



*For Board and Committee Meeting Dates, please see calendar on the last page.*

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## **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**

This issue is packed with useful information about how to make our life in Loft Ridge safe and enjoyable. The HOA Board and Communications Committee would like to extend their heartfelt wishes for a happy holiday season and thank you for being part of this beautiful community!

## **Loft Ridge Community Projects Update**

Repair and replacement of damaged **curb sections and sidewalks** posing trip hazards was completed in November 2009 (a few sections targeted for grinding are being repaired separately). A request has been forwarded to the Virginia Department of Transportation to repair sidewalk hazards along the publicly-owned portion of Ridge View Drive, but it is unlikely that any work will take place before next year.

Installation of an **irrigation** system for Lofthill Court is now complete; turf renovation of bare areas in the Lofthill common area is scheduled for Spring 2010.

The Fairfax County Office of Public Works is working with us to increase the luminosity of **street lights** throughout our community. Although upgrades usually run around \$3,000 per light, thanks to Supervisor Jeff McKay, Loft Ridge is able to participate in a special program resulting in no cost to our community! It is hoped that increased luminosity in key areas will reduce the number of car tamperings and make our neighborhood safer for everyone.

Sealing of the **asphalt paths** throughout the community was completed in Summer 2009. As part of our required infrastructure maintenance, work to repair cracks and seal Loft Ridge **streets** is planned for late Spring 2010. At the same time the street sealing is underway, **sanding and painting of curbs** will take place.

**Turf renovation and sodding** in designated areas throughout the community continues, with projects recently completed along Ridge View Drive (near the entrance and across from Cheatham Court.) If you know of any areas in need of turf renovation or sod and are willing to water, please contact the board at [board@lofridge.com](mailto:board@lofridge.com). (Watering is critical to the success of turf renovation or sod; without a commitment to water, new grass will die and we'll end up wasting community funds. So please consider whether you're able to make a two-three month commitment to water when making your request. We will provide all needed materials and reimburse for water usage.)

Pruning of branches and limbs next to community street lights was completed in October 2009, as were the regular fall prunings and dead tree removals. **Tree plantings** are planned for and/or continue along Ridge View Drive, the tennis court area, Lofthill Court, and Medallion Court.

**Landscaping** improvements for targeted areas has wrapped up for the year. Further landscaping improvements throughout the community will continue throughout FY2010.

The board is currently seeking proposals to replace community **split rail fencing**, with work expected to take place in spring or summer of 2010.

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## Loft Ridge Community Projects Update *(...continued from Page 1)*

Additional mulch has been added to the community **playgrounds** to ensure compliance with Federal guidelines and protect our neighborhood children. Three sunset maple trees were also added to the Ridge View playground to provide some much welcome shade on hot summer days. If you're available to help water, these new trees could use some help in their first year. All it will take is bringing a couple gallons of water to the playground once or twice a week. Not only will you be helping the environment by aiding in the growth of new trees, but you'll be doing a good deed for your community!

Progress on repair of **creek erosion** behind Churchman Court has been slow. Although a plan has been developed and funding approved by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the Office of Stormwater Management has not scheduled the work for any time in the near future. In order to get things moving along, Supervisor McKay's office was contacted for help and they have been working diligently to get the Stormwater Management Office to address this as soon as possible.

### Traffic Safety Reminder for Drivers

Safety is everyone's responsibility. Loft Ridge residents and guests are urged to obey speed limits throughout the community. The speed limit throughout Loft Ridge is 25 mph.

Many Loft Ridge residents, including children, enjoy walking or playing outside. Please slow down not just over the speed humps but throughout the community. During winter when it gets icy, it is especially important to do so. Although we remind walkers to wear something light and reflective when walking in the dark, early in the mornings or in the evenings, and teach our children not to play in the road, occasionally poor choices are made. Obeying the speed limits can save lives – isn't it worth a few extra seconds?

If you see someone driving aggressively, call the police department's non-emergency number (703) 691-2131, 24/7. Have the license plate and location. If the driving behavior is an immediate or eminent threat to life and property, call 911.

We thank conscientious drivers for helping keep the roadways safe in the Loft Ridge community.

### 'Tis the Season for Giving (...and Taking)

It's hard to believe, but petty crime actually rises between Thanksgiving and Christmas, apparently so holiday grinchers can get their hands on some quick cash to buy gifts (I wonder how the recipient would feel knowing their gift was purchased with stolen funds? "Gee, thanks for being so thoughtful...I really appreciate all the effort you went through to get this for me...").

Don't let yourself become a victim this holiday season! Remove or store all valuables in your car so nothing is visible to a potential thief (especially coins, GPS, IPODs, laptops or anything electronic). Lock your car whenever you exit and park in well-lit areas. At home, keep outside lights on (front and back), and report any suspicious activity you see by calling the non-emergency number for the police at 703-691-2131. Suspicious activity includes:

- cars that are driving slowly and appear to be scouting the area; people who are loitering (especially around vehicles or behind properties);
- someone carrying electronic equipment that's not in a box; someone looking inside a vehicle or peering through home windows; or
- someone trying to enter a vehicle by any unconventional means (coat hanger or Slim Jim).

If you see a potential car tampering or house break-in in progress, call 911 immediately!

Please also continue to alert other Loft Ridge residents to any crimes or suspicious activity by emailing the Loft Ridge group at [group@loftridge.com](mailto:group@loftridge.com) (please join if you haven't already by sending an email to [groupadmin@loftridge.com](mailto:groupadmin@loftridge.com)). Our community has been very pro-active about reporting unlawful activity and alerting other residents to potential problems. These efforts have contributed to the arrest of several criminals, and no doubt have prevented many residents from becoming victims themselves. Keep up the good work!

## Pets, Laws and Our Community



Pets bring joy to our lives, but having a pet is also a great responsibility.

We remind Loft Ridge residents that it is the HOA rule and Fairfax County law (Section 41.1-2-4) to keep dogs restrained by a dependable leash and controlled by a responsible person when off the property of the owner. Please be advised that if your dog runs free and gets picked up by Animal Control Officers, the unrestricted dog may be impounded (and taken to the Fairfax County Animal Shelter). If the owner is immediately located, the owner may be issued a summons.

Some Loft Ridge homeowners also sighted unattended cats and dogs roaming around the community. Please call the Fairfax County Animal Services at 703-691-2131 to remove stray dogs from streets and other public areas. If you have a problem with un-owned roaming cats, you can call Animal Allies at **703 940-9183** or Nancy Schoenig at [president@loftridge.com](mailto:president@loftridge.com) to humanely trap and relocate them to a feral cat sanctuary. Roaming cats and dogs cause injuries to themselves, wildlife and people and can pose a serious health danger. For the protection of your pets and the community, please tag your pet, keep your cat indoors and never leave your dog unattended.

It is also against the law (Section 41.1-2-15) to allow pets to trespass on, destroy or damage another person's property. If you have repeated problems with a neighbor's pet coming onto your property, consider sending a trespass letter. You can download the letter template at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/animal/animal-trespass.htm>

Be a responsible pet owner and a considerate neighbor!

## Trash Talk



The rules are very simple, but it seems we always need a reminder on trash.

Trash service in Loft Ridge is every Wednesday morning (except Christmas). Your trash and recycle bins should be placed out for pick-up **no earlier than 7 p.m. Tuesday evening**, and returned to your rear yard as early as possible **the same day as trash service**.

If you notice that **AFTER** the trash has been collected and there is garbage laying around the curb, especially if you know it is **your** garbage, please have the courtesy of picking it up and not leaving out for the next week's trash. Don't have the mind set of thinking it was the trash collectors' duty to pick up what was not securely disposed of or what is not their responsibility to pick up to begin with. Trash collectors will not chase down trash blowing around the neighborhood. **PLEASE SECURE ALL TRASH ITEMS SO THEY CANNOT BE BLOWN LOOSE!!!**

In addition, **please store your refuse appropriately**. Hiding bags in the bushes, behind electrical boxes, in front of your car, on the front door stoop or tossing it in the surrounding woods is an eyesore and invites the local wildlife thinking they have an open buffet.

And last, but not least, if you have had contractors working on your house and they don't clean-up after themselves, it is your responsibility to do so. Leaving bits of drywall or wood, nails, screws, and piles of sawdust is unsightly and dangerous to your neighbors.

As much as Loft Ridge would love to hire each and every one of us our own personal maid to pick up after us it's just not going to happen.

## Let it snow – let it snow!

Some people love it – some do not. Sometimes it falls and sometimes it does not. One way or the other – there are a few things to remember:

The Homeowners Association is responsible for removing snow on Association streets (this is not done by the County) whenever accumulation exceeds two inches.

Property owners are required to remove snow from sidewalks in front of their residences and from their assigned parking spaces.

When de-icing – do not use salts such as calcium, potassium, sodium chloride or ammonium sulfate/nitrate. Products such as *Halite*, *RockSalt* and *IceFighter*, have destructive ingredients and are harmful to concrete. Products such as *Soft Thaw* are effective, as are clean sand and non-clumping kitty litter.

Under no circumstances shall vehicles be parked in such a way as to impede the entrance or exit of service vehicles assigned to plow, apply sand, etc.

## Fireplace Safety

With old man winter upon us, here are some tips for using your fireplace during these chilly months:

- Have regular preventive services done to clean and inspect your chimney annually.
- Use only wood that is properly seasoned to reduce creosote build-up.
- Be careful not to overload the fireplace with too many logs.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to contain sparks.
- Keep a fire extinguisher nearby and know how to use it.
- Allow fireplace ashes to cool before disposing of them in a metal container.
- Store firewood inside your fence but not next to your house.
- Do not store firewood in the common area or woods behind your property.

## Combating Swine Flu



The Fairfax County Health Department encourages anyone with influenza like illness to follow these standard guidelines:

- If you get sick, stay home from work or school for 48 hours after your fever subsides and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Sneeze and cough into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often, scrubbing your hands together for 20 seconds with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

For more information, visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/pandemicflu](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/pandemicflu) or call the Health Department at 703-246-2411, TTY 703-591-6435.

## Decorating for the Holidays

It is always a joyful time when holiday decorations appear in the neighborhoods. Not only does it continue family traditions but it brings joy to the family as well as friends and visitors to the community. There are just a few things to keep in mind:

- Be considerate of your neighbor sensibilities and make certain you have quality displays.
- Be sure your electrical cords and connections are in good order.
- Turn off your decorations when you retire for the night but do leave your porch lights on for safety.
- Water your tree every day – do not let it dry out and become a fire hazard.
- Be prepared to remove your decorations in a timely manner during the month of January.
- Remember that Christmas trees will be picked up during the first two weeks of January. Trees must be free of lights, ornaments, tinsel, stands, plastic bags or any other items, and placed next to the regular trash.
- Please do not dump your tree on common grounds or in the woods.

## Did you know...

that the Fairfax County's **Noise Ordinance** promotes an environment for county citizens that is free from noise that jeopardizes their health or welfare or degrades the quality of life.

Under the Ordinance, TV, radio, musical instruments and animals that howl, bark, meow or squawk frequently and habitually are declared a noise disturbance at any time when plainly audible across property lines or through partitions.

You can find more information about noise and how to register a complaint online at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/environment/noise/](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/environment/noise/)

that the Department of Labor offers a 62 page booklet called ***Taking the Mystery Out of Retirement Planning***. The publication features interactive worksheets as you read each chapter plus information on how to make the money last.

To download it, just go to [www.dol.gov/ebsa/Publications/nearretirement.html](http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/Publications/nearretirement.html)

## Dog Feces

Most pet owners do an excellent job of picking up after their pets and we applaud them for being good neighbors. We know pets – and their owners – provide a pleasure for all of us.

Unfortunately, homeowners are still reporting that some neighbors have been:

- not picking up feces in the common areas;
- allowing their dogs to use other neighbors' lawns as a bathroom;
- occasionally leaving the dog poop on the sidewalk;
- throwing waste bags into the wooded areas instead of the dog stations provided by the association;
- leaving pet waste near even the tot lots.

If the majority of people can do it – why can't everyone? It is a simple courtesy and a simple effort. ...and it just helps keep the development more pleasant. It would be great not to have to do this message so frequently.

## Helping to Keep Everyone Alive

When it is dark, there is poor weather, windows fog and our night vision dims as we age, drivers cannot always see runners or bike riders when they wear dark jackets and dark pants. So for those of you who walk and/or run after dark or in the early morning hours, please consider wearing light-colored clothing and/or something reflective, like tape, a vest, belt or hat will be helpful. If walking on the road, walk against traffic so you can see if a car is approaching too close.

Drivers turning into the community or turning onto one of the side streets cannot always see you when it is pitch black so anything that helps the motorists know you are there is worthwhile.

## Latest on Texting

The 2009 Virginia General Assembly passed house bill 1876, which became effective on July 1 dealing with texting while your are driving. Details are:

- It shall be unlawful for any person to operate a moving motor vehicle on the highways in the Commonwealth while using any handheld personal communications device to manually enter multiple letters or text in the device as a means of communicating with another person or read any email or text messages transmitted to the device or stored within the device, provided that this prohibition shall not apply to any name or number stored in the device nor to any caller identification information. Fairfax Police explained that "highways" mean any street in the county unless the street is privately owned (such as Churchman – Evergreen Knoll – etc.)
- It does not apply to the use of factory-installed or aftermarket global positioning systems (GPS) or wireless communications devices used to transmit or receive data as part of a digital dispatch system.
- Nor does it apply to any person using a handheld personal communications device to report an emergency.
- No citation for a violation shall be issued unless the officer issuing such citation has a cause to stop or arrest the driver of such motor vehicle for the violation of some other provision of this Code or local ordinance relating to the operation, ownership or maintenance of a motor vehicle or any criminal statute.
- A violation of any provision of this section shall constitute a traffic infraction punishable, for a first offense, by a fine of \$20 and, for a second or subsequent offense, by a fine of \$50.



## Holiday Card Recycling Ideas

Each year 2.65 billion Christmas cards are made. Instead of throwing out your old holiday cards, consider the following ideas:

- **Donate** your holiday cards to the St. Jude's Ranch, a nonprofit home for youths, collects old holiday cards for reuse. Children at St. Jude's earn money by creating new holiday cards from the old. Either cut off the backs of the cards or leave them intact and mail the cards to St. Jude's Card Recycling, 100 St. Jude Street, P.O. Box 60100, Boulder City, NV 89006.
- **Make Postcards** by cutting off the backs of old holiday cards that do not have writing behind the front and use them as postcards.
- **Create Your Own Card** by cutting and pasting parts of old cards onto a new blank card. You can find packages of blank cards at most arts and crafts stores.
- **Use** old holiday cards as **gift tags** by cutting them into square or rectangular shapes and punching holes in the corners for string or ribbon.
- **Save holiday cards for arts and crafts** throughout the year if you have children.

## How to Haggle With The Best Of 'Em

These tough economic times are a great time to bring out your inner haggler. Remember that there is nothing shameful about asking for the best price. Most Americans don't haggle because they associate it with being cheap or arguing. If you feel this way, just ask yourself: Don't I deserve a good price? We'd like to offer you some of the tactics to negotiate discounts that hopefully will help you get the best price. These are the first few suggestions:

- **Medical bills**

**Consider this:** To maintain cash flow, many doctors will knock 5 or 10 percent off if you pay up front. Uninsured patients can get even bigger discounts (50 percent or more) for procedures that doctors and dentists usually bill to health plans, because medical practitioners are used to getting less than full price from insurance companies. The discounted rate doctors give a patient are still far better than what an insurance company pays.

**Try this:** Find out what doctors and dentists typically bill for services and how much insurers pay at [www.vimo.com](http://www.vimo.com). Negotiate the bill before your procedure. Offer to pay up front in exchange for a discount.

- **Chain-store items**

**Consider this:** Don't assume the price tags in retail stores are not negotiable, particularly if the item is flawed or looks as though it is not selling well. Small imperfections can often be covered with a coat of paint; plants that look wilted may be brought back to life; a shirt with a spot may not matter if you want to wear it under a sweater. The salesclerks at chain stores generally don't have the authority to give you a discount, though, but a manager does. Don't get angry, but do be sympathetic. Ask the store to help you get a good deal. Bottom line: people want to help nice people.

**Try this:** If you're buying a big-ticket item (\$200 or more), ask a manager for a discount. If you've seen the item in the store for a while, say so. Some stores have codes on price tags that will show the manager how long the product has been on the floor. The longer it has been hanging around, the better the deal you can get.

For big ticket items, shop during slow store hours, e.g., a Tuesday afternoon. The salesperson will be able to spend more time negotiating with you and may be more anxious about making a sale. For prices on items that are clearly negotiable, like automobiles, furniture, and mattresses, prearrange your own financing or bring cash. Then negotiate the price as if you were going to use the store's 0% financing for the first year. Once the price is negotiated as low as you think you can get it, ask the sales agent or manager how much lower the price will be if you pay cash now. Point out that the price should be lower because the store isn't losing money by not getting paid the first year.

For smaller purchases, ask a clerk if she knows when the item is likely to go on sale, or ask her to call you when it is marked down. You could also tell the cashier you forgot the coupon from the weekly circular. He will probably have an extra. Don't be afraid of silence. If you think you could still get a lower price, stall for time by saying something like, "Hmmm, I don't know . . ." and then staying silent. The longer you stay silent, the more anxious the salesperson may become and the more likely to throw in other bonuses for purchasing.

## 2009 Tax Season Hints

There isn't much you can do *after* December 31st to reduce your taxes for the current year, but there are some things you can do now to take the sting out of your tax bite!

- **Charitable contributions:** It doesn't just have to be monetary contributions – there is a great need for gently used warm clothing this time of year. The food banks are in particular need of food for their distribution efforts, especially since more people are relying on these banks. There are several charities in our area, as well as churches, to help you find the area of greatest need. And if your charity accepts credit cards, you can charge a contribution in 2009, take it off on the 2009 returns and pay off the credit card in 2010.
- **Medical expenses or business purchases:** Not advocating running up credit card debt but you can charge medical expenses (subject to 7.5% of Adjusted Gross Income for deduction as itemized deductions) or business expenses in 2009, deduct them in 2009 but not pay the charges until 2010 – per IRS, expense deductible in the year incurred, not necessarily when you pay the credit card charges.
- **Prepay your 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter state and/or local taxes:** If you are paying estimated taxes, or, as a W-2 wage earner, believe you will have a balance due to the state, make state/local tax payments by December 31, 2009 – then you can take a deduction on Schedule A, Itemized Deductions. See Virginia Department of Taxation website for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Estimated Tax voucher.
- **Catch Up Your 401(k) Contributions:** There are maximum limits to 401(k) contributions each year, so if you have not maxed out, consider asking your employer if a “catch-up” contribution is allowed - if your employer matches some of your catch-up contributions, you're in even better shape. As not all 401(k) plans allow for this "catch-up" provision, be sure to check with human resources or your company's benefits administrator.
- **Residential Energy Credits:** Residential energy credit is extended through 2009 and 2010, for qualified expenditures on the principal residence, such as energy efficient windows, insulation material, electric heat pump water heaters, and electric heat pumps. The aggregate amount of the credit is \$1,500.
- **Miscellaneous Items:** The following may be of interest:
  - Taxpayers can elect to deduct either state income taxes or state sales tax paid in 2009.
  - Elect to treat combat pay as earned income extended through 2009 for Earned Income Credit calculations.
  - Higher education expense deduction remains for the 2009 tax year, as does student loan interest deduction.

## Important Safety Reminder

Do you have a fire extinguisher in your home or kitchen area?

A portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives. Portable extinguishers do have limitations, use only when the fire is confined to a small area and is not spreading; when everyone has exited the premises; the fire department has been called; and the room is not filled with smoke. However, because fire grows and spreads so rapidly, the number one priority for all residents is to get out safely.



Select a multipurpose extinguisher that can be used on all types of home fires and is large enough to put out a small fire, but not so heavy as to be difficult to handle. Choose an extinguisher that carries the label of an independent testing laboratory. Local fire departments or fire equipment distributors often offer hands-on fire extinguisher training.

Install the extinguisher close to an exit and keep your back to a clear exit when you use the device so you can make an easy escape if the fire cannot be controlled. Fire extinguishers are one element of a fire response plan, but the primary element is safe escape. Every household should have a home fire escape plan and route and working smoke alarms, just ask your school age children. A folding escape ladder available on the top floor of the townhouse is also a very good idea.

*Source: Fairfax Co. Fire and Rescue Department, Public Affairs and Life Safety Education Section, 703-246-3801.*

## Loft Ridge Real Estate Update (listed between August and November 2009)

### Sold

5729 Evergreen Knoll Court - \$380,000  
4339 Marjoram Court - \$400,000  
4333 Gingham Court (end unit) - \$430,000

### For Sale

5738 Evergreen Knoll Court - \$365,000  
5684 Medallion Court - \$365,000  
5631 Ridge View Drive - \$445,000



Information provided by Metropolitan Regional Information Systems.

## Christmas at Mount Vernon

This special daytime program includes a dozen themed Christmas trees, historical chocolate making demonstrations and 18th-century dancing. The popular tradition of inviting visitors to meet the charming "Mrs. Washington" continues.

**Date(s):** 11/27/2009 - 01/06/2010, recurring daily

**Time:** 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**Phone:** (703) 780-2000

**Location:** George Washington's Estate & Gardens at 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon, VA

## Keep Loft Ridge Beautiful!

### The Architectural Control Committee Needs You!

Have you ever wondered about the rationale behind the violations you receive in the mail? Is there something about the inspection process you think could work better? The best way to make changes is to get involved! The ACC is gearing up for inspections starting next spring. Get involved now and learn all about the ACC inspection process. Next spring you will be ready to join your fellow neighbors in the important task of inspecting homes, insuring that homes are kept in good repair. That helps all of us maintain high property values. For more information call Kathi Cahall, ACC Chair at (703)732-8659 or email at [accchair@loftridge.com](mailto:accchair@loftridge.com).

### Contributing Editors

Our special thank you to many residents who have helped in writing and editing of this issue of the Loft Ridge Limelight, including:

Norma Hughes	Mary Kelly
Bob Lucas	Luba Mullen
Mary Quigley	Nancy Schoenig
Lisa Staesina	Peggy Thompson
Louise Whitt	

### For Upcoming Events.....

...check [www.loftridge.com](http://www.loftridge.com) As of publication time, the following HOA events have been scheduled:

#### Board Meetings:

Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.  
Mark Twain Middle School

#### ACC Meeting:

Check website for dates and locations!

#### Communications Committee Meetings:

The meeting in December is cancelled  
Tuesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.  
5730 Lofthill Court  
Tuesday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.  
5707 Evergreen Knoll Court