Dear HOA presidents,

Recently, East Lake Woodlands was placed in the spotlight when it was reported that two stolen cars filled with young teenagers with quite a long criminal past had violated our community. When first reported I was shocked as most of you must have been. After listening to several media reports several of us became skeptical that two stolen cars would enter a gated community with a guard watching that could identify them. Jaime Soderland, ELWCA property manager, and Ryan Flaherty, manager of Allied Universal ELW controlled access, checked all visitor and barcode information between the hours of 12am and 5am on Sunday and had no record of the stolen license plates entering. This information was provided to the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Department. There were also reports that the youths entered and burglarized several homes and cars. No reports were made to either our officers or the Sheriff’s Department that a burglary occurred during this time. Keith Crank, ELWCA board member and director of controlled access, talked with the lead detective on the matter and he stated that the burglary information came from the surviving youth and not from any direct evidence.

The detective said that the report that they had entered East Lake Woodlands arose from a report from a Pinellas County Sheriff's deputy who happened to have made a 3:50am traffic stop on East Lake Road southbound, near Woodlands Blvd (North Gate). He had been alerted earlier that they were looking for a black SUV and a Sebring. He spotted the two cars on East Lake Road and saw them turn onto Woodlands Blvd. He left the scene of the traffic stop and proceeded further south on East Lake Road for about 1/4 of a mile until there was a crossing in the median. He then came back up East Lake Road and turned into the North Gate. The cars weren't there so he approached the guard on duty and asked if he had seen the 2 vehicles coming through to which the guard reported that he had not seen either vehicle. The next place they spotted the vehicles was on the exit ramp off of East Lake Road onto Tampa Road. Our assumption is that if the two vehicles turned onto Woodlands Blvd, they saw the gate and guard and immediately made a U-turn and proceeded back out to another area. By the time the Sheriff's Deputy made it back to the North Gate the vehicles had disappeared into the darkness.

Pinellas County Deputy Jason Howard was at the ELWCA Board meeting on Tuesday night, August 8, and confirmed that they now do not believe that they ever entered East Lake Woodlands. As Deputy Howard said, we are lucky to have gates and it's no accident that we
have a much lower crime rate than any community surrounding us. A sense of security at home is one of our greatest needs and desires. Unfortunately, an event like this opens our eyes to the problems that surround us. I feel extremely lucky to live in and represent a community that places a high priority on the safety and well being of all residents.

Thank you for your continued support,

Susan Whitehead
President, ELWCA