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Imperial Golf Estates Builds New Entrance, Installs New Barcode Access Control System

Imperial Golf Estates is a large gated community in beautiful Naples, Florida. It encompasses about 2,000 acres, including 1,565 private homes, condos and villas and a private golf club. The first phase of the subdivision was originally built in the early 1970s with a single front entrance manned 24/7. But as the community grew and phases were added, it became clear a second gate was needed for those homeowners who lived toward the rear of the development.

A second entrance would save those residents approximately 15-30 minutes of drive time to their home. It would also cut down on some of the traffic traveling through the community. Finally, that second entrance was needed to allow police, fire and rescue units to more easily reach the back of the community.

The homeowners association at Imperial Golf Estates knew it didn't want to burden the residents with the cost of a second manned entrance but it still needed to tightly control access. Anything less would compromise the security of the entire community. They decided to work with a general contractor who then contacted Action Automatic Door & Gate in Naples, Florida to develop a solution.

"We custom designed an entrance and access control system for the unique requirements of this community," explained George Ebel, president of Action Automatic Door & Gate. They immediately ruled out card reader and transponder systems. Both could easily be shared with others by simply giving the card reader or transponder to someone else and both were also known to frequently malfunction. "We recommended a barcode system. It would provide the best security at an unmanned entrance while not inconveniencing the residents."

In January 2011 the company proceeded to install two BA-440 readers manufactured by Barcode Automation, a Winter Springs, Florida company and the industry leader in barcode scanners. The readers would record not only vehicles that enter through the gate but also vehicles leaving the community and their associated times.

At Imperial Golf Estates, the homeowners association identified the owners of 634 single-family homes that would be permitted to use the new back entrance, and they were assessed the amount needed to pay for it. Those owners would be the only ones to receive the barcode decals.

"When distributing the barcodes, we didn't simply hand them to the residents," explained Harlan Dam, president of the homeowners association. "Instead, we had them bring their vehicle to us at which time we noted the owner by name, and the car's license plate, make and model. It was important that we had all the relevant information for every barcode we distributed."

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The community's property management staff installed the barcode decals, placing them on the rear passenger side window of the vehicle where they would be unobtrusive.

"We like the barcode system because it restricts who comes and goes through that entrance. We don't want vendors, delivery people, golf club members, visitors or even any residents not in that group of 634 to use this entrance. All of those people must go through the manned front gate. We also like that we can easily deactivate a bar code if a homeowner moves out of our community," Dam said. He added that someone had photocopied a barcode decal as a test, but the copied version did not work, exactly as the homeowner association had hoped.

Paul Cuoto, a manager with Action Automatic Door & Gate and the individual who oversaw the design and installation of the Imperial Golf Estates access control system, explained some of its unique details. The new entrance was in a remote area. Woods were cleared and 2,800 feet of road had to be built. Additionally, a small building was constructed in the median to house the barcode scanner support equipment and keep it out of the weather.

"We recommended that the barcode system be used in conjunction with security cameras," Cuoto said. "In this way, not only do they have a time-stamped record of every vehicle passing through the gate, they also have a video recording of the vehicle complete with its license plate and the face of the person driving." A total of eight cameras provide multi-angle views of all inbound and outbound traffic.

Already the combined barcode/video system has been used to catch two drivers: one who backed into a camera and a second who tried to let a friend's vehicle enter without a barcode decal and caused damage to the gate. Those individuals were easily identified and charged for the repairs. Tailgating, when one car tries to sneak in a gate by driving right up to the bumper of the car in front of it, can be a common problem at gated entrances. Cuoto said they've prevented that problem at Imperial Golf Estates by installing a double gate. "Entering the community, the reader scans the vehicle's barcode and then slides open the first gate, a wrought iron barrier. Then the weight of the car as it passes through causes that first gate arm to close. By this gate arm coming down, only one vehicle can pass through at a time, and that vehicle must have an acceptable barcode decal."

Additionally, the system has been extremely reliable. Cuoto said it has a double scanner to ensure no misreads. "If the angle of the car is such that one laser can't read it, the other one always can. Dam agreed. "We haven't had any residents claim their decal didn't work," he said. The system has also been maintenance free, other than wiping each scanner's lens every couple of weeks to keep it clean.

"We've had no problems with the barcode system," Dam explained. "It functions problem-free and does exactly what we want it to do – restrict access to those 634 homeowners who paid for it. Even though we now have a second entrance into our community and that entrance is unmanned, our security has not been compromised."