

County tourism numbers show strong growth

By Hector Flores

Charlotte County is seeing record tourism numbers, according to the latest data from the state and our tourism partners.

May 2021 tourism development tax collections amounted to \$468,992, which was a record for that month. Collections not only eclipsed May 2020 (when vacation rentals were still shut down for much of the month) by 195% but also exceeded May 2019 collections by 102%. For the year through May, collections are up 30.6% versus 2020 and 25.5% over 2019.

Based on hotel sector data, it appears June collections will be significantly higher than June 2020 (which was a record June) as occupancy is showing a 27% increase in comparison to last year. In addition, anecdotal reports from properties in both the hotel and vacation rental sectors indicate much higher than normal occupancies and revenues for the month of July 2021.

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Visitor and Convention Bureau was instrumental in recruiting and supporting both the Prospect Wire baseball national and state championships. The nationals, on which we partnered with Sarasota County, attracted 112 teams and generated \$4.1 million in total economic impact and more than 4,000 hotel room nights for the two counties from July 24-28. The state championship, which took place solely at the Charlotte Sports Park July 30-Aug. 3, drew 32 teams, generating an estimated \$1.8 million in economic impact for the county.

Sunseeker resumes

Speaking of tourism, staff from the county's Public Information Office, visitor's bureau and Office of Economic Development attended Tuesday's news conference where Allegiant Airlines President John Redmond announced the resumption of construction on Sunseeker Resorts Charlotte Harbor.

The project will feature three towers with 512 hotel rooms and 273 long-term suites, Redmond said. It will also have 55,000 square feet of meeting and event space, rooftop and ground-level pools, 19 bars and restaurants and a boardwalk overlooking the Peace River from the Gilchrist Bridge to Bayshore Live Oak Park. The boardwalk and 18 of the bars and restaurants will be open to the public. A second phase of the development will include lodging and retail space on the northern part of the 27-acre property near a planned 5,000 square-foot pool, Redmond said.

To underscore the level of interest in the project, a live video of the news conference on the county's Facebook page had a reach of 41,000 users in 24 hours, 9,208 engagements (likes, comments and shares), 321 comments and 163 shares. A Facebook slideshow post had a reach of 45,539, 11,776 engagements, 245 comments and 440 shares as of 1 p.m. Wednesday. To view the news conference video and slideshow, visit www.Facebook.com/CharlotteCountyFlorida.

TikTok account

Charlotte County launched a TikTok account on Friday. To view the county TikTok page, visit www.TikTok.com and search for @charlottecountyflorida. Users may also download the TikTok app from the Apple App Store or Google Play store.

“We’re adding TikTok to our social media strategy because it gives us the opportunity to target a younger demographic with messaging about county events, jobs and news,” said Communications Manager Brian Gleason. “More than 50% of TikTok users are under 34 years of age and nearly a third are between 10 and 19. Those are people we can reach with info about parks and recreation events like the recent back-to-school backpack giveaway, and job openings for camp counselors and lifeguards, for example.”

TikTok is available on mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers. Cities, counties and other public agencies across the United States have been turning to TikTok to engage people in their communities who don’t consume traditional media.

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