fox "IT", used mostly with stamp collectors,
8. Clear Correction Fluids,
9. A high-performance eraser to erase everything from ballpoint pen ink, PPC and Diazo copy ink, to typewriter ribbon ink, drafting ink, and printed matter.

### **Problem at hand:**

The problem has grown so severe that many local and federal authorities have formed task forces around the country, with agents from the Postal Inspection Service, U.S. attorney's office, local police forgery units, FBI and Secret Service.

They offer the following advice to people with old-fashioned mailboxes:

- Don't leave outgoing mail in an unlocked box. Take it to work, drop it in a collection box, hand it to a letter carrier or take it directly to the post office.
- If you have to leave outgoing mail in your box, do it immediately before the letter

carrier comes, and don't raise the mailbox flag.

- Avoid leaving mail in a box on Sundays and holidays, when letter carriers don't work.
- Install a lock on your box. This can be done by placing the lock on your mailbox and then cutting a small slit in the mailbox that is large enough to slide mail through, but which is not big enough for a hand to fit in. Residents also can purchase a mailbox with a lock already on it for roughly \$20 at a hardware store. In both cases, you will not be able to have outgoing mail picked up.

### **The Red Flag:**

U.S. postal inspectors report an epidemic of mail thefts in the United States and even in other foreign countries, much of it the result of drug users who are spreading the word. However, it has been reported that some bad postal workers are getting into the act. Thieves swipe outgoing checks from mailboxes when they see the red flag up. The bad postal worker removes the check from the "postal bag".

According to a local postal inspector, even U.S. Postal Service collection boxes can be targeted by thieves who wait until the boxes fill up on weekends and then reach inside to rifle letters.

Another problem is when residents leave outgoing mail containing checks in the mailbox before going to work. The thieves will steal a check in the morning and then cashed the stolen check by the afternoon.

### **Positive Protective Measures:**

- Don't put bills in a residential mailbox. The red flag sticking up is like an invitation to a thief.
- Ask your bank if you can pick up new books of checks. Or ask the bank to have a parcel delivery service deliver them.
- Shred or burn canceled checks. If you need to save them, make sure the canceled checks

are in a secured area, such as a bank lock box, or a wall safe. Don't throw them in the trash.

- Check bank statements immediately after receiving them. If you fail to report check fraud within 30 days of receiving your monthly statement, the bank does not have to reimburse your loss (UCC Code 4-406).
- Print a return address on an envelope. A signature can be traced, duplicated or forged.
- Don't discard credit card records or bills with household trash.

#### **WHAT TYPE OF PEN TO USE WHEN**

**WRITING A CHECK:** If you are a ballpoint pen lover, switch to black ink when security is important. Among water-based inks, remember that gels are the most impervious. But when you're writing checks to pay the monthly bills, only one type of ink, the kind in gel pens, has been found to be counterfeit proof to acetone or any other chemical used in "check washing." Most ballpoint and marker inks are dye based, meaning that the pigments are dissolved in the ink.

Based on recent ink security studies, we highly recommend that you use a gel pen, like the Uniball 207 that uses gel ink that contains tiny particles of color that are trapped into the paper, making check washing a lot more difficult. The pen sells for about \$2. Personally I sign all my checks and important documents with one. But if you don't want to switch, do not hesitate to use your favorite fountain pen. Just fill it with ink in one of the more durable colors and enjoy!

For the full article, unedited, go to [www.ckfraud.org/washing.html](http://www.ckfraud.org/washing.html) . The US Postal Inspectors web site is <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov>. A form to report crime is on this site. The Postal Inspector's phone # if you do not have the internet is: 1-877-876-2455.

## **PALM DESERT TO SPONSOR CERT TRAINING CLASSES**

We have been notified by Gary Rosenblum, the City's Risk Manager, that the City will sponsor two CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) training sessions. One will be in the fall of 2011 and the other will be scheduled in 2012. The training consists of 20 classroom hours over a week's period of time. The training will be held at The College of The Desert Campus. Each class will be limited to 30 students. The class schedule is to be announced in September. Watch for more information.

This is the last issue of "YOUR CASABLANCA" until October.

**This issue of your Casablanca was  
produced by:**

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