

# 2025

## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

### Letter from the President

As we say goodbye to 2024, I want to reflect on our accomplishments and speak about our challenges. I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved and the people that made it happen.

On behalf of the Cottages, I want to thank our board members, Bob Metelko, Jim May, Steve Bragg and Tom Hickey, as well as Committee leaders, Marylin May for Communications and Joe Casale for Architectural Review. They along with other dedicated volunteers work throughout the year to fulfill the management responsibilities of the Association and save us thousands of dollars in property management fees.

Other key volunteers include: Carole Myles - covering for me on landscaping oversight and issues, assisting neighbors with their questions/issues, and representing the Cottages on Big Rivendell Maintenance Committee; Chris Smith - managing irrigation emergencies, our directory updates, and providing technology support for meetings and events; Bert Andresen - repairing fences and doing minor repairs on the circle and at the clubhouse; Jackie Axiom – delivering directories and newsletters and completing pool checks along with Diane McCourt (who also looks after clubhouse maintenance); Debbie Craddock – leading Social Committee activities and Welcome Committee with Jenny Volk. And several of you jumped in to help us prepare for—and recover from—an unprecedented hurricane season. All of these neighbors are volunteers whose dedication and support to our community helps keep our costs down and make this a desirable place to live. To all—we are extremely grateful for your support each and every day!

We continued to make progress on multiple fronts this past year, especially in landscaping, which represents a significant portion of the work and expenses, and is considered an important benefit to existing and new homeowners. The board has successfully negotiated keeping our annual contract increase to the national CPI index and labor costs flat for another year. Here are the highlights achieved:

Working in partnership with the GreenTech leadership, we outlined landscape goals and multi-year plans for the restoration and renovation of the Cottages landscape, which was presented to homeowners with our vendor at the February Annual Meeting.

- Completed Phase 2 of the sod restoration project by installing over 11,000 sq. ft. of sod in 40 properties. Sod replacement will be an ongoing effort due to the age of our community.
- Incorporated irrigation “enhancements” into ongoing wet checks to improve irrigation coverage of plantings and sod (a major factor in keeping yards beautiful).

- Identified some of the “shut-off” valves that exist between homes and enable repairs in the future without affecting other homes. (A future project for volunteers is to assist in finding the rest of them in the yards).
- Working with our landscape architect, created and installed new yard designs on two properties which support our long-term goals.
- Installed attractive “rock” beds on two raised sidewalk locations for safety and beautification reasons.
- Created multiple “test” beds of new, environmentally friendly plantings in boulevards as part of a long-term restoration plan.
- Continued removal of old or dead trees/plants across multiple yards in support of the long-term restoration efforts.

With historic rainfall this summer, sod in multiple locations was attacked by pests and fungus. GreenEdge applied multiple treatments to curtail the spread and damage but some lawns will still need replacement.

Three major tropical storms/hurricanes hit the Cottages this fall causing major storm damage. The worst storm, Hurricane Milton, caused many homeowners to evacuate. I personally tracked down nearly everyone to understand who was remaining and ensure they had a “plan” or neighbor looking after them. Thankfully, no one was hurt and the major damage was mainly broken tree limbs, plant debris and roof damage.

Storm clean-up was facilitated by having positive working relationships with two key vendors – GreenTech and GreenTopps. They came to our rescue quickly and had our circle cleaned up within weeks. In addition, our own volunteers worked through the storms and afterwards to assist other neighbors, and prevent further damage to yards and homes. Many thanks to them all!

The Clubhouse and the pool are the Association’s other major assets and each are of an age that requires regular attention and maintenance. Hurricane Milton, effectively, destroyed our solar pool heating panels that assist pool heating in the winter. The Board examined alternatives to this technology including photovoltaic panels to generate electricity. We concluded the most cost-effective option is to replace the solar pool heating system and approved a contract to do that. The work will be completed soon. In the interim, we constantly monitor our heat pump to keep it functional.

On the surface, our Clubhouse continues to impress. Close inspection, however, reveals the telltale signs of deferred maintenance including peeling and rotting porch and ramp frameworks, loose plumbing fixtures, rust, clogged drains and needed electrical attention. This fall, the Board agreed to initiate a comprehensive Clubhouse maintenance review designed to identify (and prioritize) specific repair, replacement, and improvement projects that can be completed over

several years and designed to keep it a major asset for another couple of decades. Further, all improvements will be funded from the Association's reserves, helping to keep operational assessment increases to a minimum.

While we could not continue for a fifth year without an increase in our HOA dues, we again managed to keep costs down through effective contract management, effective use of reserve funds, and volunteerism. We carefully monitor our expenses and our spending against our annual budget, work closely with our accounting firm and two banking institutions to gain better interest rates on our monies, and ensure proper allocation of expenses to operations and reserves. Our Association is unusual in that we have online access to our account balance information, expenses and invoices where many others do not, helping enable better management of our resources.

This year we introduced the option to vote electronically at our Annual Meeting – just as Big Rivendell does – to make it easier for homeowners to vote and enable our association (if enough owners participate) to reduce the cost of printing and the numerous volunteer hours needed to print, collate, distribute and tabulate ballots. We encourage you to vote electronically this year if you did not do so in 2024!

In December, the Board voted to approve an important resolution to preserve our covenants for another 30 years. This resolution was critical to maintaining our legal structure since our governing documents would have expired in 2026 without notice or further action. Thank you to Tom for working with our legal counsel and ensuring we are good for another 30 years!

In summary, our Association is strong, viable, and makes a significant contribution to the value of our homes. It is one of the reasons our homes do not stay on the market long. And to bring this around full circle, this is all due to the countless hours of dedicated work by dozens of neighbors over the years. But to continue to meet the challenges in the future we need your help, from replacing lightbulbs to managing hurricane preparations and repairs. Consider how you can contribute to maintaining the value of our unique community. We will be reaching out.

I want to wish everyone a very "Happy New Year" and a safe and prosperous 2025 as we continue working to build a better neighborhood in the Cottages!

Warmest regards,  
Marilee Casale  
Cottages President