

Tourism an economic boon for Charlotte County

By Hector Flores

Numbers from the county's annual tourism research firm paint a robust picture for our most recent fiscal year and a rosy scenario for the near future.

According to the Downs & St. Germain report, here are a few key performance indicators for FY 2021 (Oct. 1-Sept. 30) versus the prior year:

- \$6,071,981 collected in tourist development taxes (up 36.8%)
- 863,000 visitors (up 23.4%)
- \$844 million in total economic impact (up 35.7%)
- 1.1 million hotel/vacation home room nights (up 11.4%)

These additional figures demonstrate how vital tourism is to our economy:

- Tourism supports 10,752 jobs in Charlotte County (one job for every 80 visitors)
- Tourism jobs generate \$248,251,200 in wages and salaries
- Visitors save each county household an average of \$875 on their annual tax liability (up from \$703 in FY 2020)

Part of the tourism development tax revenue noted above gets reinvested into marketing. The report showed how effective that marketing has been. Every dollar spent by the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau on marketing, sales, and public relations efforts is associated with \$63 in visitor spending in the county. Twenty-two percent of visitors came here for the first time, with beaches and other outdoor activities among the top reasons for visiting. One out of four visitors surveyed said they had seen coverage of the county online, in newspapers or on television. To see how we market the county to visitors, visit www.PureFlorida.com. Of course, the county has always been a magnet for family members coming to visit relatives who moved here from up north.

The future should produce more good news. Despite the rising number of tourists overall, foreign visitors made up only 2% of the 2021 figures. With travel from Canada now permitted and an eventual return to normal travel patterns in Europe — Great Britain and Germany are two of our biggest sources of foreign visitors — future visitor figures are expected to rise accordingly.

Another reason for optimism is how much visitors enjoy returning to the county. One of every three visitors surveyed responded they have visited 10 or more times. Ninety-six percent of visitors said they would recommend Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach to family and friends and 97% said they will return. That's a lot of happy, repeat customers.

If you're a visitor reading this, thanks for including Charlotte County in your travel plans. You mean a lot to our community and are key to its economic health. Tell your family and friends how welcome and appreciated you felt here. And come back to see us soon.

Recycling success

For the fourth year in a row, Charlotte County was recognized by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for exceeding the state's 75% goal for county recycling. DEP Deputy Secretary John Truitt presented the Recycling Recognition Award to county staff from the Public Works Department's Solid Waste Division at the agency's Florida Recycles Day ceremony on Nov. 17.

The county's 78% recycling rate for 2020 tied for first in the state with Pinellas County.

"This week recognizes the importance of recycling and celebrates organizations like the Florida Recycling Partnership and counties that help Florida work toward our recycling goal," Truitt said. "We're honored to recognize these organizations with Recycling Recognition Awards for their commitment to protecting Florida's environment."

Charlotte County's recycling program began in 1990 with a pilot curbside pick-up program and expanded countywide in 1991. In 2001, the county opened the West County Mini-Transfer and Recycling Center to collect residential yard trimmings, debris from minor household repairs, tires, appliances, furniture, household hazardous waste, special waste and recyclables. A second center was added in 2005 in Port Charlotte. In 2008, the county's solid waste and recycling contractor implemented cart collection of solid waste and recycling, including single-stream recycling in which all acceptable recyclables are collected together.

Many thanks to our residents and business owners for their efforts to keep recyclables out of our landfill, which has extended the lifetime of the existing landfill cell on Zemel Road. For information about recycling, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/solidwaste.

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