

Charlotte County 2021 Annual Report



100 Years



A Letter from County Administration

2021 presented its share of challenges, especially with the ongoing pandemic, but the county achieved many accomplishments and milestones this year.

Our Public Works Department received its hard-earned accreditation from the American Public Works Association. The team-building and staff development process improves internal communication and documentation of duties and responsibilities and delivers improved operational performance when workflows or processes are brought up to industry standards.

County departments earned 13 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards, bringing the number of awards we've received since 1987 to 38. In his citation recognizing the county's achievements, NACo President Gary Moore said, "County officials and front-line employees have demonstrated bold, inspirational leadership. This year's Achievement Award-winning programs illustrate the innovative ways counties build healthy, safe and vibrant communities across America."

Charlotte County was recognized by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for exceeding the state's 75% goal for recycling. The county's 78% recycling rate for 2020 tied for first in the state with Pinellas County. It is the fourth year in a row, the county has exceeded the state's recycling goal.

Visitors identified the county as a relative safe haven amid the COVID-19 outbreak. With our high vaccination rate and myriad outdoor activities year-round, our tourism numbers soared in Fiscal Year 2021 (Oct. 1, 2020-Sept. 30, 2021). Tourism development tax revenue climbed 36.8% to \$6,071,981 and visitor numbers rose 23.4% to about 863,000. The economic impact those visitors had totaled \$844 million.

We accomplished several milestones with capital projects in 2021. The Human Services Department's Family Service Center opened in November. The Gibraltar Drive center houses county partner agencies, including The Boys & Girls Club of



Charlotte County, Charlotte Behavioral Health Care, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, Department of Health, Drug Free Charlotte County, Jewish Family and Children's Service and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. The Human's Services Department's 211 call center is also operated there.

We also completed the final phase of the Burnt Store Road widening. Burnt Store is now four-laned from the Lee County line to U.S. 41. The three-phase project is both a vital hurricane evacuation route for tens of thousands of Charlotte and Lee county residents, it is also an economic catalyst for the South County area. The widening also vastly improves the safety of this highly traveled corridor.

The Punta Gorda-Charlotte County Metropolitan Statistical Area was ranked 11th in the 2021 Milken Institute Best-Performing Cities Index, improving from 39th to 11th from 2020 to 2021. The index is based on jobs, wages, and high-tech growth, housing affordability and household broadband access. The institute cited the county's "careful planning and investments [that] have led to improved local amenities."

The Purchasing Division earned the National Purchasing Institute's Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Awards for the 17th time.

Of course, a review of 2021 wouldn't be complete without noting our Centennial. Charlotte County has been commemorating the 100th anniversary of its creation on April 23, 1921 when Charlotte, Highlands, Glades and Hardee counties were divided



from DeSoto County. The county held a Centennial Gala on April 23, 2021, created a Centennial website and Facebook page and held more than a dozen commemorative events attended by thousands of residents and visitors. Centennial street sign toppers were installed at historic and prominent intersections, banners were hung from the Gilchrist and Collier bridges and seals were installed on driveways, facility entryways and manhole covers.

Here's to a great next 100 years.

— *Hector Flores*
County Administrator

Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners



Ken Doherty
District 1



Christopher Constance
Vice-Chairman
District 2



Bill Truex
Chairman
District 3



Stephen R. Deutsch
District 4



Joe Tiseo
District 5

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS Guiding Principles

- To be recognized as a community leader in quality of life issues.
- To improve Charlotte County government's morale and employee satisfaction.
- To increase and enhance the organization's and Charlotte County's productivity and performance.
- To enhance and improve our customers' satisfaction.
- To positively change the image of government.
- To improve communication both internally and externally.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS Focus Area Goals

Public Services:

To maintain a safe and healthy community by delivering essential services from skilled, professional and dedicated public servants.

Economic and Community Development:

To create a business climate that promotes a diversified, growing economy consistent with sustainable growth management plans, environmental stewardship and enhanced quality of life.

Infrastructure:

To build and maintain countywide infrastructure that meets our evolving needs and enhances our community appearance, improves public safety and protects our natural resources.

Efficient & Effective Government:

To manage fiscally sound county operations with a culture of transparency, accountability, citizen engagement and innovation.



Charlotte County marks Centennial with gala

Charlotte County celebrated the Centennial anniversary of its creation by the state of Florida on April 23, 2021.

Charlotte County was created on April 23, 1921, when Gov. Cary A. Hardee signed a bill passed two days earlier by the Florida Legislature that divided DeSoto County into five counties: Charlotte, Hardee, Highlands, Glades and DeSoto.



The county held a Centennial Gala at the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center where a commemorative video premiered. The video was also posted to the county's Centennial Facebook page.

The Florida Legislature adopted a resolution stating, "Charlotte County and the residents who have made it such a wonderful place to live, work, and play are congratulated upon the occasion of the 100th anniversary celebration."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a proclamation sending "greetings and best wishes to all observing April 23, 2021, as the 100th Anniversary of Charlotte County." Florida. Sens. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott and Rep. Greg Steube also sent messages of congratulations.



7:00 a.m.

Public Works Department trucks from various locations roll to assigned duties.



10:00 a.m.

Human Services Director Carrie Walsh addresses colleagues at weekly directors meeting.



8:00 a.m.

Animal Control officer responds to a call for service for a nuisance animal.



8:00 a.m.

Community Development Department inspectors begin scheduled appointments.



9:00 a.m.

Chairman Bill Truex convenes Board of County Commissioners meeting.



11:00 a.m.

Answering veteran's question.



11:00 a.m.

IT staff monitor computer network activity.





12:00 p.m.

County staffer steers an airboat along a canal inspecting for overgrown aquatic weeds.



1:00 p.m.

A Charlotte County Transit driver helps a passenger board a Transit bus. The door-to-door service covers all of Charlotte County.



2:00 p.m.

The county's advanced traffic management system controls and monitors traffic lights to ensure optimal flow.



3:00 p.m.

The county historian examines a 1920s-era surveying tool before displaying it in an exhibit case at the library.



3:00 p.m.

Lifeguards conduct a training exercise at one of the county's four pools.



4:00 p.m.

A welder in Fleet Operations works on an excavator.



5:00 p.m.

The Public Works Department maintains 2,100 miles of roads across 858 square miles.





6:00 p.m.

A rescue unit from the Fire/EMS Department responds to a call in Port Charlotte.



10:00 p.m.

A Utilities Department technician checks levels at a water treatment plant.



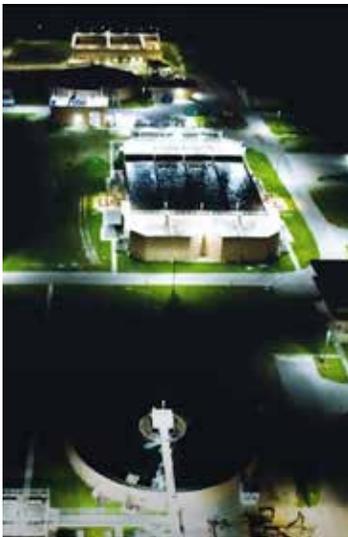
8:00 p.m.

A Mosquito Control helicopter takes off to perform aerial spraying.



1:00 a.m.

Utilities Department water treatment plants operate around the clock



2:00 a.m.

A fire engine responds to a call.



7:00 a.m.

A security guard opens a gate at the county administration center.



One Charlotte, One Water

Water Quality Manager hired in March 2021



Brandon Moody has built a growing network of advisors spanning state and regional agencies, local interest groups, and concerned citizens. A county monitoring strategy has commenced and staff has continued to work closely with the Water Quality Manager to enhance education and outreach. The One Charlotte, One Water webpage launched in May 2021. The annual county calendar competition focused on water in Charlotte County, bringing greater awareness of One Charlotte, One Water in the community.



Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact

Staff worked closely with Florida Gulf Coast University's Water School and other jurisdictions across Southwest Florida to form the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact. Charlotte County was the first to officially join the compact. This compact is intended to provide a regional response to the challenges presented to Southwest Florida by a changing climate, including impacts to water quality. As of June 2021, all jurisdictions originally petitioned to join the compact have signed it, indicating their commitment to participate in this important endeavor. FGCU and members of the compact are coordinating with one another to further define the framework for addressing resiliency issues within the region and have engaged a facilitator to take on the role of setting up the operational structure of the compact. Along with being the inaugural member of the compact, Charlotte County continues to be a leader in the development and operation of the compact ensuring the needs of the county and our citizens are well represented.



Legislative Agenda

We were approved for recurring funding for our county's Community Action Team, and even during this difficult year our county was able to secure \$1,000,000 for our septic-to-sewer program and \$1,101,438 for Manasota Key beach nourishment (Stump Pass). These successes are built upon our relationship with leadership within the Florida House and Senate as well as the governor's office.



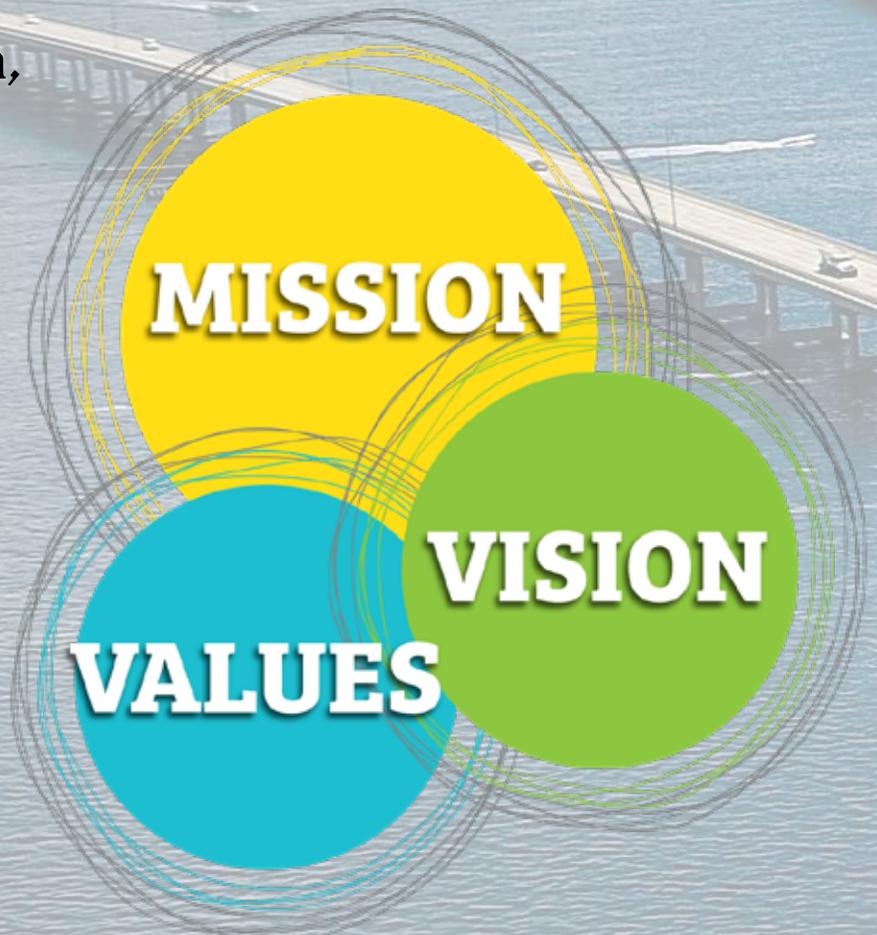
Digital Communications

As part of the 2021 strategic communications plan, the Public Information Office published quarterly reports on social media communications. In August the first annual Digital Communications Report was published, covering social media engagement, key performance indicators, website traffic and online analytics.

30 Social Media Accounts
Across **8** Platforms

Relaunched Mission, Vision & Values

The Public Information Office relaunched its Mission, Vision & Values outreach efforts in May 2021 following its suspension at the beginning on the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The effort included designing and installing murals and signs at county facilities to ensure the county's mission, vision and values were visible and accessible to employees and the public. MVV materials, including Meeting In A Box content were distributed to departments for use in staff meetings as employees returned to offices.



COUNTYWIDE AWARDS & RECOGNITION

American Water Works Association-Florida Chapter

- Outstanding Water Distribution System-Division 6-1st Place Charlotte County Utilities
- Year-Round Water Conservation Education, Public Education-Honorable Mention Charlotte County Utilities

Center for Digital Government

- Digital Counties Survey Awards-9th place, 150,000 – 249,999 Population Category Community Development

Cigna Well-Being Award

- Wellness at Work program Stephanie Phillips

2020 Florida Shore and Beach Preservation Association

- Public Service Award-Matt Logan

Florida Recreation and Parks Association

- 2021 Public Relations: Campaign/Initiative Easter Egg-scursion Community Services
- 2020 Agency Excellence Award in Environmental Sustainability Award-Community Services

2020 Florida Association of Counties Institute for County Government

- County Government Best Practices Award Human Resources Department, Leadership Development Program

Gulf Coast Building Officials Association of Florida

- Building Inspector of the Year Award-Bob Hunek

Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International

- Visitor Guide-Silver, Outsiders Welcome video campaign-Bronze, Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau

2021 Milken Institute Best-Performing Cities Index

- Punta Gorda-Charlotte County Metropolitan Statistical Area-11th

2020 National Purchasing Institute

- Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Award Purchasing Division

Southeastern Outdoor Press Association

- Excellence in Craft Award-Outsider Guide Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau

SquaredUp Live Conference

- Outstanding Dashboard Brian English

United Way of Charlotte County Spirit Awards

- Charlotte County, Most Generous Workplace

13 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards

The Public Information Office submitted nominations for 22 county programs and projects to the National Association of Counties' Achievement Awards. In May 2021, the county received 13 Achievement Awards, the most since the county began submitting entries. Since 2017, Charlotte County has earned 38 NACo Achievement Awards.

Community Development:

- FEMA Risk Map Changes & Community Outreach
- Building a Qualified Labor Force through Creativity and Innovation Comprehensive Community Plan

Human Services:

- Community Organizations Active in a Disaster

Public Safety and Public Works:

- Helicopter Public Safety Efforts

Public Works:

- Trap Protection and Vandalism Reduction

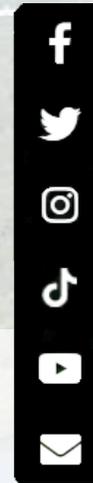
Community Services:

- COVID-19 Safety Plan for Hosting Events
- Back 2 School Bash Backpack Give Away
- CrossU training and team-building program
- Virtual Training
- Efficient and Effective Youth Sports Council
- Recreation Facility Phased Reopening Plans
- Charlotte Sports Park Security



Social Media Manager

The Public Information Office onboarded a social media manager, Ashley Turner, in May 2021 as part of its revised strategic communication plan. The social media manager completed a review of all social media accounts and made recommendations for revisions to the county's social media footprint, including combining some pages, eliminating others and providing guidance for improving performance, such as engagement and content.



Charlotte County launched our TikTok account on Aug. 6, 2021 to reach a younger demographic with messaging about county events, jobs and news.



FOR 2021 FROM ALL ACCOUNTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS COMBINED:

27,835,769 IMPRESSIONS **124,887** FOLLOWERS
537,830 VIDEO VIEWS **523.8K** MINUTES VIEWED

Note: one person may follow multiple accounts. Does not include Nextdoor.

TIER 1 PROJECTS

1% Local Option Sales Tax

In November 2020 the voters overwhelmingly approved the 2020 1% local option sales tax referendum. We are already underway with some of the projects.

With respect to the 2014 local option sales tax, the County completed the Justice Center Generator, Sailing Center, and Family Services Center.

<p>Quality of Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Port Charlotte Beach Park Recreation Center Renovation ◆ G.C. Herring Park ◆ William R. Gaines Jr. Veterans Memorial Park ◆ Bicycle, Pedestrian Sidewalks and Trails <p>Public Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ New Fire Station 17 ◆ Airport Rescue and Firefighting Training Prop ◆ Radio Management Warehouse ◆ CCSO Administration/911 	<p>Public Safety (cont.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fire Station 6 Replacement ◆ Fire Station 3 Replacement ◆ CCSO District 4 and Training Complex <p>Transportation/Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Quality Infrastructure • Family Services Center – Phase 2 • Edgewater Drive Phases 3-5 Design and Phase 4 Construction • Harborview Road <p>Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security Upgrades
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COVID-19 Ongoing Response

We continued to update an organization-wide COVID-19 policy, which included employee protocols, payroll codes, and management of employee leave time according to CDC guidelines to keep our workforce safe and healthy to continue delivering exceptional customer service during a pandemic.

As a continuation of Information Technology's pandemic response, we began supporting the county's vaccine distribution efforts. IT was the point of contact with the state vendor for the vaccine registration system and provided connectivity, first at Harold Avenue Regional Park (outdoors), then at multiple indoor sites. We provided mobile network connectivity at Harold Avenue using our mobile network trailer "PodRunner" and supported the DoH and volunteer staff with technical support. We had IT staff and Charlotte Technical College interns staff all sites.

Staff from several departments continued to help with the pandemic; assisted with setup of the vaccination sites across the county, completed data entry of vaccination recipients information and moved the staging from the Town Center Mall to the new staging location at the Goodwill location in Punta Gorda.

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau's "Outsiders Welcome" campaign evolved into Outsiders Welcome BACK.

This resonated with the mindset of consumers as the US was starting the long emergence from the pandemic lockdown on travel. A destination such as ours has a high appeal when looking for outdoor, outside, natural pursuits, low density, and social distancing. With meetings, sporting events and a very effective marketing campaign in play, the Bureau outperformed markets to the north and south in terms of growth almost every month.

New CC-TV Program Launched: Let's Talk Charlotte

CC-TV, the county government access television channel, launched a new talk show program called "Let's Talk Charlotte" in July 2021. The program features county commissioners and staff discussing county policies, programs and initiatives. The program is taped in various locations, including a new set created in the CC-TV control room at the Emergency Operations Center.

Affordable Housing Parcels

Real Estate Services, in conjunction with the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and Human Services, identified and reserved 32 county-owned parcels for affordable housing. This will help meet the affordable housing goal set by the commission as part of the Strategic Focus Area for Economic & Community Development.



Parks and Natural Resources Improvements



Carmalita Park Football Improvements: Carmalita Park football received all new football goal posts (as did Franz Ross and Ann & Chuck Dever Regional parks), along with new bleachers shades for the game field and four new shade structures set in the common areas for spectators. A new playground was added adjacent to the concession stand as well.

Port Charlotte Beach Park Boat Ramp Boarding Piers:

The boarding piers at Port Charlotte Beach Park were in bad shape and in need of replacement. All three piers were completely removed and rebuilt. This boat ramp is one of the most heavily used in Charlotte County and now the public will be able to continue to enjoy it with safer boarding piers. One of the best things about this project is that we were able to complete the entire rebuild without shutting down the boat ramp. We closed one lane at a time, which may have been an inconvenience for a short time, but not a major inconvenience for the community.



Cedar Point Environmental Center Upgrades: The Community Services Capital Maintenance Plan included the interior renovation of the Cedar Point Environmental Center. Cedar Point Environmental Center is open five days a week and offers a variety of environmental education and recreation programs as well as volunteer opportunities. The interior of the building was completely renovated with new flooring, paint, restroom fixtures and furniture. A staff breakroom was added, and the inoperable sliding glass doors were replaced with hurricane-rated windows. The capital maintenance funding allocated to this building will prolong its remaining useful life and allow visitors to continue to enjoy this Community Services amenity.





57th Annual Easter Egg Event: Egg-scursion Scavenger Hunt

This year's event showcased an Easter Egg-scursion Scavenger Hunt along with a Hippy Hoppity Hop-along drive-through. There were 153 members of the community who participated in the scavenger hunt and an estimated 1,800 patrons who took part in the drive-through activity. Social media included videos and photos that reached 32,401 people. This program also provided Charlotte County's first Instagram Reels, which resulted in more than 2,600 views and reached more than 2,700 profiles.

Community Services received more than \$8,000 in donations from community partners for this event.



153 SCAVENGER HUNTERS
1,800 DRIVE-THROUGH PATRONS

Recreational Programming via Facebook Live Videos

Community Services began delivering fun and active video programs for all ages, interests and abilities via Facebook Live to the Charlotte County community at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to their popularity, these videos have continued to be offered on a weekly basis. These programs offered crafts, tours, workouts and many other topics while allowing members of the community to ask questions and receive answers from staff in real-time.



MORE THAN **155** VIDEOS

MORE THAN **170,000** VIEWS

Charlotte County Justice Center Renovation/Remodel and Forensic Evaluation/Building Envelope Improvements

Construction for the project started in August 2018 and finished in February 2021. The cost to design this project was \$1,951,037, with the cost of construction at \$15,778,537. This complex project was completed in twelve phases, all within a fully operational, occupied, and secured building.

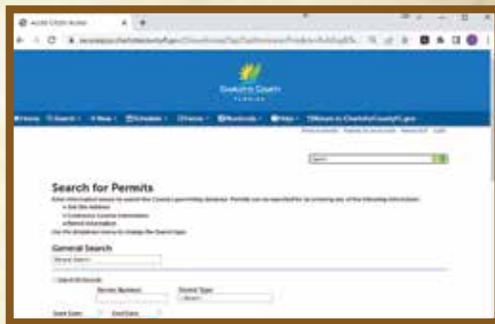


Concurrent with the Renovation/Remodel project, the Justice Center Forensic Evaluation/ Building Envelope Improvements project began in June 2018 and was completed in November 2020. The cost of design for this project was \$335,809 and the cost of construction was \$2,224,961.

These two projects were completed with different design firms and construction teams, efficiently and effectively working together with each other and with stakeholders and staff, resulting in enhancements to public services delivered at the Charlotte County Justice Center.

Advancements in Community Development Efficiencies via Technology

Atlas Insight is a web-based tool that allows automated inspection assignment and routing through the use of inspector disciplines and inspection areas defined by Building Construction Services using GIS technology. This product has saved several hours each day of manual inspection routing, not only increasing efficiency but also accuracy and reducing overtime costs.



ePermit Hub gave us the Digital Plan Room functionality to allow for multiple reviews to be completed simultaneously, removing the need for “paper” permits to be physically routed from desk-to-desk. This feature has significantly reduced review times. Additionally, customers are able to apply for any type of permit and upload plans and documents without leaving their home or office. One of the most notable benefits of the software was that our permitting activity never slowed down when we were closed for the pandemic. Customers were able to use the digital plan room while our lobby was closed which maintained our levels of service.

Murdock Circle Turn Lane Improvements



This project consisted of extending the existing right turn lane from Murdock Circle to southbound U.S. 41. The project included new storm drain modifications, construction of the new turn lane along with new signing and pavement markings.

Emergency Management Mass Vaccination Operations

In anticipation of the eventual Food and Drug Administration approval of a vaccine to provide protection against COVID-19, planning for the mass vaccination operations began in the summer of 2020. Emergency Management, in concert with the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County, identified numerous sites for both indoor and outdoor operations and determined logistical and staffing requirements for each location.

After public site vaccinations began in January 2021, throughout the year new locations opened and closed, demand shifted, and staffing changed. The end result was the successful operation of mass vaccination sites at Harold Avenue Regional Park Recreation Center, Tringali Park Community Center, Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center and the Charlotte County Cultural Center. Additionally, homebound individuals were identified through the special needs registry and Charlotte County Fire & EMS personnel supported in-home vaccination efforts to reach those individuals. As eligibility to receive the vaccine expanded to larger segments of the population, mass vaccination strategies evolved to include both public and private partners; illustrating the whole community approach employed to deploy the vaccine in the most effective and efficient manner possible.





National & International Pickleball Tournaments

The Punta Gorda PicklePlex was host to two major national and international tournaments in January and February of 2021. In January, the Association of Pickleball Professionals had 611 athletes participate, traveling from throughout the U.S. and as far as Afghanistan, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan and Zimbabwe. The event created an economic impact of more than \$1 million, generating 1,663 room nights. The APP staff and select athletes gave back to the community by donating paddles, balls and nets to Punta Gorda Middle School. This grassroots effort engages young children to participate in the fastest growing sport in the world.

The Pickleball Global World Championship took place in February, attracting 500 amateur and professional athletes from across the globe competing for a total of \$100,000 in prizes. With more than 1,000 spectators throughout the five-day event, the estimated economic impact was just under \$1 million, generating 1,400 room nights.

Manasota Key Beach Restoration Monitoring

Project includes providing erosion control and shoreline stabilization measures including beach renourishment, maintenance dredge bypassing, and stabilizing structures for over eight miles of eroding gulf and inlet shorelines within the Manasota Key barrier island, Sarasota County and Charlotte County.



1,110
PICKLEBALL
ATHLETES

1,200
BASKETBALL
ATHLETES

Boys & Girls State Basketball Championship

The Visitor & Convention Bureau was awarded a two-year agreement to host the U.S. Amateur Basketball Boys & Girls State Championship in Port Charlotte. In June 2021, all six county gymnasiums were utilized, together with local schools in the region. More than 1,200 2nd-grade through 12th-grade boys and girls participated. Being a summer event and families making it a vacation, it created 1,725 room nights and an economic impact of \$1.8 million for the local community. Participants traveled from all over Florida looking to crown their team as the state champion in their respective age group.

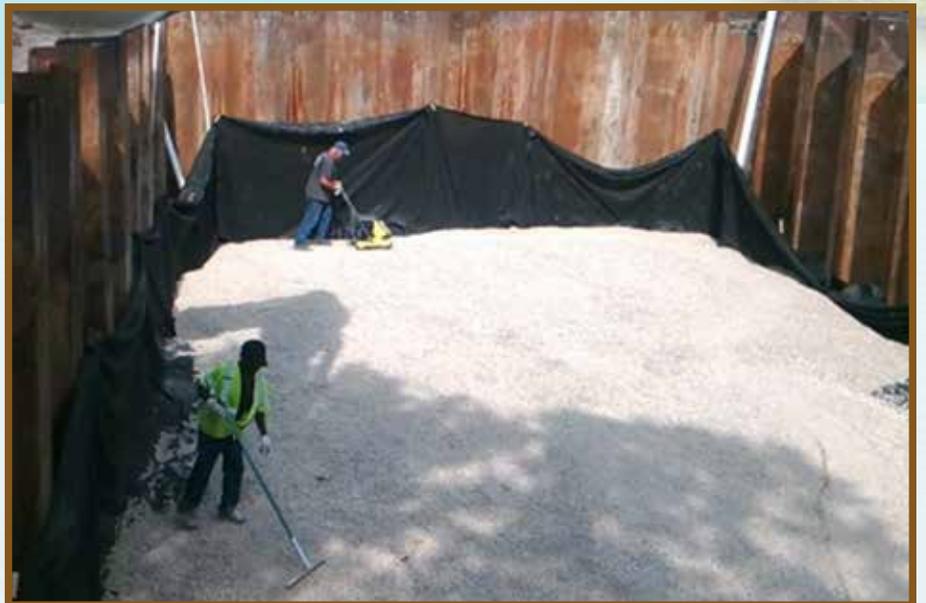
Elkam Waterway at Peachland Boulevard Stormwater Control Structure Improvement

This project provides for the design and permitting of a stormwater control structure under Peachland Boulevard at the Elkcam Waterway. The new structure replaced two 48-inch corrugated metal pipes that were deteriorating with a 10-foot by 10-foot concrete box culvert and weir. Peachland Boulevard remained open to vehicle traffic during construction. This structure is the last of 40 structures to be replaced. As a result of the Stormwater Master Plan that was completed in 1998, it was determined that 40 of the existing stormwater control structures were either undersized or had deteriorated since the 1960s when they were originally built. This project started in October 2020 and was completed October 2021.



Ackerman Water Quality Project

Construction was started in April 2021 and it will take approximately three years to complete and will connect approximately 1,800 existing properties to the central sewer system. The Ackerman project also includes replacing all the existing potable water mains, a new vacuum station, a new lift station and a new potable water booster station to improve circulation and water quality of the potable water system in Mid-County. The Utilities Department received a \$28 million loan to finance the construction of the entire Ackerman Water Quality project.



Family Services Center

A 2014 tier 1 sales tax project, construction began in early September 2020 and finished in July 2021. The new facility benefits citizens by offering a central combined location to provide multiple resources to the community.

Eviction Diversion Program

Human Services developed and executed an eviction diversion program with the Gulf Coast Partnership that served 587 residents (182 households), distributing \$5.7 million in direct financial assistance to Charlotte County residents. The program directed just under \$1 million to local non-profit health and human services organizations for COVID-related programming.

Human Services also created a reimbursement program with Charlotte County Utilities that served 618 households during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From coronavirus relief funds, \$300,000 was allocated to the Gulf Coast Partnership that housed 73 homeless individuals, which allowed the community to file for recognition from the federal government for “Effectively Ending Chronic Homelessness.”

**EVICTION DIVERSION
SERVED:**

**587
RESIDENTS**

=

**182
HOUSEHOLDS**

