All About SMORS – Chapter 1.
This is a chance for us to get the word out on a potential news item before the news happens so that you understand what the issue may be and are aware of what it all means.

So, I am going to explain all about SMORS to you. Unfortunately, this is a rather involved topic and before we go too far, you need to have some idea of where SMORS came from and just what it is. If I tried to cover it all at once, it would be a rather lengthy post and many of you might drop off to sleep before finishing the story. I think it best to divide this into several posts and leave a day or a few days between posting them, so it has time to sink in. But don't worry, there will be a test! <g> Today's chapter will be Chapter 1 – where did SMORS come from?

To answer this question, we need to go back to January of 2015. I was just appointed Finance Director to fill a vacant position on the board. Toni Miller was the previous FD but declined to run for another term due to health concerns. No other members ran for the position so after the September election of 2014, the position was vacant as of January 2015. I felt that I could do the job as I had some 30 plus years of experience designing and implementing financial systems. I was fortunate to be mentored by two outstanding Finance Directors, Terry Spears and George Shelly, both of whom were Finance Directors and chairmen of various state organizations of Finance Directors.

By the way, Toni was a great bookkeeper but did not know the accounting theory behind it all. She worked hard for Safari for a good number of years and was a real asset to the association.

Once I started looking into how Safari's financials were set up, I quickly realized that there were some major problems. For one, Safari was only tracking Revenue and Expenses and totally ignoring Assets, Liabilities and Equity. Another was that the chart of accounts was not really organized to provide meaningful information. Lastly, most of the member tracking was done on four spreadsheets without any verification that the data between them was complete and consistent. Toni worked very hard at her job and usually could be found in the office on every weekday working for about 4 hours each morning. But when it came time for the preparation of member invoices, she basically did the entries into the old version of Quickbooks by hand and spent some 40+ hours to get the invoices out.

I came from a background of computer systems with over 50 years of experience and was determined that I would not spend that amount of time to do so simple a task. With Diane Sellinger's able assistance we redesigned the chart of accounts and implemented Safari's books using the online version of Quickbooks which is where we are today. Quickbooks is great accounting software, but it does not provide any form of member information or electric meter readings or any other non-accounting types of information.

What I did was to begin implementing a series of web pages that would contain the member related information including the meter readings that can feed billing information to Quickbooks to generate the invoices. I also included many other features which will be listed later. After the first invoices went out, I heard back from the members that the Quickbook invoices were hard for some to read because of the small print and the confusing descriptions. This was addressed by my adding a few more web pages to actually print the bills with larger fonts and clearer descriptions.

This system was first used in the spring of 2015 and has been going ever since. In 2017-2018 I implemented the Safari website (www.safari-ilwaco.org) and included the MySafari page which is linked to the SMORS information. It has your previous electric consumption and ability to print bills amongst other items. Somewhere around 2019, John Landry gave the system the name of "SMORS – Safari Membership Online Records System" and it has had this name ever since.

In Chapter 2, I will go over some of the key functions that the system provides so that you can understand what it does. Hopefully will publish that in a day or two.

All about SMORS – Chapter 2.

In this chapter I will attempt to give you a list of the functions that SMORS provides. As you will see, it is a long list. Basically, anytime I came across anything that could be improved by automating it, I put it into SMORS. Likewise other board members would see things and ask that they be included. Below I will itemize each task that is automated and will explain what it does:

- Basic Member Demographics: This function tracks the information on each member and membership. The information includes name, address, phone number, email address, cell phone carrier, and other similar information.
- Lot list by member: This shows which members are assigned which lots.
- Flags for emailing bills, documents, ballots, and financial statements. These flags tell the system whether you wish to receive these items by email or not.
- Change History: This keeps a record of changes to lots, members, and memberships for tracking what was done and who did it.
- Change forms: The system can produce the needed forms to make changes in who is being added or removed from memberships.
- Lot List: the system tracks each lot and various items about the lot. For example, whether the office has keys to the unit(s) on that lot for emergency. It also has all the changes for that lot in terms of members. The system also stores any covenants, restrictions, or waivers on the lot which may affect a future sale.
- Plat Maps: As we are developing maps for each lot and marking them with boundary markers, the maps are stored in SMORS so that they can be accessed and printed at any time.
- Electrical Usage: The electric meter readings are kept in a history file by lot to be used in the billing & reasonability process as explained below.
- Contact Log: This is a place where board members can record important interactions with members. In the past, communication between board members often was lacking and a commitment made by one board member to a member was not known by the others who might unwittingly undo it. This function allows a board member to record the interaction and have the system email the other board members that might be affected by it so that the board all speak with the same voice. It can also store documents and pictures related to the interaction.
- Surveys: The system can do online surveys of important questions. This was a valuable tool for the board to get a sense of the members' opinion on selected topics. Its most notable use was when the board was considering whether to stay with video meetings or go back to in-person ones. The online survey was overwhelmingly in favor of the video. It was also used to determine the level of use of the laundry facilities and whether they needed to be upgraded (they did!).

- Applicants: The system tracks the new member applicants. It tracks the votes of board members as they vote to accept or deny the application for membership and gently "prods" them to vote in case they forget. It also notifies the board member responsible for applicants when certain activities related to the application must be done (interview, background check, etc.)
- Guests: The system provides a place where the caretaker can register guests and see who is in the park besides normal members.
- SIP Permits: The system stores and tracks the Site improvement Permits. This includes the form and accompanying drawings. There are reports on the status of the SIPs and each step is tracked as to date and approved.
- RV Permits: This function allows for permits for temporary RVs of more than 7 days in the park. While not in widespread use due to other priorities, it is something we should be doing to remain an RV park in the eyes of the state.
- Security: the system contains a place where each person allowed to access SMORS is established along with the role they have. Each role may have different access to the various portions of the system.
- Structure Survey: This area includes the list of non-conforming structures and pictures of those structures. This established with Pacific County the baseline of what is grandfathered and allowed to remain as long as it is safe. *Very Important*
- Events: This system allows for the scheduling and reserving of various items in safari including the lodge, kitchen, office, etc.
- Water valves: The system has a map of all known water valves in the park. To date we have identified 24 of them and some control a large number of lots while others only control a few. Your lot usually has 2-3 valves controlling it. One has a large are, one a smaller area and the third just around you. This allows us to know during water leaks which valve we can use to isolate the leak and affect the fewest number of lots.
- Alerts: The system can send SMS text alerts on various important items to members who have opted in to this part of the system. Typical alerts are for power outages, water outages, road closures, etc. These alerts can be targeted to all lots affected by a specific water valve or to those who would like to know when Tom is spraying weeds to protect their pets.

- Email:  The system provides the ability to send emails to all or selected members including attachments.  This was heavily used to send out my weekly updates for example.
- Board Emails: This provided the ability for the board to send emails with scans to various board members.
- Work Requests:  This part of SMORS was requested by Dana back in 2020. She wanted a way to keep track of the requests that members made for work such as tractor work, gravel sales, etc.  These could then be costed, and the monies billed and paid were tracked and fed to the Finance Director.  This was expanded to include specific work requests for Safari as a way to track those costs as well.  A good example was the new drains placed on 7th Street in 2020.
- Caretakers Corner:  This function in SMORS provides the caretaker a place to update the web page caretaker's corner content.
- Sales Agent:  This area gives our sales agents a place to track both listings and showings of memberships for sale.  The listing information contains pictures of the units & lots and is then available on the website for interested parties to view.
- QB Edit:  This is the function that ensures that the member information in our QuickBooks accounting system is current with what is in SMORS. Extremely important to make sure that the invoices go to the right person in the right place.
- Meter Readings list:  The system provides a listing of all lots and meters in the order in which they are read.  This makes it easy and fast for the caretaker to go from lot to lot in the quickest way possible.
- Meter Readings:  The system provides a place for the Finance Director to enter the electric meter readings along with any important comments for producing the semi-annual invoices.
- Brivo Mobile Passes:  The system tracks the mobile pass users and then includes the billing charge for the mobile pass on the invoices.
- Invoices:  The system uses the meter readings, Brivo information and other inputs to compute the members' invoices and makes the data available to be fed to QuickBooks.
- Send Invoices:  The system either emails or prints the member invoices for distribution.
- Reasonability:  The system uses the meter reading history mentioned above to determine if the current reading is consistent with the usage history.

About 80% of the meter misreads are caught with this report and corrected before the bills go out. Sometimes, but rarely, there is a change in circumstances (new park model, new owner, etc.) where the current usage is outside the normal pattern, and these are resolved individually when reported.

- MySafari Webpage: the SMORS system also provides security for members to log into the webpage and view the MySafari page which is unique to their membership(s). It includes the ability to update demographic information, provide your current account balance and the ability to print your most recent invoice. It also has the history of the electric usage for your lots, and a place to register your guests. It also includes the ability: to enter your work requests, print your lot map, see the outstanding SIPs for all lots, and see the list of grandfathered structures on your lot.

As you can see, SMORS provides a lot of functionality and there are probably some areas I forgot to list. But it is really geared towards the needs of the association. In the next chapter on SMORS, we will discuss "where do we go from here?"

All About SMORS - Chapter 3.

In this chapter, we will take a look at where we go from here with SMORS. To fully understand this question, we have to talk about the use of custom software versus commercially available software. There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

Custom software is software that is written for one, or a very small number, of customers. It is highly tuned to meet their needs. As an example of these kinds of specific needs, Pacific County requires Safari to report all name and address changes in ownerships for the property tax records. (If we don't do that, they can require that all sales be filed with them by block and site). SMORS tracks these reportable changes, and each week sends an email to the appropriate county staff listing the changes. That is a true custom function that commercial software would not normally provide. The previous chapter of this writeup listed many other examples. The tradeoff here is a dependency on providing local support of the software which can be a real challenge both in terms of cost and availability.

Commercial software has a totally different focus. It is geared towards a greater number of customers and provides the most common functions. Since it is not implemented to support your specific needs, you may have to change your business procedures to make full use of it. Because of this "mass produced" mentality, development and support costs are spread over a larger number of users with the tradeoff being more generalized functionality. Functions specific to a small number of users are generally not economically viable to be included in commercial software. On the plus side, the support of the product is not dependent on a small number of programmers and is therefore more easily provided.

Price is another consideration with software. Custom software may be more expensive to implement initially but it meets more needs of the organization. Commercial software has ongoing support and usage costs that do add up over time.

So how does all this apply to SMORS? First of all, the development and support costs of SMORS are negligible. I provided the hours to implement it as a volunteer and no monies were spent on it. It costs less than $100 per year paid to our hosting service to operate it. I am willing to continue to support it for the foreseeable future with one caveat. The administrative access to the system (the ability to "look under the hood" and change settings) is something that I will restrict to my sole use. This is because the amount of damage the untrained person can do unintentionally can cause a real headache for the person having to support the product. I have been this route before and wasted many hours trying to figure out what someone did when they said they did nothing and yet changed some parameters. It goes without saying that if someone wanted to intentionally harm the system, this administrative access would give them the ability to do so.

I have advised the Safari Board of Directors that I am willing to continue the existing support with the above understanding. There has been one request for this admin access which I have declined. I also know that the board is looking at alternative software solutions. In the long run, that may be best for Safari as I will not live forever. But there is another path for the board to consider:

The board could continue the current system and relationship with me and then search for an eventual successor to provide support once my involvement ends. Depending on who that person is, it may also involve some costs. While there is a lot of code in the system (over 30,000 lines), it was developed using commercially available standard tools. This would possibly give Safari the best functionality with dependable long-term support.

SMORS provides all the functionality listed earlier in these chapters. It also provides insurance for key documents. Functionality is available so that all documents related to Safari memberships stored in the paper files in the office can be scanned and stored in the system. In the event of a catastrophe like a fire or flood, these digital documents would be available. I think that whatever path is taken, capabilities like this one are critical to Safari.

SMORS also provides a lot of data for the Safari Webpage. If some other product is implemented, the Safari webpage and the MySafari data will probably not be available to members online.

All of these considerations must be taken into account when the board decides which way to proceed.

I hope these 3 chapters have given you some insight of SMORS so that you may better understand what is being discussed when you hear anything about SMORS.