

Tourism Bounces Back as Vaccinations Spread

By Hector Flores

County departments create monthly reports summarizing activities and accomplishments. These reports are compiled and provided to commissioners, county staff and the public. Occasionally, I like to use this space to highlight information I think deserves extra attention.

As COVID-19 vaccination rates have increased and hospitalization rates have decreased around the country, travelers have resumed their pre-pandemic habits. Tourism development tax receipts in Charlotte County, also known as bed taxes, increased 513% between April 2020 and April 2021.

Now that it is officially summer, you may have noticed the traffic on our roadways hasn't lightened up as it used to. This is a phenomenon that stretches back several years, as the difference between the "season" and "off-season" blurs. We're increasingly becoming a year-round destination for tourists.

Part of this seasonal blurring is by design. Our tourism bureau specifically targets off-season months, pitching Charlotte County as a year-round destination in its marketing and recruiting sporting events and trade associations to hold events and conferences in the "shoulder" months between April and November when hotel occupancy is typically lower. The bureau's June report has a chart that illustrates the off-season drop-off. In March 2021, bed tax receipts were \$954,893. In April 2021, they were \$580,592.

Our targeting efforts are paying off, though. In May alone, Charlotte County hosted a USA BMX event that attracted more than 700 riders and their families, a USA Swimming meet with more than 200 swimmers and 600 fans and a USSSA baseball tournament featuring more than 60 teams. The impact of those visitors will be reflected in the May 2021 bed tax figures in next month's report.

You may have heard or read about how companies and organizations are handling challenges associated with hiring workers, returning existing staff to offices and other employment issues, such as retention. In our Human Resources Department's June report, Charlotte County had an employee headcount of 1,260 and 132 vacant positions, with the highest number in the Public Safety and Community Services departments. It is especially difficult filling maintenance and lifeguard positions right now. Anyone interested in working for the county should visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/employment. Also coming up is a job fair by the Public Works Department, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. July 24 at the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center.

The Facilities Department's June report included updates on construction projects. The Port Charlotte Beach Park Sailing Center was completed last month and the County Commission held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 17. Construction of the new fire station on Don Pedro Island is moving along, with roof work underway and interior layout, mechanical, electrical and plumbing starting soon.

Community Development's June report featured news about a new BJ's Wholesale Club under construction on Quesada Avenue in Murdock. Site work is underway for a 103,120 sq. ft. building that will house the popular members-only retailer. The department issued 252 single-family building permits in May after averaging 220 per month the previous three months.

If you want to receive a copy of the monthly report, send an email to Brian.Gleason@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

Calendar contest

Submissions are still being accepted for the 2022 One Charlotte, One Water calendar. Email your photos to Brian.Gleason@CharlotteCountyFL.gov. Use the subject line One Charlotte, One Water and include your contact information and the subject of your photo. Winners will receive a free calendar and have their photos featured on the county's website and social media pages. The deadline for entries is Aug. 13, 2021.

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