

Charlotte County update for 11/18/20

County gears up for Centennial celebration

By Hector Flores

On Dec. 8, the Charlotte County Commission will consider a proclamation declaring 2021 as the Charlotte County Centennial Year. The proclamation cites the role Charlotte County residents played in seeking home rule through the establishment of a new county and the creation of that county by an act of the Florida Legislature signed into law by Gov. Cary A. Hardee on April 23, 1921.

Though small in population — the county had only 4,000 people in the 1930 Census conducted nine years after its creation — Charlotte County already had a rich historical and cultural tradition dating back to the Calusa people who inhabited the area more than 8,000 years ago. By the 1500s, Spanish explorers landed in Florida and charted the Gulf Coast. They assigned the now-familiar names to prominent features and opened the region to the fishing trade.

Following the Civil War, settlements began to spring up around Charlotte Harbor and in 1887 the City of Punta Gorda was incorporated on the south side of the Peace River. The hotel built by the railroad that terminated at Punta Gorda launched a new tourism industry that attracted winter visitors, including former presidents and titans of American industry. Real estate booms and busts followed for the next several decades, even as the area became a fertile source of timber, cattle and agricultural products.

The 1950s launched a development boom that created the foundation for today's Charlotte County. From 1950 to 1990, the population of the county doubled or nearly doubled every 10 years. While agriculture and cattle remain important industries, they have been supplanted as economic drivers by the real estate, retail, health care and service sectors. As the Centennial approaches, the county population nears 200,000 residents.

Our Centennial celebrations will extend throughout 2021, starting in January with a month-long fishing derby and concluding with a veterans cruise in November. In between, the county will hold more than 80 Centennial-themed events, including a Centennial Gala on April 23, to raise awareness and celebrate where we have been and where we are going.

We have already launched a Centennial website, www.CharlotteCounty100.com, and a Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/CharlotteCounty100>. There you can find historical information and a calendar of events. Users can also sign up to receive email updates and partnership opportunities.

As the son of parents who “discovered” Charlotte County themselves and moved our family here when I was a boy, I have a deep appreciation for our community's history. I have worked for the county for 25 of its 100 years. Please join me in our Centennial year as we celebrate our history, toast its success and prepare for whatever the next 100 years brings.

Readers may reach Charlotte County Administrator Hector Flores at Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.