

Hi Neighbor!

Well, we certainly had an eventful first full month together! A new Board means new people, new processes, and plenty to learn as we find our rhythm. And apparently, Mother Nature decided that wasn't quite enough of a challenge—so she added Tree Armageddon to the mix!

Just five days after the new Board came together, our urban forester, Chuck Conner from the Missouri Department of Conservation was here to help us look beyond the immediate needs of our trees. We received valuable input for a long-term tree maintenance strategy, including ways to increase tree diversity, a “Do Not Plant” list and a recommended list of trees for our location. MDC has publications available to guide future replacements. Those publications will be made available to the residents when the strategy is confirmed.

But then came *Tree Armageddon*.

Winds estimated at 70–100 mph swept through the area in a storm system that left a ten mile by two-mile path of wind damage. Even boats on the lake were overturned. Here at The Fountains, our mature trees took a tremendous hit, with limbs and entire trees coming down throughout the neighborhood.

Cartwright was here within about 90 minutes of our call, putting other customers on hold—including some scheduled days later—to get to us. Two days of emergency and urgent cleanup followed. The emergency cleanup is complete, and every tree that could be saved has been preserved. The remaining removals will be finished if budget allows during our annual winter maintenance. Waiting on some clean-up work gives us winter pricing and time to make sure we're making the right decisions. Our goal is to protect the trees we can save while being responsible with Association funds.

The summer weather has helped us save on irrigation, but it wasn't just the rain. The Board and IDL worked together to delay regular irrigation and reduce watering cycles whenever conditions allowed. **The result? A 56% reduction in water usage compared with the same period last year—about 819,000 fewer gallons.** That's a significant reduction in both water use and expense, especially as water rates continue to change. We're continuing to look for opportunities to manage expenses without compromising the care of our community.

While we're talking about water, a quick pond note: Some of you may have heard about the recent fish kill at Mallard Pond, which is part of Raintree—not The Fountains. Monarch Pond has a different setup: it is part of the stormwater system, with water coming in and flowing out. Mallard Pond has no outlet and is much more dependent on natural conditions and weather. We continue to watch Monarch Pond and have a contract with BV Labs to help control weeds and monitor conditions. Our aerator has been turned on and off as needed when storm debris affects it or an occasional small part needs replacement. With their expert input, our continued monitoring, and a little help from Mother Nature, we've got it.

The city also now has clearance to work on the stormwater drains and culverts at Monarch Pond. This is a major step toward needed repairs or replacement, at no cost to The Fountains. The work will be on the City's timeline, but at least we're headed in the right direction.

Another issue we've been addressing involves motorbikes on our property and common ground, including some activity coming from neighboring subdivisions. Signage will be posted at proper locations to make clear that the Fountains is private property and not open for unauthorized motorized use. Of course, the city streets and sidewalks are public. Every attempt will be made to keep them facing out from the property but discreetly placed so there is a buffer between them and the homes, if possible.

We're also watching the dollars carefully. We're looking at increases and surcharges related to shipping, tariffs, and other costs affecting contracted services. We're reviewing lawn care, fertilization schedules and billing, trash service, and snow removal as we plan for the coming months. We don't yet know the full impact of these variables, but we're paying attention and looking for opportunities to manage costs responsibly. We're already planning for snow season; good planning now gives us a better chance of being prepared when the first snow arrives.

As your new Board settles into working together, we ask for a lot of patience and your partnership. Some Board members are new to their roles, while others bring experience from previous years. We are learning new processes, getting up to speed on ongoing projects, and learning how to work through our differences and find the best way forward together.

Our goal is to make it easier for you to know what is happening, why decisions are being made, and how you can help. We may not always have an immediate answer, but we'll work together to find it and keep things moving.

Most importantly, we and A.R.E.A are here to help you. If you have a question, concern, or idea, please reach out to Sandy. She is the conduit between you and the Board. If she does not have an immediate answer or if it is outside her purview, she ensures your question or concern gets to the Board. I know that seems cumbersome to some. It really does help everyone concerned by distributing the work and speeds up solutions. Everyone on the Board is a resident like you and we volunteer our time. Sandy is contractual, and part of why she was hired was to help communication between the residents and the Board. Most often, Sandy already has your answer because she is informed of activities and can respond more quickly. If it is outside her purview, the complaint, suggestion, or compliment comes to ALL the Board for action. She understands our CCRs and Bylaws; she manages 22 other HOAs in the same manner and this arrangement has worked well over the years.

We also had a great response to our recent call for FARB volunteers. The selection process isn't completed yet, but we are pleased that neighbors have stepped forward. A full complement of FARB members will continue the work already underway identifying what needs attention, recovering (lost to the ages) approved FARB procedures, and helping make the FARB process work the way it should. An important part of that work is making sure our standards are clear, documented, and applied consistently, so decisions are based on objective requirements rather than individual subjective preferences or interpretations. Over the past year, Board members and volunteers have worked to recover information, document what we know, organize records, and put better processes in place. This year's Board of Directors and the Architectural review Board is continuing that work, building on what was started and approved before us and finding what still needs to be done. Some of that work is now in place, but there is still more to do.

The Fountains has never depended on one person—or even one Board member—to make it work. It takes a Board working together, along with neighbors willing to step forward, learn something new, take on a responsibility, and eventually pass it along to someone else. Sometimes that means overcoming personal differences or personal preferences. This is how a community stays strong. I think we have already left something of value for those who come after us—a stronger foundation, better organization, and a clearer path forward. It is not finished yet; there is still more to do, and there always will be. That is what makes it a community worth caring about, and actually for me as a Board member.

We have many new residents in The Fountains, with more joining us all the time. So here is a question for all of us: What have YOU done lately to welcome a new neighbor—or simply say hello to someone you don't know yet? We know this summer hasn't exactly encouraged backyard gatherings. When the thermometer is pushing 100°, a friendly wave from your car may be about all the socializing anyone wants! But cooler weather is coming, with more opportunities to get outside, meet someone new, invite a neighbor over, or join a community activity. Sometimes making a new neighbor feel welcome is as simple as saying, “Hi, I'm your neighbor.” You never know where that first hello might lead.

The work ahead also depends on volunteers. Whether you have skills with planning and organizing, serving as a secretary or scribe, sharing professional experience, or rolling up your sleeves for outdoor projects, there is a place for you. Over the coming months, work will continue maintaining our community along with parallel planning and implementing strategies for both physical maintenance of our common grounds and how taking care of the day-to-day responsibilities that keep The Fountains running.

Volunteering doesn't mean doing everything—it simply means doing what you can. When more neighbors share the work, no one must carry the load alone. If you have ever considered getting involved, and have skills to share, we'd love to have you along for the ride. It may be a little bumpy while we finish some of the work already underway, but you will be part of making it better—and you will get to see the results of your efforts.

Together, we can continue building a community that reflects the pride, kindness, and neighborliness that make The Fountains such a special place to call home.

Happy summer/fall, drought, rainy season, or whatever Mother Nature decides to bring us!

Sharon Neuer
President, Board of Directors
The Fountains at Raintree