

Charlotte County update for 12/23/20

2020: A Year of Challenges and Service

By Hector Flores

As an incredibly challenging 2020 ends, it presents an opportunity for some reflection about the past year and anticipation for the year ahead.

The new year dawned with renewed focus on the county's mission, vision and values, which were updated to ensure widespread awareness and adoption within the organization. The mission is delivering exceptional service. The vision is to preserve and enrich our community's quality of life for those who live, work and play in our paradise. The values are embodied in the acronym CARES: committed, accountable, resourceful, energetic and supportive.

The latter would gain new meaning as the pandemic unfolded and a federal relief package with the same acronym enabled our county staff to deliver critical aid to residents and businesses impacted by the economic disruptions triggered by the crisis.

The mission of delivering exceptional service grew more challenging when we had to figure out how to provide services digitally or by phone instead of in person. We expanded online permitting and inspections for construction, implemented curbside pick-up for library materials, produced educational and recreational content for residents home with children or elderly dependents.

Throughout the year, we continued to deliver on promises made to voters who approved the local option sales tax. We completed and opened the Centennial Park recreation center and pool and broke ground on the Family Services Center and the sailing center at Port Charlotte Beach Park. In November, voters demonstrated their support to continue investing in their community by approving a six-year extension of the sales tax to fund roads, parks, water quality, and school and public safety projects.

In August, we launched an improved website with features to make it easier to access services and information, celebrate the natural beauty and richness of the county and provide a one-stop shop for all local government entities. It works as well on cell phones and tablets as desktops and features easy-to-use functions like one-touch dialing and emailing. By year-end, nearly 270,000 users will have viewed pages 2 million times.

In the new year, we begin a new two-year budget cycle. Planning is well underway and many of you have helped by participating in a citizen survey about county services and performance. Staff will be presenting those results, as well as progress on meeting County Commission goals, in a series of budget workshops in the coming months. A new element of the process includes imagining scenarios in post-COVID worlds we may face, some promising, others daunting. Either way, we must prepare and rise to meet what lies ahead.

Of course, the vaccine is on everyone's mind. We are already working with our Department of Health partners to communicate the latest information about vaccine availability, while

reinforcing our message about sustained vigilance until the pandemic abates. Visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click the COVID-19 Information banner.

In case you haven't heard, 2021 is the Centennial anniversary of the creation of Charlotte County. We've already held several events to spread the word, including last week's bridge banner reveal. More reminders will be appearing around the community and a full year of Centennial-themed events are scheduled to commemorate this historic milestone. For more information, visit www.CharlotteCounty100.com or the Centennial Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/CharlotteCounty100.

I'm incredibly proud of how my colleagues have responded to the pandemic, many adapting to remote working, others on the front lines treating patients, still others providing in-person services to thousands of customers despite the ever-present risk to themselves and their families. County staff have been in this crisis with you every day, working for you through close calls with tropical weather, through lockdowns and reopenings, through waves of new cases and now the current holiday surge even as a vaccine brings hope for a return to normalcy some day soon.

I wish you all a safe and healthy new year.

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