

## County Hosts Government Day for Leadership Charlotte

By Hector Flores

Charlotte County and our partners in the City of Punta Gorda hosted Leadership Charlotte Government Day on Feb. 23. The Class of 2022-23 has 24 members, including two Charlotte County employees. Since the program began, 27 county employees have participated in the program, which was created by the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce to educate community leaders as they navigate the complexities of government, social services, business, and education in Charlotte County.

Government Day began at the Emergency Operations Center, where Commission Chairman Bill Truex, Deputy County Administrator Emily Lewis and I welcomed the class and shared thoughts about county government operations. As they did at various stops throughout the day, class members asked a lot of questions about a variety of local government topics.

The class went outside to learn about the work our Public Works Department does, including a walking tour of our heavy equipment that handles mosquito and aquatic weed control and swale, right-of-way and road maintenance. Back inside, a pair of sentinel chicks delighted class members who learned of their upcoming role in helping identify outbreaks of mosquito-borne illnesses.

The tour continued through the Emergency Vehicle Maintenance shop and the Public Safety Training Center, where the star of the show was the county's new Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting simulator. Training Center staff briefed the class on the features of the simulator and wowed members with a live-fire demonstration that sent flames 20 feet high around the prop's port wing and engines. They explained that not only does the simulator enable the county first responders to complete annual training required by the Federal Aviation Administration, we've already begun hosting visiting firefighters eager to train on the newest rescue and firefighting simulator in the country, if not the world.

The tour moved on to Centennial Park, where staff from the Utilities and Human Services departments addressed the class. Playing a game to break the ice, the class tried to match color-coded pipes samples with the type of water they convey. Hint: blue is potable water, green is wastewater and purple is reclaimed water. They learned about the Utilities' 67,000 customers served by 1,573 miles of water pipelines.

In the next session, led by our human services director, the class participated in a budget exercise using a box of candy as money. Class members had to allocate pieces of candy to basic costs of living, such as housing, food, transportation, clothing, childcare, etc. The exercise demonstrated how quickly the money runs out for many families in our community and the importance of social service programs administered by the county.

The day wrapped up at the Punta Gorda Public Safety Building, where city officials and police and fire department personnel provided an overview of the city, a tour of the facility and demonstrations about fire extinguishers, home fire safety, an automatic CPR machine, and police operations. The city's new K9 comfort dog, Chance, stole everyone's hearts with his playfulness and stories about his interactions with city residents.

I want to congratulate and thank the members of the Leadership Charlotte class for their commitment to taking this step toward becoming leaders in our community for years to come. You can see photos and learn more about their Government Day activities and past sessions on the class Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/leadershipcharlotte2023](http://www.facebook.com/leadershipcharlotte2023).

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