

Judith_Leraas_Cook Welcome to today's chat session. We plan to share information about applying Firewise landscaping principles around your home and in your communities. My name is Judith Leraas Cook and I am the project manager for Firewise Communities/USA. Michele Steinberg, Special Projects Manager for Firewise Communities and I will co-moderate today. Welcome Michele!

Michele_Steinberg Thanks, Judith. I hope everyone enjoys today's chat!

Judith_Leraas_Cook We will begin the chat by hearing from Bill Butler, Landscape Architect for the City of Palm Coast, Florida. Bill has been extremely active with the Firewise program for several years. Most recently, he has worked with Cypress Knoll, a subdivision within Palm Coast that has qualified for Firewise Communities/USA recognition status. After we hear from Bill, we will answer your questions about landscaping issues and/or practices in your neighborhood or community. At the conclusion of Bill's presentation, the chat will become completely interactive. We encourage you to join in at that time. Bill, tell us about your experiences in Palm Coast with integrating Firewise landscaping principles into city policy and practice. We know that you had a very exciting demonstration project within Cypress Knoll. Would you please describe that for us?

bill After devastating fires in 1985 (130 homes lost) and 1998 (100 homes lost) our community finally awakened to the real need to take action. Its unfortunate that sometimes losses have to occur not once but twice before people are motivated to do anything about it. Palm Coast became a City in 1999 and began immediately drafting a wildfire ordinance. After much discussion, in April of 2001 it was passed. It requires the property owners whose lots contain hazardous fuels averaging between 3-6' and lie within 30' of an adjacent structure, to mow or underbrush the vegetation to the ground to create a more defensible space. Additionally we have written in our Comprehensive Plan provisions for Firewise design of subdivisions and homes. Currently we are Revising our Land Development Code to be consistent with the comp plan and provide specifics on this issue.

Judith_Leraas_Cook On a little broader scale, for those of us who are homeowners and members of small communities around the United States how can we get our Firewise landscapes started? Are there certain principles we need to follow?

bill What is helpful is to use existing resources where possible. For example, the Cypress Knoll committee had an existing Neighborhood Watch program already in effect, complete with phone numbers and block captains which is what we needed to start. Second, contact your local Division of Forestry office for assistance in determining your present fire hazard and maybe have them speak with the homeowners association.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Is there a logical way of pre-planning a landscape? I am looking for suggestions.

bill Also contact your City officials if the DOF deems your subdivision is at risk and see what they can do administratively to pass ordinances similar to other communities like ours. Finally, hook up with Fireswise.org as this is the best resource for information I know. In planning a landscape, the first 30' is the most critical. In this area you want to minimize the use of fire prone existing or planted vegetation. Remove vines from trees and thin existing stands of conifers to help prevent the spread of fire in the canopy. The landscape does not need to be barren. Careful selection and placement of vegetation and proper maintenance is the key.

Judith_Leraas_Cook We know that we should keep the amount of vegetation extremely low next to our homes. Would you talk a little about hardscape items that really won't burn? We would like to hear about them.

bill Well, first of all, all vegetation will burn. Some will carry a fire extremely well and others will only smolder. An example of this is we had a fire in one of our roadway medians and a fire started in the pittosporum shrubs (thick leaves with lots of moisture in them) and the first few shrubs were continue through the rest of the planting. What you want to look for is leaves without volatile oils (ones you can smell) thick leaves with lots of moisture when you squeeze them and plants that have open airy branching with little duff production or dead leaf accumulation.

Judith_Leraas_Cook We hear a lot about maintenance. Do you have some maintenance tips for us?

bill This is a very important issue. Shrubs and tree branches should be periodically pruned back from house, not allowed to get too tall and provide a ladder to the eaves and roof edges. Dead leaves and pine needles can carry a fire even if you installed a non-flammable mulch such as gravel if you don't rake it out. Water is helpful also, particularly if we have really dry windy conditions so as to put some

moisture back into the leaves and branches so they do not ignite readily.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Bill – We know you have a lot of experience with creating improved emergency access routes. Cypress Knoll originally had a single ingress/egress for use in time of fire or other emergency. Their situation has been greatly improved, thanks to work you did there. While ingress/egress is somewhat independent of Firewise landscaping, it is very important. Would you share your experiences with increasing the emergency access capabilities in Cypress Knoll with our audience?

bill This subdivision's access solution was not easy, but makes for a good example. The single access into the community dead ended due to the city limits being at the far end of the development...

bill What we had to do was get the adjacent property owner to agree to give us a temporary emergency access agreement to put a stabilized road into the property. We additionally needed to get a driveway permit from the Department of Transportation to access the State road it lead to. We chained off both ends so as to not allow cut through traffic on a regular basis and furnished all the block captains with keys to the locks. It was then their responsibility to communicate with their blocks of the emergency route and for one of them to open the chains if an emergency arises.

Judith_Leraas_Cook The chat is now open to everyone. We encourage you to ask questions of all three of us---Michele, Bill and me. For those of you who live in AZ, CA, CO, FL (Flagler County), MT, NM, NC, OR, SD, UT or VA, you can access fire-resistant....

Gerald_Steeley Bill, where would one find a list of qualified Firewise landscape architects?

Judith_Leraas_Cook plant lists at firewise.org/usa.

bill You can go to our website at ASLA.org and get information there or contact me and I can also assist in this regard.

Judith_Leraas_Cook The Firewise program has recently opened the Firewise Learning Center. One of the two initial courses in the center is Firewise Landscaping.

Gerald_Steeley Thank you

Judith_Leraas_Cook You can connect to the learning center from the 'What's New?' section of firewise.org if you have an interest in that topic. Bill – Would you be willing to tell us a little about the Cypress Knoll demonstration project you did?

bill Sure. We wanted to demonstrate our fire mitigation ordinance as many had misconceptions about what it was and expressed

concern that their lawn mower could not get in and do the job. Mitigation mowing was demonstrated on a vacant lot by the Division of Forestry with their Gyro-trac equipment. At the same time, we had targeted the adjacent house to this lot as being in need of a Firewise makeover. We, along with volunteers from the Cypress Knoll Community, Palm Coast and Ormond Beach Fire Departments and other City and DOF personnel Removed fire prone existing shrubs and trees and replaced them with more fire resistant species, limbed up trees that were on the roof, removed... bill pine needles from shrubbery, gutters and plant beds and installed gravel mulch around the house. We took before and after pictures and what a difference it made!

Judith_Leraas_Cook How did the neighbors like the look?
bill It really triggered a chain reaction. We offered free firewise landscape consultations by way of a sign-up sheet on site and we had quite a few takers. Also we noticed a lot of residences with yard waste out front the next week, indicating proper maintenance was being performed.

Gerald_Steeley Bill, at what point would you recommend a landscape architect for an individual homeowner, or is most of your work with cities and communities?

bill I am the City landscape architect, but part of any public officials job is to serve the public and that includes homeowners. The sooner the better is the answer of when to contact an LA, as they can save a lot of your money from being wasted on the wrong plant material or the improper placement of them. Construction materials can be a problem as well and they can recommend fire resistant types of lumber and other materia

Judith_Leraas_Cook Bill – I am curious with regard to how much time it took (from start to finish) to establish the emergency access route for Cypress Knoll.

bill Initially, it took about 1 year to get this going and open. About 1 year after we opened it, the property owner whos property we had the easement agreement with sold the property and we had to cancel the easement. Just yesterday I received a new access agreement from the new property owner! He is presently trying to develop the property and he assures me he will design some type of permanent access for our use in the design.

Judith_Leraas_Cook This is absolutely wonderful information. We will be posting this transcript, in the forum area of the web site very soon. The web area is undergoing a major renovation and we are holding the transcripts until it is completed.

bill I might add that even subdivisions touted as being designed as Firewise with two access points may not be so firewise due to phasing. If the first phase does not go all the way to the other end and the road is not completed, then they still only have one egress point for maybe 2 years or more.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Bill – Very interesting. Homeowners need to be alert to these things. You are in the midst of your fire season right now. Any thought you want to share with folks from you area of the country with regard to safer landscaping?

bill Now is the time to act to form your Firewise Communities, when it is in the news and when people are most aware of it. Public information is key in the success.

Judith_Leraas_Cook I was interested that the Cypress Knoll pilot project served as a catalyst. Are you familiar with what its residents are doing now?

bill We as a City and myself had put a lot of work into the formation of the Firewise Community and now, as they should be, they are on automatic pilot so to speak. I am conversing with them from time to time and Timber Weller, the DOF fire mitigation specialist has also been assisting to guide them. I believe they are working on a spring cleanup and also indicated they wanted to educate the school children on Firewise tips so it would trickle down to the parents.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Good news! It is nice to know when a process is working. We would like to thank you, Bill, for being such a great guest! And thank you, also, to our audience for joining us today.