SOLERA PATROL

Solera’s ‘visual deterrent’

*Volunteers keep eyes on our streets and homes*

**By Larry Edsall**

Throughout their retirement life in a 55-and-over mobile home park on Florida’s Gulf Coast, my parents took part in the park’s resident security patrol. For two hours a night or two each month, they would cruise the park’s streets in their Buick.

If they saw anything suspicious, they were to contact the local sheriff’s department, which would send out a patrol car. They were not to confront anyone, but the hope was that simply the presence each night of a car with a magnetic security team sign would be enough to deter those cruising neighborhoods for what appeared to be easy targets for theft.

Once or twice while visiting my folks, I rode along with them on a shift. We spotted nothing suspicious, but that was the team’s goal — for nothing to happen.

To twist the adage, an ounce of presence is worth a pound of cure.

When I moved to Solera four years ago, I figured I’d get involved with a similar residents’ patrol. Then came the pandemic and I pretty much forgot about volunteering. Besides, I didn’t even know if such a patrol existed.

Turns out, we do have such a group. Its existence was mentioned during the August meeting of the Solera HOA board of directors. Patrol leader Ken Sawyer, who also is vice president of the Solera board, noted there were around 20 people who volunteer to cruise our neighborhood at least once a month.

After the meeting, I was among a half-dozen people who contacted Ken to volunteer to join the patrol team. We had our orientation meeting a few days later.

“This is not about confrontation,” Ken told us repeatedly throughout. “We do not engage. We are a visual deterrent.”

He added that even if you have a gun, you are not allowed to have it in your car or on your person while on patrol.

He pointed out that the patrol is not an official function of the HOA or its board. It’s a volunteer group started a few years ago after a series of burglaries in the Solera neighborhood.

Henderson police have told Ken that what typically happens is that a team of burglars comes to the area, scout for homes to rob, commits its crimes and then leaves the area. It cases a neighborhood, often parking at the end of a block and watching to see when people leave their home. Often, the break-in takes place within 5 minutes of the occupants leaving, and the robbers leave the home with whatever is being stolen just 5-10 minutes later.

Most times, he added, break-ins in Solera occur during the daylight hours, not at night.

Ken told of times when members of the Solera patrol have spotted suspicious vehicles — often with no or a paper license plate on the rear of a vehicle with heavily tinted windows. However, after seeing the patrol car with its magnetic door signs, the vehicle is immediately driven from the neighborhood.

We were instructed to get a license number if we can do so without confrontation, and to call either 911 (emergency) or 311 (suspicious activity phone number) to report what was happening.

He also reviewed some home safety steps — for example, installation of longer front-door bolts and, if you can afford one, a security door — and said elections provide criminals with an opportunity to pretend to be campaign workers, who come to your door to see what’s inside that they might want to steal.

Solera patrol members are asked to do at least one patrol each month, driving every street in the neighborhood, including the Villas. He said it usually takes about 1 1/2 hours to complete a full patrol and afterward to file your report.

And once again he emphasized, “Our sole purpose is to be a visual deterrent.”

“You’re giving a great gift to your community,” he added. “It’s people taking care of their neighbors.”