

Las Americas News
A Quarterly Newsletter for Owners & Residents of Las Americas
Volume 23, Number 3 ~ Summer 2010

CONTACT INFORMATION

Las Americas Owners Association
PO Box 15456
Santa Fe, NM 87592-5456

BOARD MEMBERS

Kimberly Aragon, Secretary
204-1470 (2010)
Eric LeMasters, Director
473-9300 (2010)
Susan Miera, Director,
Architectural Review Committee
471-6133 (2011)
Anke Mihalas, Treasurer
474-0870 (2011)
Wilson Plowman, Director
Architectural Review Committee
424-0553 (2011)
Sabrina Salvato, President
473-9310 (2012)
Martin Wright, Vice President,
Architectural Review Committee
Interim Newsletter Author/Editor
473-0698 (2012)
Bookkeeper
Meredith D. Brown 466-4969

QUARTERLY MEETING

The next Board meeting of the Las Americas Owners Association will be at 7:00 pm, Monday, July 26, 2010 in the Breakfast Room of Comfort Suites, 3348 Cerrillos Road.

NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

Do you have any suggestions for our Newsletter? You may mail news items or ideas to Las Americas Owners Association, ATTN. Martin Wright, PO Box 15456, Santa Fe, NM 87592-5456.

Would you like to be on the mailing list? Just mail us your name and address. Owners of investment property are reminded to provide a copy of this newsletter to tenants.

SUMMER MAINTENANCE NOTES - contributed by Martin Wright

With the hot weather we've been experiencing lately, maybe the last thing on your mind would be heating your home. However, this might actually be the perfect time of year for some regular inspection and maintenance so you're ready when the cold weather hits.

In my job as a real estate broker, I have conversed with a few chimney sweeps over the years. They tell me that they have more work than they can handle as soon as that first cold snap hits. Take advantage of the seasonal ebb and flow by having your chimney inspected and cleaned now. Your technician will have the time and the benefit of good weather to do a good and unhurried job for you. How often you need your chimney cleaned will depend not only on how much you use it, but also what kind of wood you burn. Contact a professional to discuss your own personal situation and to determine a cleaning schedule to ascertain the safety of you and your neighbors. If your chimney is dirty or damaged, it can be a danger to you from increased risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. And of course, a chimney which is not properly maintained can actually result in a fire, endangering not only you but your neighbors as well.

If you do not have a spark arrester installed, you need to get one. That's the "cap" that you see on most of the chimneys in our neighborhood. It performs multiple safety functions. It is designed so that any burning embers floating up the chimney hit the metal plate and are knocked back down into the firebox where they can continue burning. Without the spark arrester, small burning cinders can be pushed up out of a chimney and then quickly fall back down on your roof or a neighbor's roof, or into nearby vegetation. This could possibly burn a hole in a roof or start a brush fire. Another benefit of the spark arrester is that it prevents birds or animals from entering your chimney. A bird's nest clogging up a chimney can lead to carbon monoxide in the home, or result in a structural fire.

The ideal time to have your heating system maintained is before you need to use it. Like chimney sweeps, plumbers and other heating specialists tell me that they are swamped with work as soon as that first cold night hits us in the Fall. They get booked up and you can easily wait a week before your preferred service person can fit you into the schedule. Beat the rush and get your heater overhauled while the weather is still warm. Most Las Americas residences have hot water baseboard heating. These systems have a part called an "auto air vent." It automatically bleeds air out of the system. It is a small part and not terribly expensive to replace. But if it stops working correctly, it can cause catastrophic failure of the whole system. If enough air accumulates in the boiler, the boiler itself can crack. It is better to spend a hundred bucks for replacement when this part shows signs of wearing out, than to wait for the heat to stop working and finding out that your

SUMMER MAINTENANCE NOTES (CONTINUED)

boiler is shot and you need to come up with a couple grand to get your heater working again.

To check your auto air vent, first you have to find it. They are often located above the expansion tank and / or on top of the boiler case. The part is typically a brass colored cylinder about the size of a film can (for those of us who remember when cameras used film). At the top of the unit is a hole where the air is vented out (sometimes it is shaped like a Schrader valve - like the air valve on an automobile tire). The vent hole has a screw-on cap or a screw-in plug (depending on the model) designed to keep dirt out of the valve. **DO NOT TIGHTEN THIS CAP / PLUG.** It may be your instinct to do this, like you would on a tire valve, but doing so will prevent the valve from venting air properly. If you find one that has been tightly sealed because someone who didn't know what they were doing tightened it up, consider replacing the valve to be on the safe side. To properly position this cap / plug, follow the directions that came with the valve. Typically, they tell you to screw the cap / plug down all the way, then back it out about 1 & ½ turns, to allow air flow but prevent dust and dirt from settling in the valve.

Every time the auto air vent sense air in the line, it opens the valve a little bit to vent the air, then closes again when it senses water. This process usually allows a tiny bit of water to escape, where it dries up. We all know about hard water stains that build up around sinks and faucets in our area. This same thing happens to these droplets of water on the auto air vent. After this happens enough times, a crust will form in and on the valve and eventually prevent the valve from operating correctly. I look for signs of hard water deposits on and around the auto air vents. If I see a white crust starting to form on the part, I have my plumber replace the valve.

All of our Las Americas boiler systems are custom built; some have one auto air vent and some have more than one. If your system has two (or more) of these it is important that they both (all) be working properly. If you find that you are having these units replaced frequently, it may be a sign that there is a leak somewhere in the system, something you should discuss with your heating professional.

Malfunctioning thermostats or zone valves may not prevent a heating system from warming your home, but probably reduce efficiency. Inspection of all of the parts of the system is important to minimize your heating bill and maximize the life of the system.

Even if all of the parts in your hydronic heating system are functioning, it is important to do a regular basic cleaning of the burners and the mechanical closet. Accumulated dirt in and around the burners can affect the fuel / air mixture. This can mean inefficient combustion, so you waste natural gas and spend more money for your utility bill than you need to. And it can mean an increase in carbon monoxide - a health hazard. Your heating professional will clean the burners and test the exhaust to make sure CO levels are within acceptable limits as part of a regular inspection and overhaul of your system. Also keep the mechanical closet clean and free of any leaves or combustible materials to manage the risk of fire.

If you are unclear or in doubt about any of these suggestions or ideas, please consult a chimney or heating professional.

LAS AMERICAS HELP LINE

Residents are expected to be considerate and respectful neighbors. The Las Americas Owners Association encourages residents to resolve any differences by 1) discussing concerns with the other neighbor(s) involved and 2) coming to a satisfactory agreement with your neighbor(s). If you are still unsuccessful, individuals from the Board of Directors volunteer to assist with settlement of issues. For the months of July, August, and September, you may contact Wilson Plowman at 424-0553.

Copies of Las Americas Owners Association documents and newsletters are available online. Point your browser to www.RealEstateInSantaFe.com/americas/.