

For Immediate Release

Local swim team's future uncertain as homeowner's group threatens legal action

Despite Summit HOA board and Summit Seals' yielding to demands, Stratford HOA board continues legal action and intimidation tactics.

Valencia, Calif., May 24, 2010 – For 21 years, children in the Valencia Summit neighborhood eagerly awaited the start of summer. The reason: six weeks of healthy exercise and hanging out with their friends – courtesy of their community swim team, the Summit Seals.

But this summer, a pall is cast over the swim team's future as a group of residents, who are part of a gated sub-homeowners association known as the Stratford Collection within the Summit, is threatening legal action against the team. These Stratford residents, who serve on the Stratford HOA board, have been trying to do away with the 80-plus member swim team since last year.

Their arguments are the swim team is a liability, putting all Summit homeowners at risk for potential lawsuits. They also say the team monopolizes the main pool during the summer and should have to pay for the use of the clubhouse.

Earlier this year, the Stratford board hired an attorney and threatened legal action against the Summit HOA board, which has the authority to approve the swim team contract even though the team is a self-standing, non-profit organization that receives no funding from the HOA.

The Summit board worked diligently to address the Stratford board's concerns by requiring the team to increase their insurance coverage from up to \$2 million at times – an amount determined to be more than adequate by insurance consultants – to \$5 million, making the Seals among the most insured aquatics programs in Santa Clarita.

The Summit board also asked the team to continue their practice of keeping a lane open for anyone who wants to swim laps and start practice one hour earlier at 2 p.m. so the main pool is vacated by 6 p.m. It also eliminated championship meets at the pool, which attracts a larger crowd than regular meets. The swim team has also cancelled water polo scrimmages, a beach trip, and the very well supervised teen sleepover in an attempt to work with the non-swim team neighbors.

The board also limited the team's use of the clubhouse during prime rental hours but did not impose a fee for occasional clubhouse usage because of the overall benefit the swim team brings to the Summit, such as community and family involvement.

The swim team contract was approved last month and swim team sign-ups were held in the clubhouse parking lot on May 15. Swim team registration not only attracted numerous families, but also a Stratford board member and a private investigator, who were seen videotaping the swim team children, teenagers, manager, families, and coaches from a car with out of state plates.

"At first we didn't know who they were. They wore dark sunglasses and were parked in the parking lot for 2 ½ hours, pointing their camera at young children and teenagers. We later learned that one of the men was president of the Stratford board," said Mike Anderson, a parent with a child on the swim team.

He added that another parent called the Sheriff's Department but the men left quickly before they arrived. After the officers left, the two men returned and continued taping. Now, swim team parents have learned that the Stratford board is threatening a civil lawsuit against the swim team.

Many swim team families don't understand why the Stratford board wants to eliminate the Summit Seals, which competes against other HOA teams, including Old Orchard I, Old Orchard II and Valencia Hills. They say several Stratford families have swimmers on the team and there are plenty of pools in the Summit (in addition to the main pool, the Summit has three other pools and the Stratford HOA also has two pools).

Regarding the Stratford board's safety concerns, swimmers on the Summit Seals are supervised at all times by three coaches who have CPR and lifeguard training as well as teenaged "junior coaches." The team manager or another adult is also required to be at the pool anytime there is a swim team function or activity. In addition, to be on the swim team, swimmers, ages 4 to 16, must demonstrate their ability to swim the length of the pool.

Many Summit residents believe the Stratford board is using liability and safety as an excuse and that they want to do away with the team because a handful of Stratford residents live next to the main pool and they don't like cars parked on the street when there is an occasional swim meet. Some Summit residents have also heard that the attorney for the Stratford HOA board was involved in closing down another swim team in Valencia's NorthPark neighborhood about three years ago.

"It's disappointing that it has come to this," added Scot Thompson, a parent with three children on the swim team. "The only thing my kids want to do is swim and have fun with their friends for six weeks in the summer. It's unfortunate that a select few want to take this away from them."

#

Contact:

Name: Scot Thompson

Phone Number: (661) 476-4702

Email Address: sthompson@solidconcepts.com