

T.E. at War with Itself—One Person's Interpretation

Part I

Introduction

My wife and I were very excited in about 1992 when we learned my aunt intended to leave us her home here in T.E.! Such a gift would allow us to enjoy the Florida warmth during our Wisconsin winters at a very modest cost. But then we began to observe a growing schism between members of the community. It is an attempt to understand why this has come to define relations at T.E. that I am providing the following thoughts in hopes the community can come together once again and be the place my aunt so loved and appreciated.

Background

My aunt's parents purchased two lots here in 1955 and moved our current trailer on in 1957. In the late '80s we began visiting my aunt for several days eventually up to a week each winter. In 2002 she passed on and the property became ours. Out of her affection for T.E. she left \$85,000 for the Helping Hands Program of the community church. She intended assistance so no resident would be forced to leave due to financial hardship.

While still visiting, we had occasion to contact Mr. John VanderMolen for assistance on a diverse set of issues all the way from how to set up her computer to finding our property line! My aunt had unlimited respect for John and he was extremely responsive and very helpful. I could understand why she felt as she did about John and we shared her view. It is not difficult to understand how our very positive experience with Mr. VanderMolen may duplicate many residents' experiences with he and other of the leaders of T.E. over the years! This earned loyalty must make it difficult for many residents to consider that errors of leadership and of the law have and are occurring.

As we became residents/snowbirds, we started attending the trustee board meetings to better understand what T.E. was all about and perhaps become involved. Mary Lou McNulty was the chair at the time. We attended most of the

Monday trustee meetings and subsequent workshops held each year between November and April through the spring of 2010. Over the course of these 8 years several characteristics stand out.

Observations

Early years—We were impressed at how well organized the trustees were in providing activities for the residents. The amount of activities and the special resources afforded by TE really were and are fantastic! However, months were to go by without a full treasurer's report. Robert's Rules were interactional guidelines, but minutes of meetings were sketchy at best. There were little efforts to record who presented what and very few comments or requests by community members were subsequently reported or acted upon. On rare occasions straw polls of attending resident's preferences were held.

Middle years—Some actions were taken by the trustees or their committees perhaps, off season, on issues dear to some resident's sense of legality, propriety or comfort like raising boat slip fees or fees for parking recreational vehicles. Attempts were made to have such decisions reconsidered. These were apparently turned away by the board. Disgruntled residents, feeling they had a right to have input began objecting. Trustee Chairperson McNulty responded to their complaints by sending a letter suggesting that if they didn't like the way things were they could sue! Unfortunately some objectors were not always considerate nor perhaps even polite in objecting. Some of these people came to T.E. having had considerable experience in such matters in younger years and offered to enlighten decision makers with this experience. When they were turned away they may have felt somehow diminished by the rejection. Perhaps they let their feeling take over. Long-time residents, on the other hand, found these "attacks" on their leaders who had provided so much over such a long time period unacceptable and fought back. As battle lines were drawn, it's likely that objectors were met with hostility and rejection by the majority.

This conflict, still with us, steals the rich potential possible in the great group of residents and leaves the community in two camps. The larger of the two have consolidated powers of those in control to a point that any vestige of democratic

functioning has all but disappeared. The other group—a distinct minority—has pretty much relied on a few people to carry the battle on a hazardous mission to get the courts or government officials to set things right. Since the leadership of the minority was also those seeking court intervention, much of the group's activity was possibly viewed negatively and even discounted by the majority. There is little doubt the skirmish over the kitchen (a former domain of Mrs. McNulty's) only served to show the majority how misspent the efforts of the minority were. It did, however point out the need for our leadership to know and respond to the law.

One very hard lesson from this middle stage is that the trustees are less a social activities committee (sad because this function has been so beautifully carried out by them) and are, in fact, an official democratic governmental body sworn to carry out duties and responsibilities as prescribed by law.

Current status: Even though the court decision is being appealed, many residents may feel the case is over and the trustees have been exonerated so there is no need to make accommodations. Most people in the minority camp believe in an eventual overturn of the first court decision and are doing what they can in the interim to improve on selected services to the residents. In short, we have a stalemate and until some leadership evolves to put an end to this false division, the vast human resource pool represented by all our residents continues to be at a very serious and costly war with itself.

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