

## County growth reflected in monthly report numbers

By Hector Flores

With all that is going on in Charlotte County and within county government, I find our monthly department reports to be a great source of information. For example, we know our commercial and residential growth is surging. The Community Development Department reported in May 2024 that it issued 394 single-family residential permits and 379 certificates of occupancy, meaning homes ready to be lived in. We also issued nearly 4,000 permits of all types in May.

Two of the booming developments driving that growth are Babcock Ranch, which has been issued 2,765 COs since home construction began in 2016, and West Port, which has received 419 COs since April 2021. In May, Babcock Ranch builders applied for 98 new permits and West Port 46.

On the commercial side, Balentine Builder Services, a Fort Myers-based customer cabinetry business is building a 65,000-sq.-ft. facility that will open this year. A new Mazda dealership on U.S. 41 in Port Charlotte was recently completed and is now open. The Economic Development Office forecasts commercial development valued at \$150 million will be added to the tax rolls in 2024, rising to \$185 million in 2025 and \$285 million in 2026.

Our growth also means we need more staff to serve and capacity to accommodate them in the Emergency Operations Center before, during and after disasters. We learned during Hurricane Ian that the EOC, which was built after Hurricane Charley damaged the former EOC, needed to be expanded to handle our storm response. We need more meeting rooms, sleeping quarters, food preparation equipment and space, utilities improvements and more. On May 28, the County Commission approved an architectural contract for the design of the EOC expansion. The Florida Legislature approved a \$12 million grant for the project in 2023.

Our tourism numbers are booming, too. In May 2024, tourism development tax collections, which are assessed on short-term stays under six months at hotels, home and condo rentals, rose 14.3% from last May to \$726,194. Year over year in May, TDT revenues increased 14.6% to \$5,911,547. Revenue from visitors to Charlotte County, which also includes sales tax collections, saved county residents more than \$1,000 a year on their property taxes.

Sporting events are an increasingly important part of our tourism promotion strategy, as they typically attract entire families instead of just the competitors. In May 2024 alone, the county hosted seven events, including baseball, softball, basketball and pickleball tournaments, a half-marathon and dance and cheer competitions. Sports tourism generated a \$39.5 million economic impact so far in 2024, through hotel and home rentals, and spending at restaurants and retail and grocery stores.

You can review all the information in the monthly reports on our website, [www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/monthlyreport](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/monthlyreport).

*Readers may reach County Administrator Hector Flores at  
[Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov](mailto:Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov).*