

County Earns 13 NACo Achievement Awards

By Hector Flores

The National Association of Counties announced Charlotte County has earned 13 Achievement Awards. The awards honor innovative and effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents.

In his announcement, NACo President Gary Moore said, “Over the past year, county officials and frontline employees have demonstrated bold, inspirational leadership. This year’s Achievement Award-winning programs illustrate the innovative ways counties build healthy, safe and vibrant communities across America.”

The programs earning Achievement Awards cover nine departments or divisions: Budget and Administrative Services, Community Development, Community Services, Human Resources, Human Services, Public Information, Public Safety and Public Works. Many of the awards involved interdepartmental coordination in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as county staff worked to continue delivering exceptional service to the public.

The Human Services Department partnered with area nonprofits to create the Community Organizations Active in a Disaster program to assist residents. Working with reassigned staff from Budget and Administrative Services and Community Services, COAD and Human Services processed more than 4,000 aid applications for 10,566 residents, distributing \$5.7 million to county households.

The Community Development Department’s FEMA Risk Map Changes & Community Outreach program included a new online interactive mapping application. The website increased public awareness of flood zone changes. Flood insurance ratings are crucial for Florida counties to reduce flood insurance rates.

Community Development, in partnership with Human Resources, also earned an award for its program called Building a Qualified Labor Force through Creativity and Innovation. Hiring qualified building inspectors and plans examiners has been an issue considering the demand and requirements for them to apply and be hired. The departments devised an auto-wage progression program that rewards building code professionals for attaining more licenses and certifications.

The Community Development Department was recognized for its education and visioning efforts for the Comprehensive Community Plan program. The department worked with the Public Information Office to create a series of videos explaining the 10 elements of the comprehensive plan.

The Public Works and the Public Safety departments were recognized for their interagency cooperation for Helicopter Public Safety Efforts entry. The departments created a partnership with the Charlotte County Sheriff’s Office that provided helicopter support missions for mosquito control spraying and fighting brush fires.

The Public Works Department won an award for initiating a Mosquito Trap Protection and Vandalism Reduction program that saved taxpayer money and improved data collection. The design, creation and deployment of a protective casing, coupled with solar power, increased the trap lifespan and reduced the number of traps that provided no results.

The Community Services Department won seven awards for the following programs:

- COVID-19 Safety Plan for Hosting Events, which created a framework for reopening county facilities following Centers for Disease Control guidelines for sanitizing and social distancing.
- Back 2 School Bash Backpack Give Away, a modified drive-through version of the popular program to ensure the safety of participants and staff.
- CrossU, a training and team-building program that enables staff to work at any of the county's 10 recreation centers and pools.
- Virtual Training, which consisted of creating videos and organizing a Microsoft Teams question-and-answer session.
- Efficient and Effective Youth Sports Council, an effort to coordinate and promote activities of independent athletic organizations using county athletic facilities.
- Recreation Facility Phased Reopening Plans 2020, a detailed implementation plan to re-open recreation facilities in the safest way possible for patrons and staff.
- Charlotte Sports Park Security During the 2020 MLB Season created guidelines instituted to limit the potential of an outbreak of COVID-19 within the Rays organization during spring training.

Since 2017, Charlotte County has earned 38 NACo Achievement Awards. Congratulations to everyone involved in these innovative programs developed to deliver exceptional service to the public. The dedication and professionalism demonstrated in these projects is a testament to the daily work being done by county staff and our partners.

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