

RIDGE RUNNER

BARKERS RIDGE NEWSLETTER

www.barkersridge.org

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Winter 2011

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Important Numbers

Constable:	
Emergency	463-6666
Non-Emergency	463-2446
Westlake Fire Dept.	492-0560
Crest Management	579-0761
Street lights (Centerpoint)	(713) 207-2222
Poison Control	(800) 764-7661
Animal Control	999-3191

2010 HOA Directors

Victor Treat
President

Victor Treat
Vice-President

Andy Akers
Secretary

OPEN
Treasurer

Brian Cheadle
Director

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Just wanted to say hello to everyone. With Judith McGlaughlin taking on new roles at her company, she had to step down from the HOA. Her departure is a great loss to the neighborhood, but she will still be living here and participating in our activities. As the new President, I thought I would introduce myself.

I have been on the HOA Board for 10 years now. I joined shortly after our community protested an apartment complex that was going in on Barker Cypress. My family has lived here for 16 years, and we have found this to be a warm and friendly community. When we first looked at this area, we came during the Easter Egg Hunt and saw what appeared to be hundreds of people. We figured this would be a great neighborhood to raise children.

You might have seen me running the Easter Egg Hunt (small surprise) or the Movie Night, among other things. Speaking of which, we have one coming up Friday, December 16th at 6:30 P.M. at the Tennis Courts again. We hope the weather cooperates.

I want to close by thanking Mary Adams and Mary Schoemann and all the volunteers who came out on short notice to put out the Christmas decorations. When a community pulls together like that, great things happen.

Victor Treat

Newsletter Update

As Victor stated in his message, Judith McGlaughlin had to step down as our HOA President. She was also our subdivision's newsletter editor. All that Judith has done for our community went above-and-beyond. She did a fantastic job!

I have taken on the newsletter responsibilities; however, this isn't "my" newsletter—it's ours. If any of you, our Barkers Ridge neighbors, have suggestions or ideas for articles that would be of interest to our community, please e-mail them to me or give me a call.

We plan to put an issue out four times a year—Winter (December), Spring (March), Summer (June), and Fall (September). A good way to keep up-to-date is to sign up for the *Barker's Ridge HOA* Closed Group on Facebook and keep a look out for e-mails from our President.

Gayle Cook
281-398-9068
gaylebobcook@hotmail.com



News Briefs

MOVIE NIGHT OUT

Date: Friday, Dec. 16th
Time: 6:30 P.M.
Movie: TBD—suggestions, anyone?
Location: Barkers Ridge Tennis Courts

Blankets/protection MUST be under chairs!
No metal or hard plastic on Tennis Court surfaces! Popcorn will be provided.

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HAUNTED HOUSE

Jim Reynolds and his crew put on an awesome Haunted House which consisted of five scenes and six actors and ran on Sunday and Monday nights of Halloween weekend. Approximately 700 people went through the house which was held at the swimming pool. Jim and crew want to thank the HOA Board of Directors and all the volunteers for their hard work and support. It was a lot of fun, and they can't wait until next year!



Jerald Garcia



Starting with the back row, from left to right:
Diane Garcia, Tracy Longstreet, Delaine Lowe, Neil Burton,
Beth Kellen, Jim Pickering, Pat Webb, Chris Bearce, Jerald
Garcia, Elvia Shockley, Brian Shockley, Jim Reynolds

Mayde Creek High School News

MAYDE CREEK MIGHTY RAM BAND...

will perform a Holiday Concert on Tuesday, December 6th at 7:00 P.M. featuring holiday and seasonal music. Three concert bands and one jazz band will perform during the evening. The concert is at Mayde Creek HS Performing Arts Center and is free and open to the public.

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MAYDE CREEK HS BOOK FAIR

Parents and community members are welcome to attend—just sign in at the front desk.

HOURS

Wednesday, Dec. 7th: 7:00-3:30

Thursday, Dec. 8th: 7:00-3:30



MAYDE CREEK HS MUSICAL

Mayde Creek High School Fine Arts Department is proud to present *My Fair Lady*, a musical by Alan Jay Lerner & Frederick Loewe, based on the play *Pygmalion*, by George Bernard Shaw. This classic tale of a poor flower girl's journey from the depths of poverty to the heights of the British Aristocracy takes place January 19th, 20th & 21st at Mayde Creek High School's Performing Arts Center, located at 19202 Groeschke Rd. Houston, Texas 77084. Come see Eliza's comical climb up the social ladder as she battles Henry Higgins' war to teach the English how the speak. Advance tickets for the performances at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, or for the matinee performance at 2 p.m. on Saturday, are \$10 for students and \$12 for adults. Tickets at the door are \$12 for students and \$14 for adults. Advance tickets are available at www.seatyourself.biz/mchs. Call 281-237-3803 for more information.



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Reminder

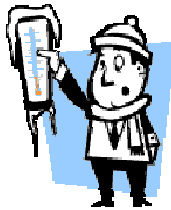
**HOA Dues Due
January 1, 2012**

Frozen Pipes

By Jerry Fitzpatrick

Even though Houston winters are relatively mild, temperatures can drop to freezing on particularly cold nights. The water pipes in or around your home can freeze if the outdoor temperature remains at or below freezing for several hours. This condition is sometimes called a “hard freeze.”

Water is incompressible and expands when it freezes. When water inside an object freezes, the object can crack or burst causing leakage and irreparable damage.



Household water leaks can easily spew at a rate of ten gallons per minute or higher. This flow rate can quickly damage walls, floors, cabinets, and other household items. If water-soaked walls and floors are not dried and treated quickly, hazardous molds can grow on them that are difficult to remove.

Insulation is the first line of defense for preventing frozen pipes. Exterior pipes should be completely wrapped with insulation. You can also cover exterior faucets and valves during the winter months.

Insulation should also be used on pipes inside unheated enclosures like a garage. Electrically-heated wraps are an option, but much more costly than conventional insulation.

Foam and rubber insulation degrades over time, so it's a good idea to check its condition every fall. It's easy and inexpensive to replace the insulation using supplies purchased from a hardware store or improvement center.

Adding insulation to the exterior walls of your house is an expensive proposition. However, you can turn your indoor temperature up a couple degrees to help keep the exterior walls warmer. Opening cabinet doors beneath your kitchen and bathroom sinks can help keep those areas warmer as well. Pipes inside interior walls are

unlikely to freeze unless you've turned off your furnace (e.g. during a winter vacation).

Attic pipes are unlikely to freeze if they are individually wrapped, or if you have blown-in insulation that covers them. You should wrap any exposed attic pipes, especially if they are metal instead of PVC. During an extended freeze, you might consider leaving the attic entrance open so that warm air from inside your house can heat the attic.

Because pipes burst due to pressure, damage can be prevented by leaving a few faucets open slightly. Opening the faucets just enough to allow a slow drip should prevent a pressure buildup. This technique obviously wastes a little water, but it is cheap insurance.

If you have an underground irrigation system, the valves and pipes that prevent backflow are especially vulnerable to freezing. I found this out the hard way during the winter of 2009!

The purpose of your backflow equipment is to prevent contaminants from entering the fresh water supply. The “backflow preventer” unit and pipes are located above ground as shown in the photo (right). These pipes should be well-insulated.



The backflow preventer itself is usually made of brass. Metal conducts cold much better than PVC. Therefore water inside of the backflow preventer can freeze more easily than water inside of the pipes.

Foundation Distress

By Stephen Newberry

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CAUSES OF FOUNDATION DISTRESS?

It is a mystery to many homeowners as to the cause or causes of foundation problems. At the first mention of foundation problems, many think of expensive foundation repair. Well, a little knowledge and simple actions could keep that boogiemaster at bay. First of all, this discussion is limited to areas where there is a lot of expansive clays in the soils such as is the case in southeast Texas and the greater-Houston area. We also will be confining our discussions to single family homes, although other structures such as apartment complexes, condos, townhomes, light commercial structures, etc. may be affected the same way.

Next, let's talk about what makes the soils in our area move so much. The answer is the clays in the soils and how they react to moisture. As the soil dries out, the clays will shrink. (If there is no vegetation on the top of the ground, you may see cracks appearing on the surface of the ground.) When the soil becomes wet, they will rehydrate and the soils will expand. Any structure on top of this ground will rise and fall with the expanding and shrinking soils.

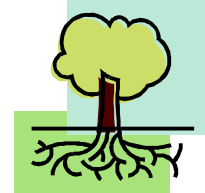
The foundations of most homes in our area are engineered with this movement in mind. In a normal year, between the wet season and the dry season, the perimeter may rise and fall as much as $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch relative to the center of the structure. Why does the perimeter move more than the center of the house? The moisture content of the soil under the center of the house is relatively more stable than the moisture content around the perimeter because evaporation affects the soil more at the perimeter than the center. Also when it rains, the soil will rehydrate faster around the perimeter – it will take the water longer to travel to the center to swell the soil at that location.

So What is the Main Cause?

The main cause of foundation movement is the changing moisture content of the soil. If you can control the moisture content of the soil, you can control most of the movement of the foundation.

Trees and their root systems:

Some very large trees can pull out 200 gallons of water a day! Maybe you don't have trees this large on your property or the property adjacent to yours, but you may have 2 or 3 smaller trees and combined they could be pulling out 50 gallons of water a day. Are you putting those 50 gallons of water back every day? Probably not.



Weather conditions:

We are in the middle of a persistent drought that could last into the year 2012. This factor is causing visible damage to many homes in our area. We have had years where flooding has been a big problem and drainage issues were foremost on everyone's mind.

Plumbing problems:

Cracked or broken drain lines or fresh water pressurized lines can cause problems not just under the kitchen and bathroom areas but the whole length of the lines as they run out to the perimeter of the house. A dripping hose bib is also a big contributor to foundation problems.

Not having positive drainage away from the house:

Do you have an area around your house that doesn't drain and water sits for days after a rain? You should have positive drainage away from your home. That means that the ground should be graded so water will flow away from your home and off your property. There should be 6 inches of fall in the first 10 feet from the edge of your home. If

Foundation Distress
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your property ends in 5 feet, you should still have that 6-inch drop in that 5-foot space. If water ponds in one area next to your house, you will have soils that stay wet and will swell and areas that are dry will start to shrink. This will cause differential heaving of your foundation; that's not good.

Other causes:

There are many other contributing causes to foundation movement and the problems they bring with them. Some of those issues are gutters & downspout placement, secondary A/C line dripping, and landscaping blocking drainage. The good news is that there are remedies to these issues and most of these remedies are cheaper than expensive foundation piers. An unbiased foundation evaluation can give you the knowledge to make a good business decision.

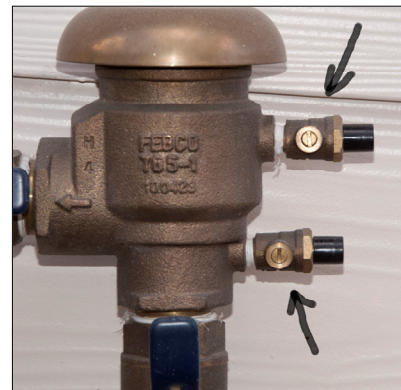
You can contact Stephen Newberry of Foundation Check at 832-858-0867 or Stephen@foundationcheck.com. You can subscribe to our free newsletter for other tips, insights, and case studies. Just go to www.foundationcheck.com and on the right-hand side you will see a signup box. Let the 'Foundation Doctor' diagnosis your slab problems.

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Frozen Pipes
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Your setup should have two manually-operated drain valves. One is for the incoming water supply; the other is for the outgoing water supply. The backflow preventer itself should also have small drain valves like those shown in the close-up photo (right).



After you turn off your irrigation system in the late fall, you can drain your backflow preventer to help prevent freezing. Believe me; replacing a damaged one is a costly pain in the neck!

Before draining the unit, close the incoming water-supply valve by hand. If the small drain valves have plastic end-caps, remove them. Using a medium flat-blade screwdriver, turn each valve 90 degrees clockwise to open it. Water should pour out of each drain for only a few seconds. If water keeps coming out, you haven't closed the incoming water supply valve properly.

After the water has drained, return the valves to the closed position using the screwdriver. Also reattach any end-caps. Leave the incoming water supply valve closed to prevent the backflow preventer from refilling with water.

The backflow preventer will still contain a little water, so it's not a bad idea to wrap it with an insulating material. The unit has an odd shape, but it can be wrapped effectively using pieces of foam rubber, cork, or cloth. Don't forget to unwrap it and re-open the incoming water supply valve before enabling your irrigation system the following spring!

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Barkers Ridge Real Estate Update



www.DianeSanders.com

RE/MAX MTC
Diane@SoldMany.com
281-579-8022

"Always do right, this will gratify people some and astonish the rest." –Mark Twain

The question of the year, "How is real estate doing?" Below is what the Houston Association of Realtors has to say:

HOUSTON — (November 16, 2011) The Houston real estate market has added reason to be grateful this Thanksgiving season after logging a fifth straight month of positive home sales in October. The year-over-year increase in single-family homes sales, coupled with a rise in pending sales and continued decline in months inventory, signals a market that is benefitting from a healthy absorption of housing inventory. Adding to the positive report is an average price that achieved an all-time high for an October in Houston.

According to the latest monthly data prepared by the Houston Association of REALTORS® (HAR), October sales of single-family homes rose 9.1 percent versus one year earlier. All segments of the housing market, from the sub-\$80,000 to the \$500,000 and above, experienced growth. On a year-to-date basis, sales were up 3.4 percent.

CATEGORIES	OCTOBER 2010	OCTOBER 2011	PERCENT CHANGE
Total property sales	4,420	4,815	8.9%
Total dollar volume	\$867,182,719	\$961,640,986	10.9%
Total active listings	53,039	46,674	-12.0%
Total pending sales	2,821	3,092	9.6%
Single-family home sales	3,741	4,080	9.1%
Single-family average sales price	\$206,165	\$208,506	1.1%
Single-family median sales price**	\$150,000	\$150,000	0.0%
Months inventory*	7.7	6.6	-14.1%

* Months inventory estimates the number of months it will take to deplete current active inventory based on the prior 12 months sales activity. This figure is representative of the single-family homes market.

** Half the homes sold for more and half sold for less.

How is Barkers Ridge doing as compared to last year? We are going to have to get busy to sell 37 homes like we did in 2010. There are only 10 homes ACTIVE and for sale now in Barkers Ridge, and there are 4 in PENDING (with contracts).

Barkers Ridge Real Estate Update
Continued from Page 7

Our average price per square foot is down a little from earlier in the year due to some distress sales and foreclosures that have closed in the last few months bringing that number down. The lowest price / square foot sold this year was \$39.62, and the highest price / square foot sold was \$73.55 — it had a pool. The bulk of the homes sold in the high \$50's to \$60's range. Watching the SOLD price / square foot is a very good indicator for where a subdivision is trending; I don't usually give much credence to small variances one way or another. A stunning home with a pool or a dog of a foreclosure won't sway the data much one way or another. When advising buyers on which subdivisions are doing well and which aren't, I look for a stable or increasing price per square foot over time. Review the table below; what do you think Barkers Ridge is doing?

Statistics for Barkers Ridge 2011 – thru 11/30/2011
(Total/F = Foreclosures)

	2009	2010	2011
Active			10/0
Pending			4/0
Sold	31/6	37/7	27/4
% of Foreclosure Sold	19%	19%	15%
Avg. \$/sq.ft. SOLD	\$58	\$61	\$60
Avg. \$/SOLD	\$145K	\$158K	\$150K

(All sales data is per HAR MLS; deemed reliable but not guaranteed.)

Take a look at some of our neighboring subdivisions on both sides of I-10:

\$ / Square Foot

Neighborhood	2009	2010	2011
Nottingham Country	\$73	\$73	\$73
Green Trails	\$90	\$92	\$92
Westfield Terra	\$56	\$58	\$53
Deerfield Village	\$62	\$66	\$60
Cullen Park	\$69	\$73	\$68

On that note, once a home gets foreclosed on, it may take several months, even over a year for it to actually come on the market. Sometimes the banks aren't staffed enough to handle the volume, and often they don't want to release too many on the market in a specific area at once for fear of flooding the market and ruining the value.

Have a wonderful holiday season; enjoy your friends and family! Thank you for all of your support, questions and blessing. **--d. Diane Sanders ☺**

I would love to see a constantly increasing price per square foot; but, having been through the housing fall-out from the last few years, I will take stable all day long! When I see a subdivision that takes a drastic turn one way or another (usually down), I begin to wonder if something is going on. Often, a road has gone through, there is construction in the area, commercial may have moved in...see what I mean.



Do any of these cause you to 'wonder' if something is happening?

Westfield Terra (by Ritters) would cause me some concern because not only did it drop from last year, but it also dropped below the 2009 amount. A high number of foreclosures likely? 39% this year! WOW! Go back up to the previous chart and look at the percentage of foreclosures in Barkers Ridge this year and compare. They do affect a neighborhood – but don't worry too much about one here or there.

"Nothing is really work unless you would rather be doing something else." –Sir James Barrie

Your Furnace & Air Conditioner

By Jerry Fitzpatrick

I've lived in Barkers Ridge for over 18 years, but my HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system has never seemed to work the way I want. Maybe my situation is unique, but I suspect that you may have similar concerns.

Thanks to Houston's hot and humid climate, at least 70% of your home's electricity expense is for summertime air conditioning. Before delving into summertime cooling, though, I'd like to briefly mention heating.

It's a good idea to have a contractor check your furnace every 1-2 years, even if you haven't noticed any problems. A furnace checkup takes only a few minutes, and the cost is normally low. The checkup can find problems such as a dirty filter, faulty igniter, or ventilation blockages.

Even the smallest residential furnace has 3-5 times more heating capability than you need for Houston's mild winters. This is rather wasteful, but heating normally accounts for just a fraction of your annual energy costs.

Most residential HVAC systems are "split systems." This means that the furnace, blower, and AC coils are located inside your house, while the AC condenser unit sits outside.

All of the HVAC components degrade over time, but the condenser takes the biggest beating because it is exposed to the weather.

This degradation implies that the SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) rating of your AC goes down with age. For example, a system originally rated at 11 SEER might diminish to 8 SEER or less after ten or fifteen years.

SEER values by themselves do not tell the whole story about your AC system. To keep your home cool, your system must be powerful enough to overcome the heat it absorbs from the sun.

The cooling capacity of your system depends upon the overall size of your home, but many

other factors are involved as well. These factors include wall insulation, attic insulation, window size and construction, outdoor shading, and so forth.

The Air Conditioning Contractors of America¹ has studied HVAC systems scientifically for many years. Their publication, *Manual J*, describes how to correctly size an AC system and is the gold standard for the industry.

Technically, *Manual J* describes how to calculate the "heat load" of your home (i.e. the heat it absorbs). In North America, heat is commonly measured in BTU (British Thermal Units) per hour. If the heat load on your home is 30,000 BTU per hour, then your AC system must provide 30,000 BTU per hour of cooling to offset it.

I'm not sure why, but HVAC vendors use "tons" instead of BTU per hour to specify systems size (capacity). One ton is exactly 12,000 BTU per hour, so the home in the preceding example would need a 2.5 ton AC system (30,000 BTU per hour / 12,000).

If you research HVAC online, you will probably discover that Houston is notorious for oversized AC systems. In fact, this problem (along with inadequate ventilation) is widespread throughout the southern United States. There are several reasons for this:

Many home builders "cut corners" to reduce their costs.

The architect may not have used *Manual J* to size the AC system or may have used it incorrectly.

The heat load of a home can change over time due to home improvement or deterioration.

Many contractors ignore *Manual J*. The calculations are somewhat tedious, so it's easier for them to replace a system with one that's the same size or larger.



Your Furnace & Air Conditioner
Continued from Page 9

Some contractors distrust *Manual J*, perhaps because they don't understand the science behind it or because its results sometimes conflict with their intuition.

I'm not an AC contractor. However, as an electrical engineer I've had enough math and physics to understand the *Manual J* principles. As you might guess, this has led to some perplexing discussions with several contractors.

I have a two-story house with two separate AC systems. The upstairs rooms have always seemed too warm or too cool, suggesting "short cycling" of the upstairs AC system. Short cycling means that when the system runs, it blows a lot of cold air around, reducing the temperature quickly and causing the system to shut off².

When an AC system is on for only a few minutes at a time, it removes very little humidity from the air. The air can be uncomfortable even though the thermostat says the temperature is okay. If you lower the thermostat, the system will run longer and remove more humidity, but the rooms may get uncomfortably cold. Moreover, most AC systems do not reach their rated energy efficiency unless they run at least 15 minutes at a time.

I calculated the heat load for my entire house using a *Manual J* computer program that I purchased a few years ago. The calculations showed that the downstairs system was slightly oversized (3.0 ton versus 2.5 ton) and the upstairs system was grossly oversized (2.5 ton versus 1.2 ton). Little wonder that the upstairs AC seemed to be short cycling!

Winter is the best time to replace your AC system because it's the "off season." Last winter I got quotes from a few contractors for a new upstairs system. Each of the contractors wanted to replace the existing 2.5 ton system with the same size or larger. Despite my *Manual J* calculations (which I printed out and gave to them) they all insisted that I needed at least a 2.0 ton system. They were wrong.

By signing a disclaimer I persuaded one of the contractors to install a new 1.5 ton, 14 SEER system. Even though this summer was one of the

hottest on record, my upstairs rooms have never been more comfortable. I'm also saving electricity because the new system is 40% smaller and at least 30% more efficient.

Here are some of the lessons I've learned:

Windows have a huge effect on heat load. The larger your windows, the more heat your home absorbs, especially if they face the sun.

Thin, single-pane windows provide almost no insulation. They are barely better than a gaping hole in the wall!

Heat load is reduced by trees that shade your home, especially windows. Interior blinds help, but insulating shades are even better. Exterior awnings also reduce heat load, but *they are prohibited by Barkers Ridge deed restrictions*.

Low-e, thermal pane windows are very helpful, but they're an expensive retrofit.

Attic insulation has a big effect on heat load. You can cut cooling costs by increasing attic insulation. Radiant barrier foil may also help.

Change your air filters at least quarterly to improve ventilation. Also ensure that the AC flex ducts in your attic are as short as possible and not leaking.

Programmable thermostats reduce energy costs by setting the temperature higher while you're not at home.

Some contractors may tell you that *Manual J* is "wrong for the Houston climate" or try other ways to convince you that a larger system is better. Insist on *Manual J* calculations for AC sizing.

I hope these tips help make your home more comfortable and energy efficient. You can get additional tips from the U.S. Department of Energy³ and many other web sites.

References:

1. <http://www.acca.org>
2. <http://www.proctoreng.com/articles/bigger.html>
3. <http://www.eere.energy.gov/topics/homes.html>