2013 ANNUAL REPORT

2013-2014 Budget Story

Charlotte County, Florida

A Message from Ray Sandrock

The 2013/14 – 2014/15 Budget is a transitional budget. It represents a shifting of the County's focus to the future. For the past several years Charlotte County has been in a crisis state and, of necessity, has become very adept at dealing with crisis. With this budget process we make a very conscious effort to shift our focus from being reactive to proactive.

Crisis

Charlotte has had to contend with three broad levels of crisis since 2004. The first began on Aug 13, 2004 when Hurricane Charley swept through Charlotte County causing billions of dollars in damages. Shortly after Charley a crisis of a very different nature occurred.

The shortage of housing stock caused by the hurricane coupled with a building boom throughout Florida brought a huge influx of development and speculation. In fact from 2005 to 2007 the County's assessed property value doubled. This led to a rapid expansion of construction related services as well as recreational and environmental projects and services. During this time the County budget grew by 102% and the workforce by 40%.

Crisis number three began with the burst of the housing bubble in 2007. While all governmental entities had to contend with this crisis, the rapid expansion of the previous two years accentuated the situation for Charlotte County. But again, our organization showed its ability to deal with crisis. Rather than exhausting reserves and delaying tough decisions, the county made the difficult decisions upfront and over the next three years reduced the budget by 50%, the workforce by 40%, built reserves and consolidated the organizational structure from 17 departments to 10.

Over the past two year budget process we have focused on stabilizing the organization, giving employees and the community a chance to adapt to the changes that have been made. We have maintained levels of customer service through efficiencies, reinstated our capital replacement schedules and maintained healthy reserve levels.

The Future

We know that growth will return to Charlotte County, it is only a matter of time. When it does, we don't want it to be another crisis. This budget process (2013/14 – 2014/15) sets the stage for preparing for the future. The strategies for accomplishing this are:

- Focus on long range planning
- Ordinances, regulations and standards that advance Charlotte 2050, the County's Comprehensive Plan
- Ensuring efficient processes adaptable to increased volume
- Safeguarding our infrastructure
- Employ enabling technologies, especially web-based service delivery
- Retain and develop our greatest asset – our employees

The best news of this year's budget process is that although we are seeing only a modest 1.6% increase in assessed valuation, the property devaluation that has eroded revenue seems to have hit bottom. This, coupled with estimated growth in state shared revenues allowed the General Fund to see its first revenue increase in five years.

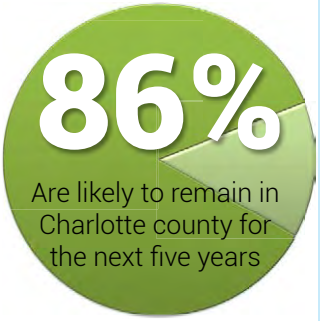
As I stated earlier, we have become very adept at managing crisis and now we are taking on the challenge of declaring the future we want to be a part of, as our mission declares, "To be the energy in making Charlotte County a beautiful and enriching place to live". The 2013/14 – 2014/15 Budget Process was a big step in that direction. The Board of County Commissioners showed true leadership in giving the organization 60+ specific goals to address. The organization provided innovative yet practical approaches toward seeing these goals accomplished.

Ray Sandrock
County Administrator

Quality of Life in Charlotte County

Some Highlights from the

Citizens Survey 2012



Challenges Ahead

Maintaining Parks and Libraries

During the early 2000s the County dramatically expanded its system of parks, environmental lands and library facilities. With the economic downturn came a reduction in library hours and services and deferred maintenance of facilities. The current budget makes a conscious effort towards maintenance in insuring our facilities and equipment are safeguarded, but increased levels of funding will be required in the future. Over the next two years both the Parks Master Plan and Library Master Plan will be updated to refine direction and identify needs. Identifying funding to meet these needs will be a focus of discussion for 2014/15 Budget update.

Limited Revenue Growth

Ad Valorem Taxes are the main source of revenue for General Fund operations. Since 2007 the County's assessed valuation has decreased by 51%. The devaluation seems to have hit bottom and this year we saw a modest 1.6% increase. With property assessment increases capped by state statute, it will be a long time before the County recoups the value lost since 2007.

Funding for Capital Needs

Since 1995, Charlotte County has had a local 1% sales tax. This sales tax revenue has been the main source of funding for capital projects including major road expansions. The sales tax is up for voter renewal in 2014—without the continued stream of revenue, funding for future projects will be very limited.

Employee Costs

While the 2013/14 Budget includes a small one-time bonus for employees, it has been five years since staff has had a wage adjustment. During that same time, they have seen their retirement and FICA contributions increased. With inflation factored in, county employees have seen a 16% decrease in take-home pay.

In addition, all county employees are part of the State of Florida Retirement system. The county is required to make contributions based on annual rates set by the state legislature. This year's rates increased by 35.5%.

We have kept health care benefit costs flat over the past four years through plan changes, opening our own employee health center and a wellness program. However, with rising health care costs and the phase in of the Affordable Healthcare Act, maintaining our current level of coverage will be a challenge.

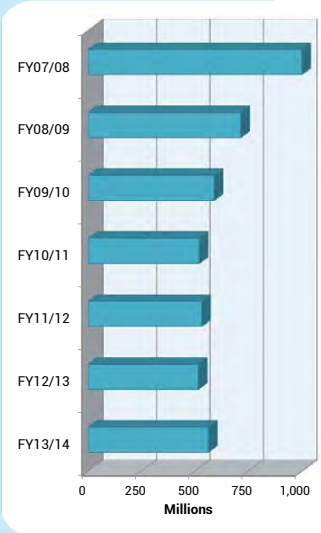
Federal and State Unfunded Mandates

The federal and state government can and has imposed regulations without providing funding. That means that County dollars must be reassigned from general fund programs to cover these new costs.

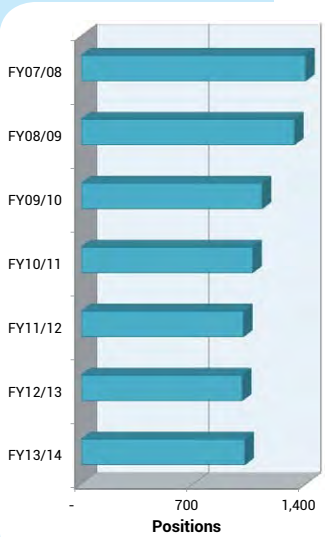
Fiscal Stewardship: Securing our Future

Here is what we have done so far: (2008-Present)

Since 2008 we have identified $98.7 million in operational reductions and efficiencies. Net budget has been reduced by 44%



Overall County workforce has been reduced by 389 positions

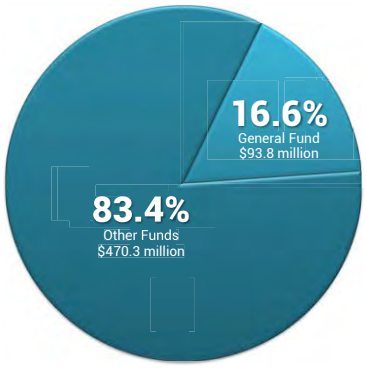


The 2013/14 Budget in Brief

Here is an overview look at Charlotte County's anticipated revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 2013/14

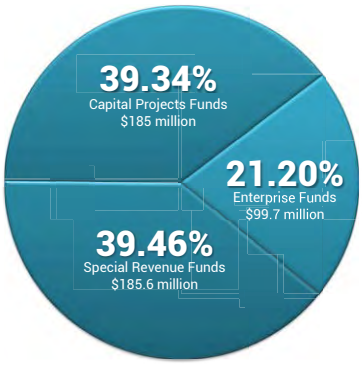
*Net county-wide Appropriations

$564.1 Million



Other Funds

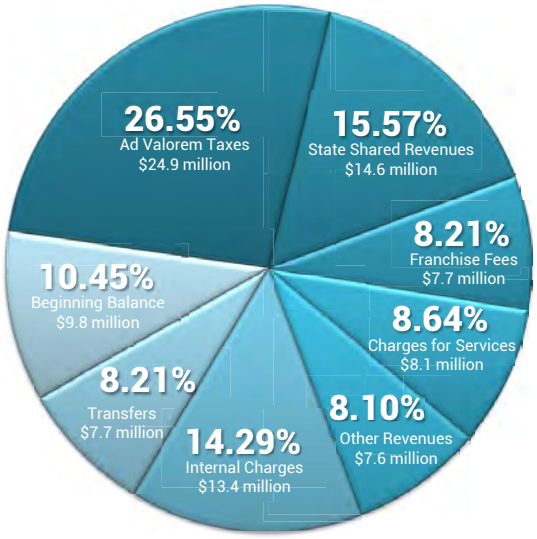
$470.3 Million



* Net Budget represents County budgets less interdepartmental transfers (that essentially double count expenditures), reserves and beginning balances

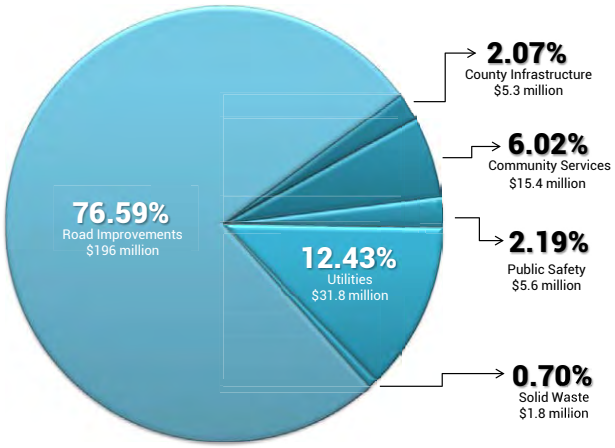
General Fund: Net Revenues

$93.8 Million



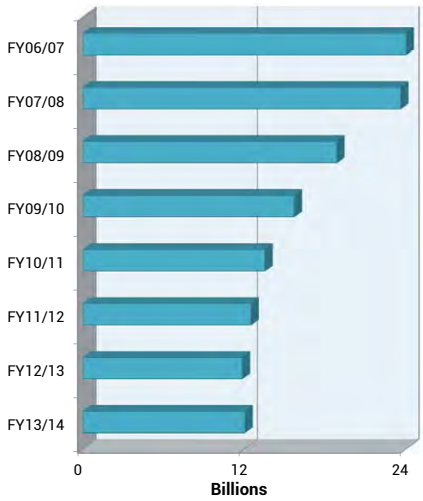
Your Ad Valorem Tax $1

Capital Projects for 2013/14



Road Improvements include MSBU projects that are funded from Special Revenue Funds

County-wide Assessed Valuation

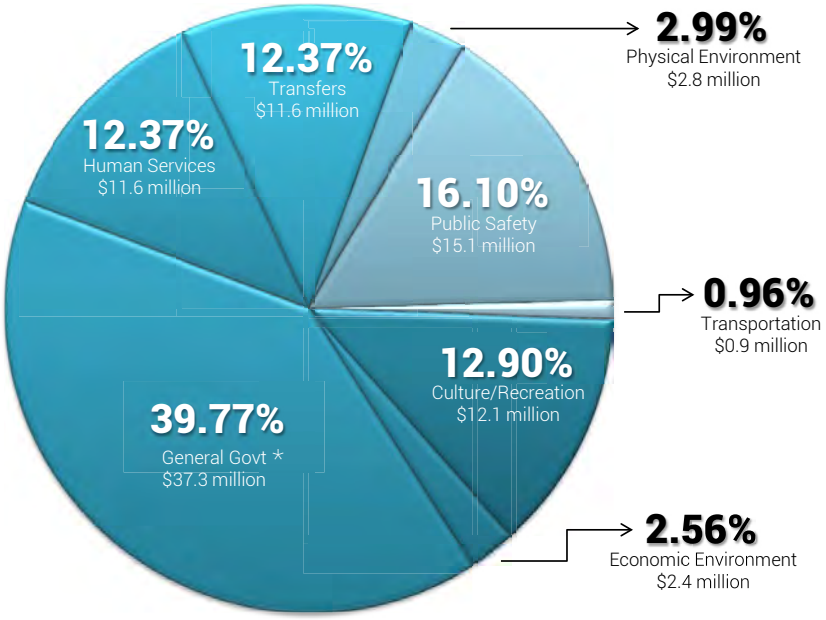


By the Numbers

The Budget serves as a business plan to the County and Citizens, prioritizing funding and plan for the future.

General Fund: Net Expenditures by Function

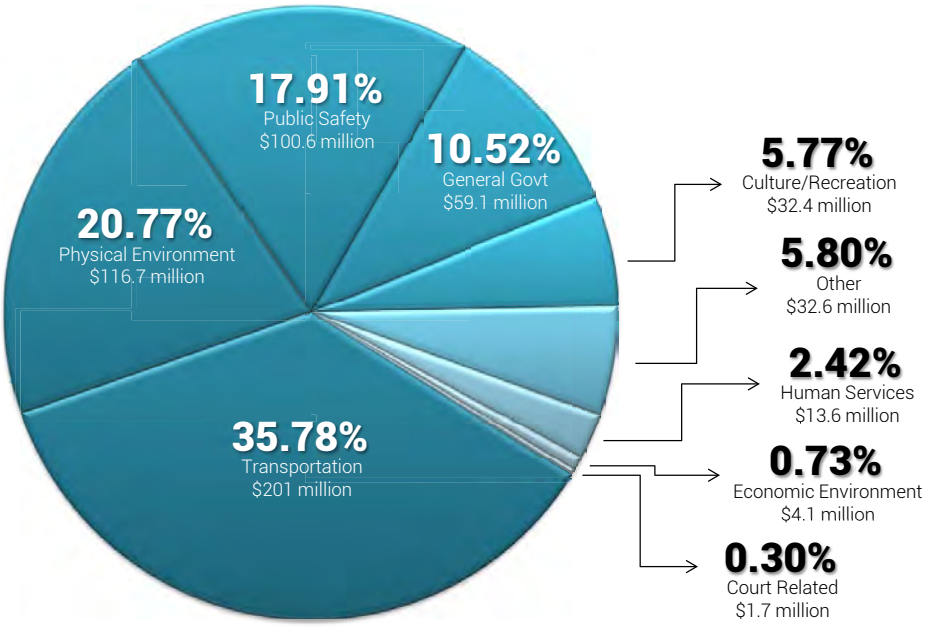
$93.8 Million (as defined by State Statute)



* Includes Budgets for Constitution Officers: Clerk, Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections, Tax Collector

All Funds

Net Expenditures by Function



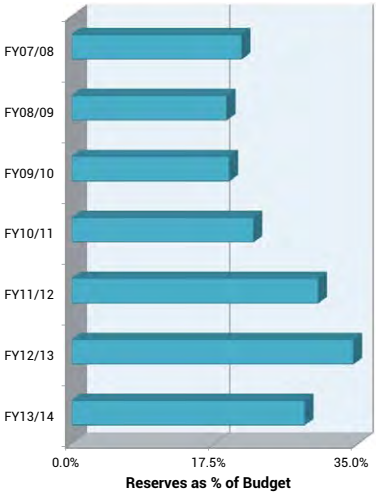
Fiscal Stewardship: Securing our Future

Wise use of Reserves

Reserves are like your savings account – their purpose is to help meet cashflow needs, deal with emergencies and help plan for future events (seen and unforeseen). Charlotte County's Ad Valorem Reserve Policy calls for:

Contingency	5 – 10% of Budget
Cash Carry-forward	5 – 10%
Fiscal Stabilization	> 15%

The graph below demonstrates a conscious effort in building our reserves to help stabilize services and meet contingencies. The reduction in 2013/14 reflects advancing $9 million to the Parkside rejuvenation and $7.5 million for commercial sewer expansion.



Bottom line:

Charlotte County has been a wise steward of taxpayer's dollars. When the economic downturn occurred we made the difficult decisions to reduce staffing and expenditures and at the same time increase reserves. Since 2007 our property valuation has declined by 51% Now that property values have begun to increase again, Charlotte is in a stable position to plan for growth when it occurs.

The Planning Process

Charlotte County has a biennial planning process. The diagram below describes the first year of the process in which goals and priorities are set for the next two years. The second year is focused on evaluation and progress toward the goals. During the second year the planned budget is adjusted for revised revenue projections and BCC actions that have taken place.

Stage I
Establish Broad Goals

BCC met in Feb. to reaffirm Strategic Focus Areas and establish 60+ specific goals within those areas.

From Dec. through Feb. County staff compile information and input from a variety of stakeholders:

- Citizens Survey
- Public meeting for citizen input
- Online citizen evaluation
- Employee survey
- Bring together internal experts to conduct Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis around each of the BCC Focus Areas.
- Review of Community long-range plans

Strategic Focus Areas

- Economic Development
- Growth Management
- Public Safety
- Human Services
- Fiscal / Financial Planning
- Water Resources
- Quality of Life
- Efficient & Effective Government

Stage II
Develop Approaches to Achieve Goals

Internal experts reconvened to generate and discuss collaborative approaches to advancing BCC goals.

Department develop goals and review operations to align with Focus Areas and BCC Goals.

Series of Budget Workshops conducted with BCC in May to review goals and proposed initiatives / efforts. BCC gives direction on initiatives for next two years.

Strategic:
Special initiatives and projects are costed for feasibility.
Operational:
Department update Performance Based Budget (PBB) information, which define core functions and operations, and develop costs for current levels of service. Met with Budget Office for review in March and Administration in April.

Stage III
Develop a Budget to Achieve Goals

Tentative Budget discussed with BCC in July.

Public Hearings and adoption of Budget in Sept. BCC adopts 2013/14 Budget and approves Planned 2014/15 Budget

Stage IV
Evaluate Performance and make Adjustments

Quarterly business meetings with Departments to review budget and metrics.

Adjustments to budget on an as needed basis through biweekly BCC Meetings.

Local Option Sales Tax Extension

Fiscal Stewardship: Securing our Future

Counties, with voter approval, can increase the State-wide 6% Sales Tax to 7% for infrastructure needs. The sales tax is applied to transactions subject to State tax. These monies can be used for a wide range of capital infrastructure expenses such as public safety vehicles, acquiring park or environmental land, or engineering, design and construction of any public facility with a life span of over 5 years. Maintenance and operating costs are not eligible expenses, nor are reimbursements for prior land purchases.

Charlotte County voters have approved the local option sales tax four times, in 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2008. Each time this item was on the ballot there was a defined list of projects to be funded.

For Charlotte County, any sales tax extension ballot referendum in 2014 is not for a new tax. There will be no increase in the amount of sales tax you currently pay. This is a continuation of the existing Charlotte County one percent local option sales tax that was first approved in 1994. The current program expires December 31, 2014. This next program, if approved, would start January 1, 2015.

The advantage of using sales tax to fund projects is that it is paid by everyone, not just local property owners. Tourists and seasonal visitors contribute toward projects that improve the quality of life for everyone. Currently 55 of 67 Florida counties, or 82%, have a local sales tax. This includes our neighboring counties of Sarasota and DeSoto.

Since 1994 over $325,000,000 has been collected for projects. Over 50 Charlotte County projects and 20 City of Punta Gorda projects have been completed to date. The majority of these projects were included in the County's 5-year Capital Improvement Plan. The County has been discussing the infrastructure deficit for years.

In years past the County has requested input from the public, community organizations and conducted telephone and online surveys. The Charlotte Assembly 2013 discussed this as a topic and was one of the first steps in providing input into the potential projects for the upcoming referendum.

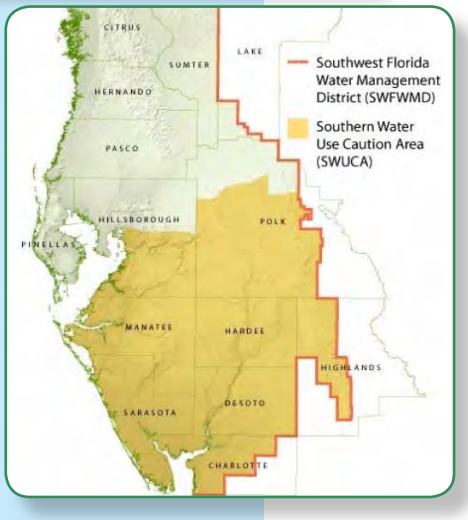
Taking Care of What We've Got

Miles of Road	2,200
Miles of street markings	800
County street lights	1,800
Traffic Signals	109
Traffic / Street signs	85,000
Miles of storm drainage	764
Bridges	138
Miles of canal	168
Miles of sewer lines	923
Miles of water lines	1,345
Lift stations	310

Number of buildings	115
Square feet of space	1,689,319
Number of parks	79
Number of sports fields	44
Acres of preserved land	2,500
Acres of parks	2,400
Piers, decks & boardwalks (sq. ft.)	85,000
Number of easements	150,000

Water Resources: Charlotte County Utilities

Recovery Strategies



Charlotte County is located in the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). In 2006, the district declared the Southern Water Use Caution Area (SWUCA), which is defined by state law as an area where water resources are, or are expected to become, critical within the next twenty years. Part of the recovery strategy within the SWUCA area is a commitment to develop alternative water supply sources, including but not limited to, reuse of storm water and wastewater, aquifer storage/recovery, sustainable use of surface water and water conservation. Charlotte County is committed to the recovery strategies developed by the district.

Sustainable Use of Surface Water

Charlotte County purchases 95% of their water from the Peace River/Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (Authority) whose source of water is the Peace River. Charlotte County is a voting member of the Authority which is made up of Charlotte, Sarasota, DeSoto and Manatee Counties and the City of North Port, who is a non-voting member.

The Peace River Water Treatment Facility was recently expanded to 32.7 million gallons a day (MGD) including a new 6 billion gallon reservoir, allowing the Authority to take water from the river during high flow season. Charlotte County uses 10.5 MGD and has an allocation of 16 MGD of the 32.7 MGD. The Authority members work closely with SWFWMD to improve water quality and flows in the upper Peace River. We understand the importance of the river to Charlotte Harbor, which is one of the most productive estuary systems in Florida.

6 Billion Gallon Reservoir

Peace River Water Treatment Facility

Alternative Water Supply

Charlotte County Utilities has constructed the backbone of the reclaimed water distribution pipeline system, including an interconnect between the central and west county systems. This will allow the shifting of reclaimed water from low to high demand areas. By reusing reclaimed water for irrigation, we reduce the impacts to our lakes, rivers or canals and ease the impact on our water resources. Futhermore, all four of our water reclamation facilities treat wastewater to reclaimed water quality, making us fully drought resistant.

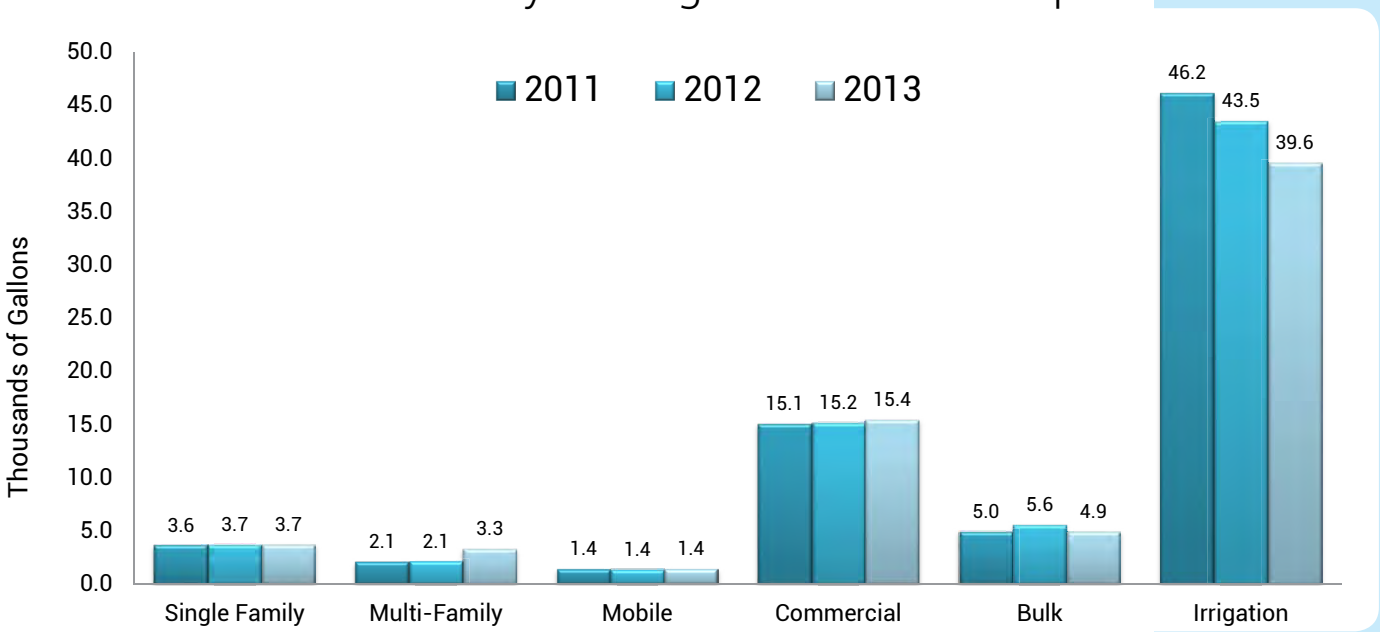
Interconnecting with other utilities is another way to improve reliability of water services to the customers. Charlotte County has completed interconnects with Englewood Water District, the City of North Port, the City of Punta Gorda, Gasparilla Island Water Authority, and the Charlotte Harbor Water Association. These interconnects allow us to shift water to and from the various utilities in the event of drought or other emergency. Additionally, we are also regionally interconnected with Sarasota County.

The Reverse Osmosis (RO) technology used at the award-winning Burnt Store Water Treatment Plant uses brackish water (salt water, but not as salty as the gulf), therefore it does not impact our precious freshwater sources. In 2009, the water treatment capacity was expanded to 3.6 MGD using the latest reverse osmosis membrane technology for improved performance and reduced electrical usage.

Water Conservation

Water conservation has been a long term goal for the County. The residents of Charlotte County have done a excellent job over the past several years in conserving water. Our utility customers are well below the national monthly consumption average usage. The graph below shows the last three years monthly water usage by category. CCU customers have maintained their conservation usage the last three years, and the potable water usage for irrigation purposes has declined.

3-Year Monthly Average Water Consumption



Community Services

CAPRA Accreditation

The Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) recognizes parks and recreation agencies throughout the United States for excellence in operation and service. Through compliance with the required standards, achieving this national accreditation assures policy makers, staff and the public that a park and recreation agency has been independently evaluated against established benchmarks as delivering the highest level of quality programs, events, and services. There are currently 107 nationally accredited agencies, 22 of which are in Florida. Charlotte County Community Services is focused on achieving this milestone by showcasing the departmental operations and services offered to our patrons. This achievement is designated as a Charlotte County goal which would enable our community to be spotlighted as one of the best in the nation.

Charlotte Sports Park

The Charlotte Sports Park is one of the showcase facilities within Charlotte County and serves as the spring training site of the Tampa Bay Rays and the home of the Charlotte Stone Crabs, the Tampa Bay Rays High-A affiliate team, who compete in a 70-game season within the Florida State League. As part of a 28.2 million dollar renovation completed in 2009, this facility boasts a state-of-the-art major league baseball clubhouse along with a stadium that features a 360-degree fan-friendly pedestrian concourse, several luxury hospitality suites, two outfield berms, a children's play area, and an outfield tiki bar. As a perfect location for large special events, this 82-acre park hosts festivals, concerts, baseball tournaments, and many other opportunities for recreational activities and programs. The Charlotte Sports Park is also connected to Tippecanoe Environmental Park, which highlights walking trails, a canoe/kayak launch, and plenty of birding opportunities.

Spring Training

In 2006, a 20-year agreement was signed with the Tampa Bay Rays to host spring training at the Charlotte Sports Park and become the year-round home of all minor league operations including extended spring training, Gulf Coast League, and Instructional League. Following the extensive renovations, the facility welcomed the first Tampa Bay Rays spring training game as part of the Grapefruit League on February 25, 2009, and has since opened the gates to consistent sellout crowds. The average game attendance per year at the Charlotte Sports Park is 85,566 with an additional 15,000 fans visiting the facility to attend various practice sessions and promotional opportunities.

Community Services

Aquatics

The Community Services Department operates three aquatic facilities, each with their own distinct personality, operating hours, and recreational programs such as lap swimming, water fitness classes, swim lessons, and moonlight swims. The Port Charlotte Beach Pool is located in the picturesque Charlotte Harbor and features a large shallow-water area perfect for water exercise and leisure programming. Oyster Creek Regional Park Pool in Englewood is an eight lane, 25 yard pool with a shallow-water recreation area and dive well equipped with a one meter diving board along a handicapped access wheelchair ramp. South County Regional Park Pool, the largest of the three aquatic facilities, is located in Punta Gorda and features 11 lanes along with a large shallow-water recreation area, a separate dive well equipped with a one meter diving board, and wheelchair ramp for handicapped access. Our signature events such as April Pool's Day (free admission with live music, classes, and giveaways) and our Moonlight programs (swims and movies under the stars) continue to be enthusiastically reviewed by all participants. All of our aquatic facilities are equipped with locker rooms/showers and the pools are open year round.

Libraries and History by the Numbers

Total budget: $3,177,424 Total Staff: 53 full time and part time

The Charlotte County Libraries and History Division includes the Mid-County Regional Library, Port Charlotte Public Library, Punta Gorda Public Library, Englewood Charlotte Library and Archive, and Charlotte County Historical Center in addition to several county historical sites.

Programs average more than 1,000 attendees per month. Total transactions are nearly 1 million per year with total visitors in excess of 650,000 per year. Current service levels include a total of 7,965 hours open annually for the county's four libraries. Circulation has increased by more than 30% over the last two years.

Charlotte County libraries now have 213,450 print materials, among them 184 periodicals and magazines, 44,636 audio and video materials, 27,330 electronic books and 96 online databases. The libraries also serve as a public hub for computer usage with more than 5,000 patrons a month accessing the internet for job hunting, eGovernment services and genealogy research. There were 874,905 unique visits to the online library.

In fiscal 2012-13, the libraries and history division significantly added to services in west Charlotte County by completing the $1.6 million renovation and expansion of the Englewood Community Library, including a new county archive facility. The four Charlotte County libraries are truly the heart of this community.

Every Great Community Needs a Great Library

"I believe that libraries are an important function of local government providing the community with a uniquely democratic institution available to all citizens. With the current heavy demand on public resources, our communities pay for and deserve nothing less than a "great" library.

"A great library is loved by all in the community including patrons, elected officials, governing boards, community groups, foundations, Friends of the Libraries and staff as well. Public libraries are free to users but not to the community. Support from local government reflecting the needs of the community is the key to successful libraries. Libraries are a community effort with nationally developed best practices adopted, adapted and applied locally.

"The leadership and staff of our county libraries have as our first duty to provide quality and efficiency in Library operations. When interest is high and stakeholders and staff are motivated, we can fulfill the vision of Libraries as some of the most totally democratic institutions in our communities."

Anne Shepherd,
Manager of Library and Historical Services

Master Gardener Volunteer Program

Florida Master Gardeners are University of Florida-trained volunteer educators. Master Gardeners educate and provide research-based information to Floridians about America's number one hobby – gardening. Master Gardeners also fill an important midpoint between consumers and the $15.2 billion Florida "Green Industry" where UF/IFAS unbiased, research-based education is disseminated for the benefit of all.

The Master Gardener program is a major outreach program that assists Cooperative Extension in significant horticultural educational efforts in the community. After an intensive training course provided by staff, volunteers and UF/IFAS Specialists, the volunteers execute a variety of outreach tasks as determined by the program leader. Based on their skills and interest, volunteer duties include answering horticultural questions over the phone, in person or through the media; participating in public service projects; giving educational programs; supporting youth activities, performing soil sample evaluations and assisting in field research. Some Master Gardeners chair and direct working groups; others answer questions on live local radio gardening shows. In-service training is ongoing to keep Master Gardeners on the cutting edge. According to the 2011 Florida Master Gardner Program Annual Report, Florida Master Gardeners provide $6.54 million or 170 FTEs in volunteer time to Florida's economy. There are presently nearly one hundred Charlotte County Master Gardeners assisting the horticulture outreach program at the Charlotte County Extension Office. In 2012 alone, these trained volunteers contributed over 5,179 hours of volunteer time valued at $96,640.14 (using Volunteer Value Source estimate of $18.66/hour). These corps of paraprofessionals have proved to be an essential part of helping educate our customers in this growing, horticulturally-passionate community.

"If you look around at the beautiful landscapes here in Charlotte County, you could say we live in one giant garden - potentially full of weeds, bugs and gardening questions. Accordingly, Master Gardeners, in association with the University of Florida, IFAS, invite inquiries and disseminate information that provides healthy and safe landscapes that bring value and eye-appeal for all."

—Ralph E. Mitchell

Cultural - Quality of Life

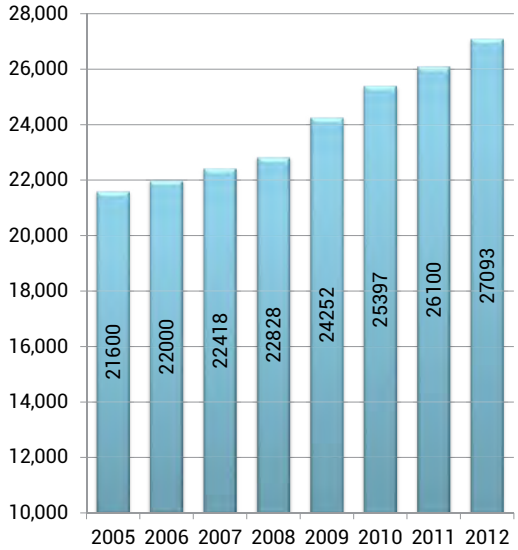
- An average year round temperature of 75 degrees, 0 snowfall.
- Over 28 miles of sandy Gulf beaches
- One of the world's largest protected marine estuaries encompassing 270 square miles with 219 miles of natural shoreline.
- Charlotte Harbor/Gasparilla Sound Aquatic Preserve comprises nearly 80,000 acres of some of the most pristine and productive coastal areas in the state,
- Marinas and boating clubs for power and sail boats with the world's best fishing.
- Charlotte County features over 70 parks and recreational areas, including a 65,000 acre wildlife management area that was a featured site in the "Florida Wildlife Viewing Guide."
- Charlotte County has four public libraries located throughout the area. The libraries offers books, audio, video, computers and a host of events for young and old alike.
- 14 magnificent golf courses throughout Charlotte County, ranging from executive to championship.
- Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
- The Cultural Center of Charlotte County has musical and theatrical productions throughout the year.
- Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center offers sports, musical and other events as well as a place for meetings and conferences.
- The Charlotte County Historical Center Society as well as the Visual Arts Center and numerous art galleries are just a few of the cultural opportunities available.

Fire/EMS

Charlotte County Fire/EMS provides effective fire protection and emergency medical services to the citizens and visitors of Charlotte County's 693 sq. miles. The department maintains a positive and safe environment through enforcement of life safety codes, over 22 programs and over a 1000 hours a year in public education.

In the past 3 years the department has received a public approval rate of 90% or more and has held a 100% rating for its emergency medical services (EMS) from the Florida Department of Health Services for outstanding equipment, documentation, and delivery of medical services. The department has 16 fire stations and 240 personnel who provide fire suppression, EMS, fire prevention, public education and specialty services (hazmat-technical rescue/air rescue/ fire fighting marine) and a full emergency vehicle maintenance division for 142 emergency response vehicles and equipment. Each fire station has a service area of 2.5 miles which provides for a 4-6 minute response time to 68.5% of all calls.

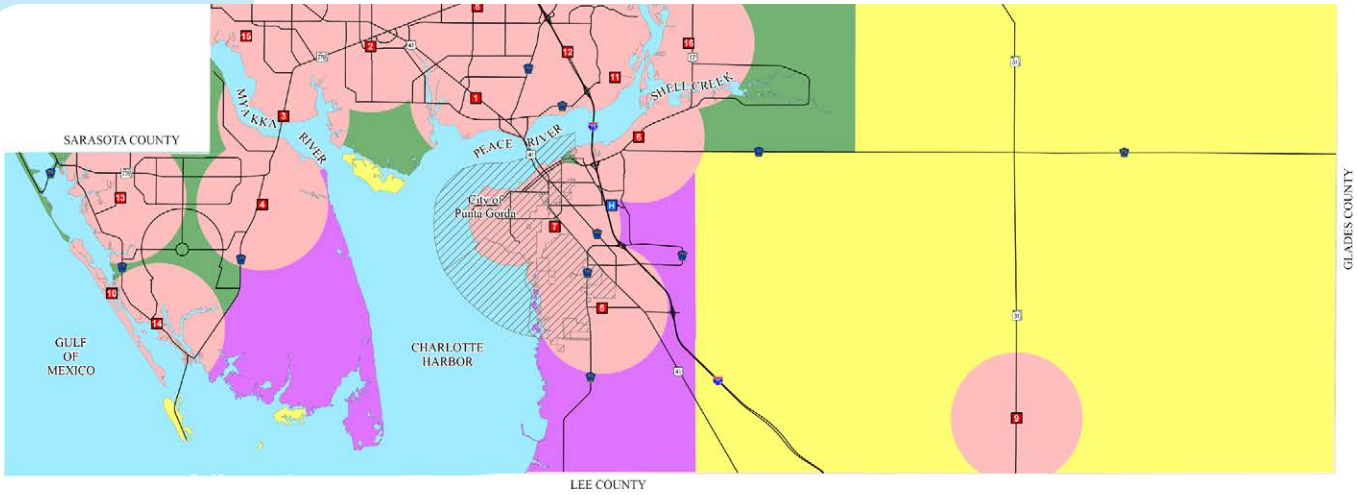
Yearly Incidents
(Fire/EMS Respond)



Charlotte County Fire/EMS is always seeking new technology to make the department more effective. Over the last year the fire operations has added a second new 27-foot fire boat that will monitor the waters in the mid-county area of the Peace River. For EMS services, we have implemented a new ice protocol along with refrigerators in each rescue unit for cooling down cardiac patients, Stryker speed sheets for easier patient transfers from stretchers to beds, Stryker trans-flats for easier patient lifting and removal from tight areas and thermal blankets for trauma patients to prevent heat loss. Most of these additions are made possible through grants provided by the state of Florida.

In January 2014 the county will be adding two additional rescue units along with 12 personnel to meet the needs of medical emergencies within Charlotte County. We are also looking forward to 2014 as we plan to build the County's new fire training facility at the current headquarters location. This facility will allow the Department to conduct live fire burns which will help enhance firefighter's skills and safety awareness during fire incidents. We are proudly serving Charlotte County—when you have a fire or medical emergency just Dial- 911 and Charlotte County Fire/EMS will be there to make your emergency a little bit easier for you.

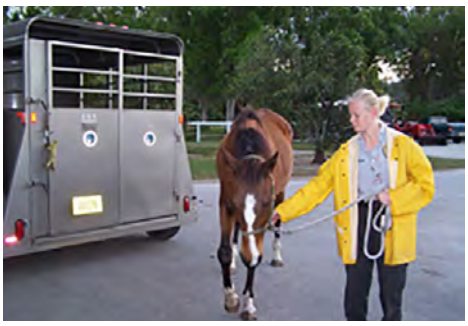
Fire/EMS Map of Response Times



Typical Response Times: 4-6 minutes 8-10 minutes 12-15 minutes 15+ minutes

Animal Control

Charlotte County Animal Control is committed to preserving and maintaining safe neighborhoods/areas throughout Charlotte County. On average, Animal Control responds to approximately 8,000 calls per year. Officers work directly with the public to resolve issues related to the safe and humane confinement of domesticated animals and regulation of proper licensing and rabies vaccinations. This is achieved through promoting responsible pet ownership and also through rabies control by complying with quarantine procedures and wildlife management. Other responsibilities of Charlotte County Animal Control include dangerous dog regulation, wildlife management, and animal cruelty prevention. We are dedicated to investigating all calls related to animal cruelty and neglect and holding those responsible accountable for their actions. Animal Control successfully criminally charged nearly 30 people last year for these types of crimes.



211

Charlotte 211 provides telephone access to trained information and referral specialists, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Charlotte 211's database contains over 880 health and human service providers, representing local services available throughout Charlotte County. Our goal is to expedite the exchange of information between customer and service providers. Charlotte 211 is accreditation with the Alliance of Information and Referrals and obtains a yearly certification through Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services. Charlotte 211 acts in accordance with the reporting process of the met and the unmet needs, maintains a good relationship with the Florida's 211 Network Providers, and United Way of Florida in advocating for Statewide 211 Call Centers. Charlotte 211 also provides quarterly statistical data to FLAIRS, monthly statistical data to the community at large.

Red Dot Program

The Charlotte County Fire/EMS 2nd Generation Red Dot Medical Information Program is the only medical information program recognized by all Charlotte County Emergency Agencies: Charlotte County Fire/EMS, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, Punta Gorda Fire/Police Departments and Englewood Area Fire Control District. Obtaining a patient's important medical information during an emergency can be difficult; the Red Dot program facilitates the availability of the information. The Red Dot Medical Information Form is filled out by residents before an emergency occurs. The top portion of the form is placed in a red magnetic pouch on the front of the refrigerator. The bottom portion of the form is mailed to the 911 Dispatch Center for entry into the 911 computers, which allows dispatchers the ability to provide emergency responders important information while responders are en route to the patient. The 2-inch self-adhesive RED DOT is placed on the exterior of the home's entry door, just above the doorknob. With the Red Dot on the door, dispatchers will alert emergency workers that the Red Dot Medical Information Program is in place in the resident's home. The home information sheet is transported with the patient to the hospital and copies are provided for the emergency room staff. The Red Dot Program is sponsored and funded by area hospitals.

Emergency Management

Office of Emergency Management is charged with planning for, responding to, recovering from, and mitigating emergencies that may affect the residents and visitors of Charlotte County. Most people are familiar with the Office through the public education efforts that is undertaken in regards to tropical weather that may affect the county. The Emergency Management staff spends hundreds hours annually providing seminars, expos, and presentations to prepare residents for hazardous weather. One of the programs undertaken in the past three years was to place evacuation zone markers on stop signs throughout the county. The program was the first in the country to encompass an entire county and has received both state and national awards.

Although known for hurricane preparedness and response, the Emergency Management Office is involved in numerous other programs that benefit our residents. Emergency management plans of all health care facilities in the county are reviewed each year to insure they are ready should an emergency occur. Those facilities include hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and adult day care centers. The Local Mitigation program is managed from the Emergency Management Office to assist residents who may want to undertake flood protection measures. Local Citizen Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are trained and managed by the Emergency Management Office. CERT is a program that trains residents to be able to assist their neighbors in the event of an emergency. The Office also maintains the Special Needs registry which tracks the most medically dependent members of the community and, along with the Health Department, provides for special sheltering during storms. Training and providing exercises to First Responders in the Incident Management System is part of the normal activities.

Managing the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is one of the primary responsibilities of the Emergency Management Office. The EOC can be fully activated in a matter of hours and includes representatives from every Charlotte County department, Punta Gorda representatives, law enforcement, volunteer organizations, state, and Federal agencies. The goal of the EOC is to recover the county from a serious event by supporting first responders, securing resources from across the state and nation if necessary, and gathering and disseminating essential information to those who need it.

CERT: Citizen Program Ready to Grow

For almost 13 years, Charlotte County Emergency Management has offered CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) training to interested citizens willing to invest the time and effort required to complete the 8-unit course and practical exercise. Offered in a classroom setting, the course covers a variety of subjects from basic first aid to fire suppression and terrorism. This year a new CERT Coordinator and a partnership with the Sheriff's Office Neighborhood Watch Groups has increased interest and shown a significant increase in applications for this FEMA-sponsored program. Additional CERT training is being scheduled in the upcoming year to meet the increased demand from the public.

Numerous CERT members also assisted Charlotte County with its nationally-recognized evacuation collar program, which saw 9,400 reflective markers installed on stop signs and street signs across the County's unincorporated areas. The evacuation collar program was honored in 2013 by the National Hurricane Conference and the Florida Governor's Hurricane Conference for its innovative approach to public awareness. Other communities are beginning to replicate the program as emergency managers strive to inform their residents of the hazards inherent to coastal flood plain areas.

Opportunities for Development

With 4,300 acres ready for development, the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park represents an impressive global opportunity, having interstate access, large-scale site selection and flexibility. Businesses like Cheney Brothers, Inc., Supertrack, Blue Bell Creameries, Arcadia Aerospace and Eastern Avionics, to name a few, have made the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park home because of the availability of superb water, power, telecommunications infrastructure, a Foreign Trade Zone, rapid permitting, shovel ready Certified Sites and new roadway improvements.

Over 870 prime acres of publicly owned land is available in the heart of a dense consumer market located adjacent to the Charlotte County Sports Park (home to Tampa Bay Rays' spring training facility and the Charlotte Stone Crabs), minutes from Interstate 75, scenic beaches, and the beautiful Charlotte Harbor. Known locally as Murdock Village, this parcel of land is located within the Charlotte County Enterprise Zone.

The Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), with approximately 766 acres, is located in the southern part of Port Charlotte with direct access to the Peace River and the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary. With an average daily traffic count of 52,660, U.S. 41 provides the major access to Charlotte Harbor. I-75 is approximately two miles away. Downtown Punta Gorda is within a one mile walk, bike ride, or car trip across the U.S. 41 Peace River Bridge. Portions of the area are within the Charlotte County Enterprise Zone.

Parkside, a 1,100 acre area in central Port Charlotte, was once the main commerce district for Charlotte County. In 2010, the Board of County Commissioners established the Parkside CRA and adopted the Citizens' Master Plan that outlined the need for infrastructure improvements to revitalize the neighborhood and commerce district in order to generate private sector investment. To date, the Board of County Commissioners has committed $9 million to implement the Citizen's Master Plan. Projects currently underway include replacing water and sewer pipes, improving drainage, and enhancing street corridors with multi-use pedestrian paths and landscaping.

To further facilitate economic development, Charlotte County has an Enterprise Zone, Foreign Trade Zone and tax incentives to help businesses relocate to the area.

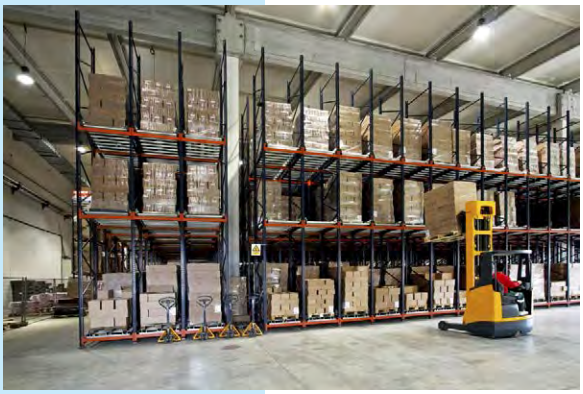
Transportation

Charlotte County has four state highways, two federal highways and one federal interstate running through the area. I-75, the north-south interstate servicing the western part of Florida, is Charlotte County's primary thoroughfare, with a length of 470 miles in Florida and 1,786 miles overall. There are five exits within the county, two of which are in the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park and an additional exit on the Charlotte-Sarasota county border. U.S. 41 extends as far north as Michigan's upper peninsula and runs almost parallel to I-75 with the major Florida cities of Miami, Naples, Fort Myers and Tampa along its route. U.S. 17, a north-south highway, starts in Punta Gorda and ends in Winchester, Virginia, with Orlando and Jacksonville among the major cities it intersects.

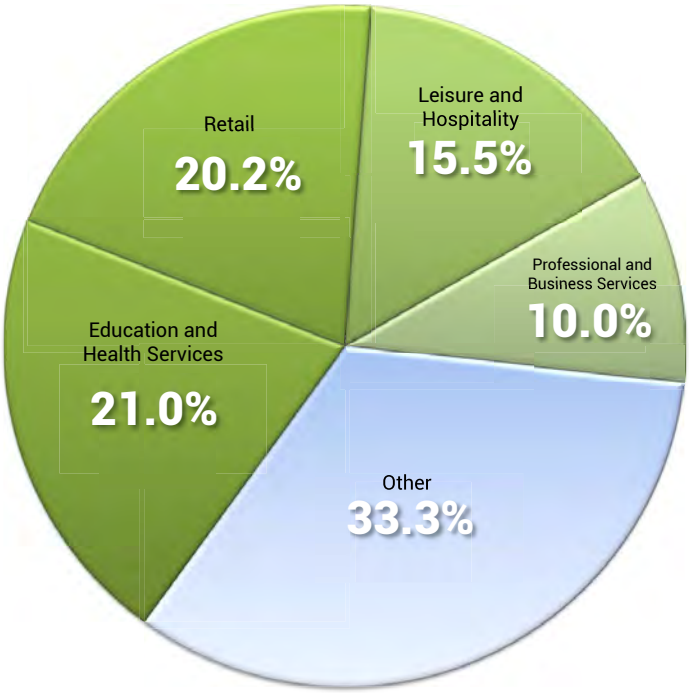
The Charlotte County area also has a regional airport in Punta Gorda. The Punta Gorda Airport (PGD) can accommodate larger corporate jets and has direct commercial airline service provided by Allegiant Airlines to 20 large US metropolitan cities. It is located within the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park.

Economic Development Goals

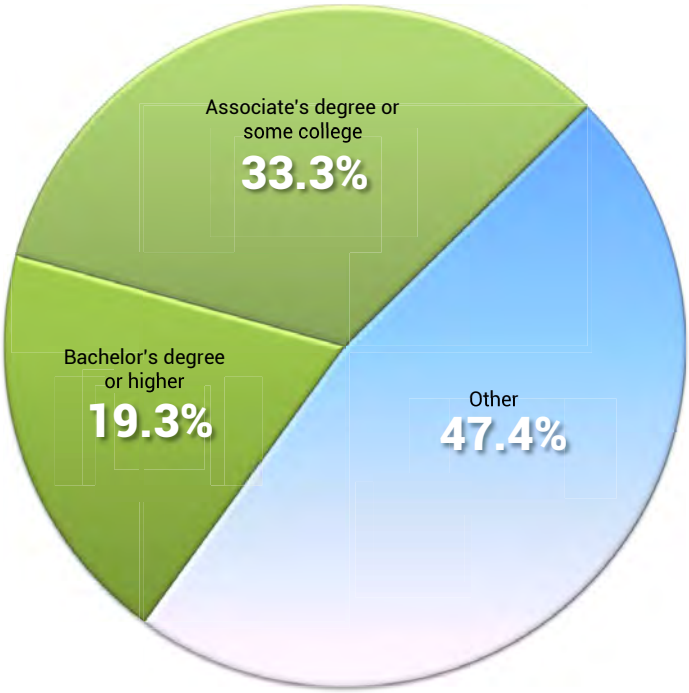
1. Attract businesses that will bring high paying, high skilled jobs to the County.
2. Create an entrepreneurial, incubator environment for growing new businesses.
3. Building a strong business and expansion program to assist existing businesses.
4. Lead redevelopment efforts to strengthen the economic base and attractiveness of some of the older areas in the county.



Where the Jobs Are



Education



Spotlight on Industry

Cheney Brothers, Inc. has initiated development plans to build the largest private business in Charlotte County in the coming year. Their new food distribution facility of over 300,000 square feet will be located near the airport, and will employ over 350 employees when completed.

The Mission of the Charlotte Harbor Visitor and Convention Bureau

- Provide high quality, low cost economic development for Charlotte County
- Preserve and protect the natural resources that are the foundation for our tourism industry
- Help sustain the arts, attractions and activities that make Charlotte County an interesting place to both live and visit.

The Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) was established in 1996. It is the official tourism sales and marketing organization for Charlotte County. The Bureau markets Charlotte Harbor and the Gulf Islands as one of Florida's premiere eco-tourism, leisure, sports and meeting destinations.

The Bureau is funded by a five-penny tourist development tax on lodging accommodations including hotels, motels, inns, home vacation rentals, campgrounds and RV parks. Three of the five pennies pay for VCB operations, advertising and marketing. The remaining two pennies are pledged to finance the Charlotte Sports Park and Stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays' Spring Training.

The VCB staff works to educate visitors, meeting planners, sports event organizers, travel journalists, on-line bloggers, tour planners and others about the attractions, accommodations, activities, events and event facilities in Charlotte County. This is accomplished, primarily, through print advertising, social media, familiarization trips for journalists, attendance at tradeshows and on-line media.

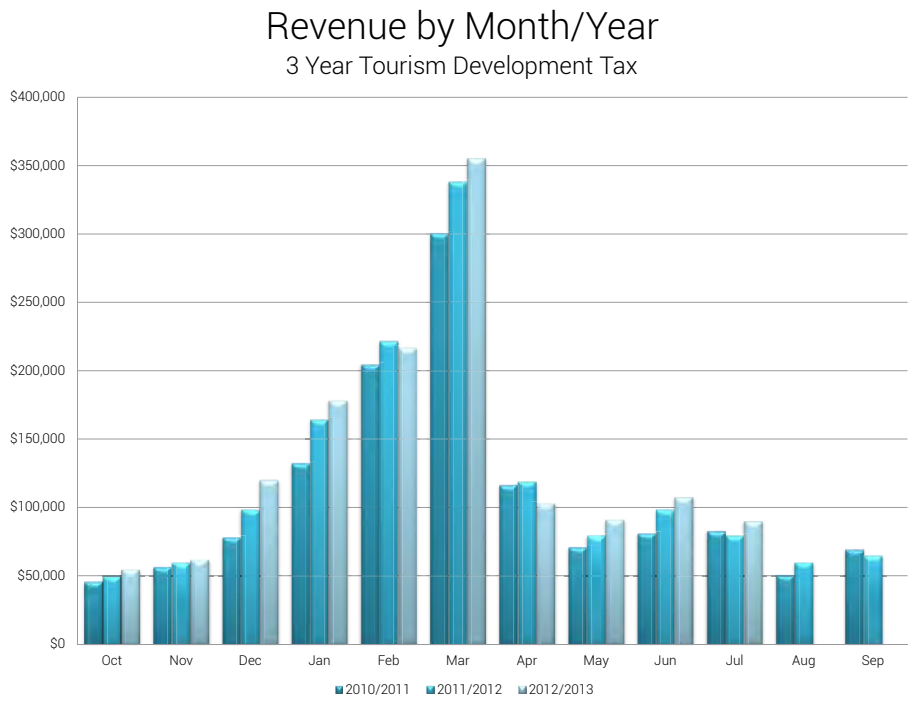
Tourism is low impact, high return economic development. It normally does not require additional police, fire protection, roads, classrooms or utilities. Tourism uses the community's existing infrastructure while generating sales tax revenue that helps to pay for those services we, as citizens, enjoy.

Local restaurants' and attractions' survival during low season is dependent upon visitor patronage during our peak tourism months of December through April. Charlotte County's attractions, specialty shops and unique restaurants would not be here for everyone to enjoy if it were not for our visitors.

People might think of tourism as only supporting hotels, attractions and restaurants. However, tourism creates jobs and generates revenue for many businesses in Charlotte County including convenience stores, grocery stores, gas stations, linen supply companies, beverage distributors, food purveyors, and many more.

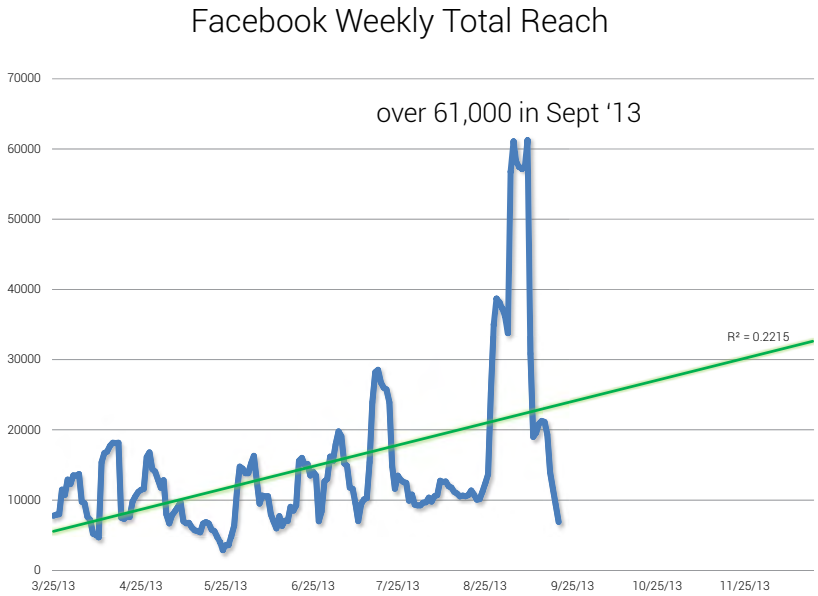
Sustainable tourism is a primary goal of the Visitor and Convention Bureau. The health of our water, beaches, natural areas and wild life is not only critical to our quality of life but also to the success of our tourism industry.

Tourism Trends



Over the past 3 years, there has been a steady increase in tourist tax revenue in Charlotte County. The summer season, typically the slowest time of the year for the area, was stronger than usual in 2013, which is a good sign for area accomodations, and a good signal for the area economy in general.

Social Media Marketing



Since 2008, the Visitor's Bureau has engaged visitors and citizens alike on various social media platforms. Currently, the Bureau utilizes Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+.

The graph below is indicative of the growing reach of the VCB in social media, as well as the importance to continue and expand these efforts.

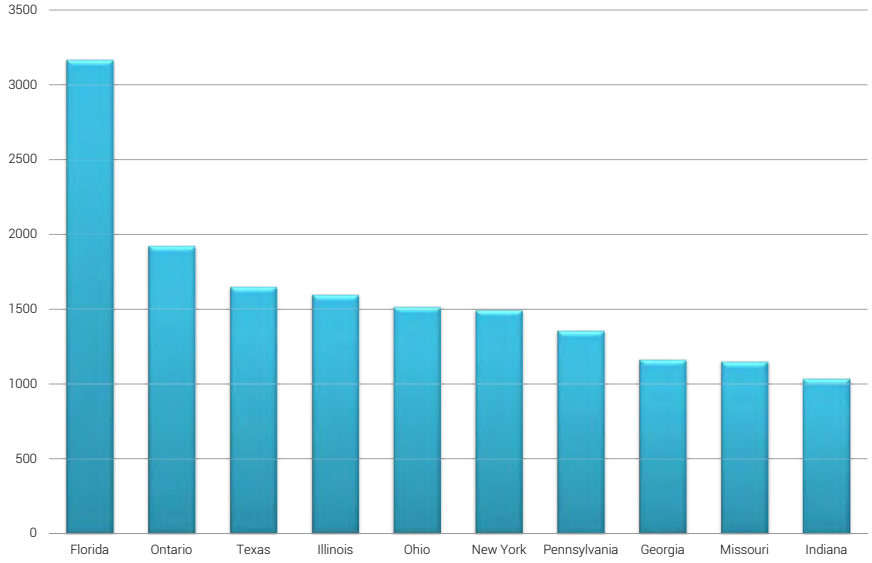
Quick Facts

- If tourism were to suddenly disappear, the average homeowner's tax bill would increase by $300 per year. Tourism generates more than $20 million in sales tax revenue annually.
- Tourism supports more than 6,000 jobs in Charlotte County.
- 99% of the Visitors Bureau's budget is funded by a tax on visitor accommodations. Only 1% is funded by ad valorem taxes.
- The Visitors Bureau responded to more than 18,358 requests for visitor information in 2013 from people who are interested in visiting Charlotte County.
- Tourism in Florida generates $15 in new sales tax for every $1 the state's tourism organization spends on advertising. That helps pay for local roads, police, fire and other services that benefit everyone.

Who Visits Charlotte County?

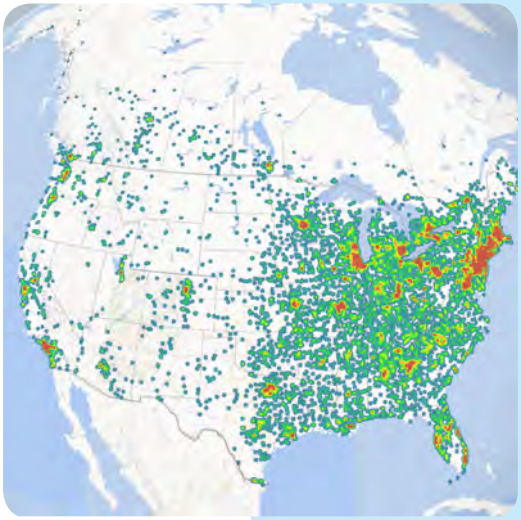
Inquiries by the Numbers

Inquiries by top 10 states/provinces



Inquiries by Heat Map

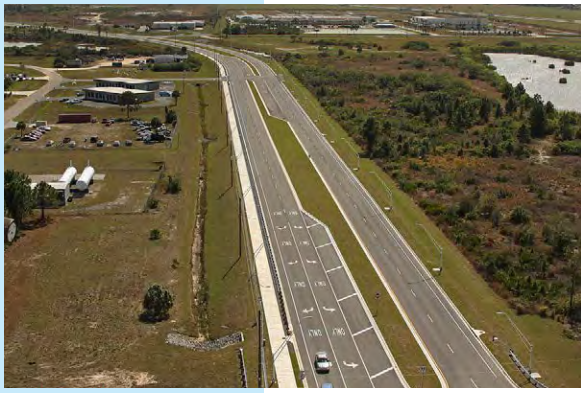
June 2012 - May 2013



Roads

The Charlotte County road projects follow our road policy and are conceptualized to meet: Transportation/traffic concurrency level of service requirements pursuant to the Smart Charlotte 2050 comprehensive plan; reliable storm evacuation routes; and safety and traffic operations considerations. This past year Community Development Engineering staff worked diligently to meet the county road policy.

Piper Road South - Completed



Completion of Piper Road South, which lies between Henry Street and North Jones Loop, met a top goal of the Board of County Commissioners which is to be proactive and encourage economic growth in and around the Punta Gorda airport. This four-lane divided roadway will serve as the primary thoroughfare of the area, with various collector roads and interconnecting streets to be constructed as development within this region is planned. Road construction and cost-sharing via a partnership between Charlotte County and the Florida Department of Transportation ensured a successful completion to this $7.4M (road construction cost) project. A continuation of Piper Road North is planned. The proposed alignment from Henry Street northerly to U.S. 17 is designed and permitted—however, neither construction funding nor right-of-way are available.

Rampart Boulevard Widening - Construction in Progress

This project is to widen Rampart Boulevard from its existing two-lane rural section to a four-lane urban section beginning at Loveland Boulevard and extending to the King's Gate subdivision entrance. The project is required in order for roadway level of service requirements to be met as a result of traffic flow from the king's gate subdivision. Total road construction costs are approximately $4M. Benderson Developers, Inc. are obligated for $1.1M of the costs. Project completion is anticipated in winter 2014.

Winchester Boulevard South - Design & Permitting Completed

This new three mile, four-lane divided roadway will be located between C.R. 775 (Placida Road) and S.R. 776. It will serve as a vital link on the Cape Haze peninsula, and provide a storm evacuation route via Winchester Boulevard north to River Road and U.S. 41. This facility will also serve as a major traffic corridor to accommodate expected growth in west Charlotte County. Construction is scheduled to begin in January 2014 at a cost (road construction) of $16.5M.

Roads

Burnt Store Road, Phase 3 – Design & Permitting Completed

This project consists primarily of widening the segment of Burnt Store Road that lies between Zemel Road and the Lee county line. The segment will be widened from its existing two-lane rural section to a four-lane divided suburban section. Burnt Store Road serves as a significant evacuation route for south Charlotte County, providing access to I-75. Estimated road construction costs for this 2.6 mile improvement are $15M. Engineering design and permitting are complete. Construction bidding is to occur late 2013. Construction completion should be spring 2015.

Midway Boulevard Widening, Phase 2 - Design & Permitting in Progress

This project is to complete the widening of Midway Boulevard from Harbor Boulevard to Kings Highway. The widening of the roadway from its existing 2-lane rural section to a 4-lane divided urban section is needed to accommodate current and future traffic volumes; to provide pedestrian/bike facilities; and to improve and enhance this corridor as a hurricane evacuation route. Engineering design and permitting is expected to be completed early 2014 with an anticipated construction start of summer 2014. Road construction costs are estimated at approximately $12m.

Edgewater Drive Widening, Phase 2 - Design & Permitting in Progress

This project will widen Edgewater Drive between Harbor Boulevard and Midway Boulevard from its existing two-lane section to a four-lane divided urban section. The new roadway will result in a significant improvement to mid-county's roadway network and will accommodate anticipated growth within the corridor it serves. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities will be added to create recreational and functional infrastructure in this region that currently do not exist. A spring 2014 construction start is scheduled. Road construction costs including removal and replacement of three bridges are estimated at $23M.

C.R. 771 (Gasparilla Road) - Design & Permitting in Progress

This project is to widen C.R. 771 from its existing two-lane section to a four-lane suburban section for the segment of C.R. 771 that lies between S.R. 776 and Rotonda Boulevard East. Improvements are primarily needed in order to sustain level of service requirements pursuant to Smart Charlotte 2050 comprehensive plan. Construction is anticipated to start late summer 2014. Estimated road construction costs are $16.2M.

Community Redevelopment Areas

Charlotte Harbor

The Harbor Walk project is located at the foot of the north-bound U.S. 41 bridge and is the signature project for the Charlotte Harbor CRA. Once completed, it will enhance pedestrian and bicycle access to Charlotte Harbor and will help to stimulate private investment in the area. Phase 1A, which includes replacement of the seawall, development of a small boat launch, parking area and restroom, is designed and permitted. Funding for Phase 1A is included in Florida Department of Transportation work plan for fiscal year 2014/15. Phase 1B, which includes a raised boardwalk and fishing pier, will provide pedestrian access to both sides of U.S. 41. Funding for Phase 1B is included in FDOT's work plan for 2015/16. The Board of County Commissioners approved a contract to finalize the design, permitting and construction plans for Phase 1B of the Harbor Walk project on September 24.

Parkside

Strategically located in Port Charlotte, the Parkside Community is home to two hospitals, two community parks, and several commercial establishments. Through a community partnership with the nonprofit TEAM Parkside and the Parkside Community Redevelopment Agency, many great things are happening to improve the neighborhood including infrastructure improvements and community programs that will make the neighborhood a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Eleven new homes available through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program provide an opportunity for residents to move into affordable home ownership in the Parkside neighborhood. All homes include three bedrooms, two bath and a single-car garage. Individuals interested must meet the income requirements which are based on family size.

The Board of County Commissioners approved the design concept for Harbor Boulevard on July 23, 2013. The design plan includes a 10 foot multi-use path; landscaping, street lighting; and maintains four -lanes for traffic. Charlotte County Utilities will replace water and sewer lines due to the age of the existing lines as part of the road construction. Reclaimed water lines will be installed as part of the project. The design contract was approved by the Board of County Commissioners on November 12.

Murdock Village

The County held a workshop to discuss Murdock Village in January. Direction was given to staff to submit an application to Southwest Florida Water Management District to obtain a Conceptual Environmental Resource Permit (ERP). Staff is preparing the application for submittal in 2014. Once approved, the Conceptual ERP will help to expedite the development time for projects. The Economic Development Office (EDO) continues to market the property to perspective developers. EDO staff attended "Select USA" in Washington D.C. where over 600 potential investors were introduced to opportunities in Murdock Village.

Strong Neighborhoods and a Sense of Community

Neighborhoods, Youth, and Volunteers

The Neighborhood Accountability Board (NAB) volunteers are truly just a few of the silent heroes who reside in Charlotte County. NAB board members come from diverse backgrounds that all have the same goal in mind, making their neighborhoods and community a safer place to live. The NAB is a community-based decision making process, where volunteers who reside within the community provide structured opportunities for a juvenile offender to take full responsibility for their crime and make amends with their community.

For youth that have stumbled a little in their lives, NAB offers an opportunity to get back up on their feet and become productive members of their communities. The success rate of the program is an impressive 92% for those that go through the program and do not re-offend for at least one year after. In 2012, 91 youth successfully completed the program. There are 40 NAB members who provided over 460 hours of volunteer service last year, valued at $10,218.

Parkside Community Garden

The Community Garden located at the Family Services Center in the Parkside area is a collaboration between Team Parkside, Keep Charlotte Beautiful and Charlotte County Human Services. The garden was funded through a grant from both Waste Management and Mosaic and was built by Aaron LaPlante, a Boy Scout who completed this project in order to fulfill his requirements to become an Eagle Scout. The garden opened in October 2012 and was officially dedicated on November 14, 2012.

There are 11 total beds (including 1 ADA bed) in the garden. The garden is managed by Team Parkside, who recruits the gardeners, helps coordinate their training, completes the rental agreements and collects the rental funds. Additionally, they monitor the garden to ensure that all gardeners are properly caring for and utilizing their beds. The cost to rent a bed is $15 per year for a full beds and $10 per year for a half bed. An expansion of the garden is planned and will include an additional 6 beds.

Neighborhood Revitalization Housing

Using two million dollars in federal funding received through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, 11 declining properties in foreclosure in the Parkside community were purchased to assist in the efforts to revitalize the neighborhood and provide affordable housing to qualified homeowners. Ten properties have been completely rebuilt and are ready for occupancy and the other was rehabilitated and is occupied. Two of the ten rebuilds are available for lease and the others are for sale. Funding for this project was available through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The grant funds provided an opportunity to improve the housing conditions in the neighborhood.

Community Involvement

In the fall of 2013, the United Way, Charlotte County Human Services Department and the Charlotte Community Foundation published a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment. It is hoped that the assessment will be used as a tool for our community to look at opportunities to improve the lives of our all our residents.

In late 2013 and early 2014, Charlotte County will be completing its 10-year transit development plan. This 10-year strategic public transportation plan will help in identifying needs through community participation and transit data while assessing costs and resources and will assist decision makers with a vision for long range transportation planning for Charlotte County residents.

Human Services

Supporting our Veterans

Charlotte County is proud to be the home to approximately 25,000 veterans and their families. In recognition of our military soldiers who have been wounded or killed in battle serving our Country, The Board of County Commissioners designated Charlotte as a "Purple Heart" County in February 2013, one of the first counties in the state of Florida to do so.

Through the efforts of our Veteran Services Office, with support from the Board of County Commissioners, the nationally affiliated Wounded Warriors Family Support Organization donated 40 reserved parking signs for Charlotte County's combat wounded veterans. These courtesy parking signs depicting the Purple Heart emblem were installed by volunteer veterans and posted at County facilities and parks. All signs were installed by Memorial Day 2013.

With grant funds received after Hurricane Charley, Charlotte County was able to rehabilitate and restore the multiplex house on Stillwater Avenue. In December 2012, the Board of County Commissioners approved the lease between Charlotte County and Community Assisted & Supported Living, Inc. (CASL) for the Stillwater Veteran's Home. CASL is an established agency that provides services to up to 18 homeless veterans in Charlotte County making transitional progress toward permanent housing. Community agencies provide supportive services including healthcare enrollment, pension claims and counseling.

In November 2012, the eighth annual "Stand Down" for homeless veterans was held. There were 35 homeless or near-homeless veterans who were assisted with services and other essential needs during this event through the dedication and generosity of numerous community organizations and volunteers.

Assisting our Seniors

Charlotte County is the home to 70,632 seniors over the age of 60. Through funding from the federal Older American's Act, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Area Agency for Southwest Florida, and the Board of County Commissioners nearly 400 frail or isolated seniors were provided in-home community based services to assist in preserving their dignity, promoting improved healthier outcomes, and providing them a safe home environment. Coordinated care plans use community resources, including family, churches, volunteer organizations, transportation, and home health providers to assist in home-based care. An average home care plan is approximately $5,000 per year. The average nursing home cost in Florida is approximately $80,000 per year.

Transporting our Residents

The Dial-A-Ride (DAR) program is Charlotte County's para-transit public bus service. This curb-to-curb bus service is available to all ages and provides safe, convenient, low cost, accessible transportation, while building a sense of community through connecting neighborhoods. Last year, approximately 60,000 one way trips were provided to residents.

The Sunshine program is a door-to-door transit service for individuals who are unable to provide or purchase their own transportation due to disability, age, income or living in a rural community. By providing needed trips to health care appointments, jobs, school, shopping and other life-sustaining activities, this bus service assists in improving the quality of life for transportation disadvantaged individuals. Last year over 93,000 one way trips were provided to eligible residents.

A Culture of Customer Service

Customer service remains one of Charlotte County Government's top priorities for the 2013-14 fiscal year. Our employees, who interact with the public, create the first impression that most residents have of Charlotte County. When employees are knowledgeable, responsive and courteous, residents are more likely to feel that any needs or problems may be solved through positive and productive interactions with Charlotte County staff. In 2012, The National Citizen Survey™ conducted a random resident survey regarding services provided by Charlotte County Government. Of the 51% who reported they had been in contact with a Charlotte County employee, their overall satisfaction is reflected in the following graph:

Ratings of County Employees

Employee of the Year: Dee Hawkins-Garland

Dee has the highest integrity in her job performance, delivers public service on an ongoing basis, and is devoted to outreach programs that make a difference in the community. As the public education spokesperson for Charlotte County Fire/EMS, innovation and partnership are the name of the game when it comes to Dee. With staff reductions, budget cuts, and the economic downturn, she has found ways to continue to educate the public in public safety through grants and sponsorships. Through her many years in the department she has been able to develop numerous successful programs for the public such as a baby sitter safety course, child safety seat program, fire alarms for the hearing impaired and many more.

Employee Health Center

The Bob Pryor Health Center opened in April 2009 and has been very successful and a positive change for employees. In May 2012 it moved to a new building with additional space and services. This October the Sheriff's Office teamed together with our staff to join in our Health Center program. The employees of the Sheriff's Office will find this program to be a great benefit and the result for the organization will be an added benefit with substantial financial saving.

Through expansion of the employee wellness program and use of the Employee Health Center, studies show we will continue to have healthier employees and bottom-line savings in our annual health care costs. While national health care costs continue to increase, Charlotte County has saved $9 million and we have seen improvements in all of the employee health indicators. The latest results related to the Health Center included a new statistic: direct saving to employees. This is measured as a result of the savings since we do not pay co-payments for office visits or for prescriptions at the Health Center. Direct savings to employees since 2009 is nearly $1.6 Million.

Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

District 1: Ken Doherty

District 2: Christopher Constance, Chairman of the Board

District 3: Bill Truex

District 4: Stephen R. Deutsch, Vice Chairman of the Board

District 5: Tricia Duffy

BCC Guiding Principals

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

BCC 2013/14 - 2014/15 Focus Area Goals

Water Resources: Water Quality & Water Quantity

Efficient and Effective Government

Quality of Life

Fiscal/Financial Planning

Growth Management

Public Safety

Economic Development

Human Services