



Photo courtesy of Envera Systems

When You're Away, Home Watch Services Keep Troubles at Bay

BY NATHAN
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“If you're a snowbird and going to spend months somewhere else, things can happen,” says Steve Radius. A pipe can burst, a roof can leak, or the landscaping can become overgrown (the HOA may not overlook that). All of these things, and more, can create havoc for a homeowner,

especially an owner who's thousands of miles away. Radius, the founder and owner of Radius Home Watch, makes it his mission to relieve the stress and pressure for snowbird residents and other property owners.

The founder and owner of Nextdoor Neighbor Home-watch, Larry Prater, can relate. "I've seen a lot of snowbirds get taken advantage of, charged more, or they receive poor service," says Prater. It was in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, that he knew he needed to help. "A lot of my neighbors are Canadians, and it was three years before they could come back," he says. "Within a month of the start of the pandemic, one neighbor had a leak..." Prater took care of the issue and officially launched his home watch business.

The home watch industry has seen incredible growth since 2010. According to their YouTube channel, the National Home Watch Association was established in 2009 and officially launched



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the next year. It was the beginning of instituting industry standards and regulations for home watch services across the country and in Canada. For snowbirds and homeowners with more than one property, "Having a certified home watch company means you have actual evidence that someone is watching your home," says Prater. It's validation that your investment is being cared for when you're absent and is often submitted to insurance companies as proof.

While the evolution of smart homes and technology may provide a glimpse into a property, there's something to be said for the physical presence and services that a home watch can provide. Radius and Prater offer a level of service that your doorbell camera just can't compete with, from watering plants to checking on outdoor lights, and even being a key holder when an owner can't be present for a contractor or repairs. "The homeowner knows that there is somebody trusted to open the door and lock up when they're done," Radius says. They check the safety and security of a property, while monitoring the upkeep as well. "When people are gone for extended periods, sometimes a service company may skip a week here and there, and people don't know," Prater says.

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Radius and Prater agree there are a range of worries and concerns that can plague a snowbird when they don't have eyes on their property. The most common—"Water all around," says Prater. "If you get one little water leak and it goes unseen, then you're looking at water damage, maybe mold...it just snowballs," Radius explains. In addition to damaging leaks, pools need to have water let out or added in, and water needs to be turned on to prevent pressure from building up in the pipes. It's these things and more that Radius and Prater help homeowners take care of and address.

As a snowbird, one of the biggest stresses about a second home in Florida can come during storm season. With little warning and the unpredictability of severe weather, it's difficult to prepare your property prior to a tropical storm or hurricane, check on it after, and clean up any damage or debris. Home watch services relieve that anxiety by prepping a home beforehand with shutters, "and we'll do an inspection of the property and assist with cleanup and removal of storm shutters," says Radius. Most homeowner associations don't allow residents to keep shutters up for an indefinite period of time, so "people want someone that they trust to put shutters up and take them down within the allotted timeframe," Prater adds.

A home is a big investment, one that Prater and Radius know needs to be protected and cared for, especially when you're gone. Keeping the property safe is a priority, and no matter the size or age, something can happen says Prater, "It doesn't matter if it's a 1968 unit or a 2023 home." If a homeowner desires help, both home

watch companies have vetted contractors on hand to ensure they can make a recommendation they trust.

That trust is the foundation of their businesses, going beyond checklists and check-ins (although crucial). Just like they trust certain contractors, they develop relationships with their clients to build trust for when an owner is states away. "I have a passion to do things for people... I'm there to protect them," says Prater. It's protection and an enhanced level of comfort that we all want when we're away. Radius puts it this way, "It's all about peace of mind, and the ability to be fully present wherever you're at, confident that your home is cared for." ■