

Administrator's Update for 5/8/2009
By Roger Baltz

I participated in a Realtors Association gathering which also included City of North Port City Manager Steve Crowell, City of Punta Gorda City Manager Howard Kunik, Mary Ann Mize, and Tax Appraiser Frank Desquin. We each presented information regarding projects and issues related to our operations.

The past two weeks have seen considerable efforts continue regarding moving forward with effort to prepare the County budget for our next fiscal year. Our County budget workshops to date have resulted in reductions which now total just over \$11 million dollars under the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) operations alone.

This past week we moved forward with elimination of 43 full time equivalent positions in our County. These positions were fully funded in our budget but were vacant and had not been filled as part of our strategies to reduce expenditures. Our staffing level for the BOCC side of our operations has now been reduced to the level which existed roughly five years ago.

Charlotte County has received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association. This award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting and represents a significant achievement by the organization.

The Building Officials Association of Florida Gulf Coast Chapter unanimously chose Vince LaPorta, Deputy Building Official, for the Chapters' "Building Official of the Year".

Our Building Construction Services department has issued over 40 single family permits in the month of April. This is the highest number since September 2007. The permits were issued for locations all over Charlotte County.

This past week several of our County departments participated in National Government Week, with its theme, "Greening Our Future". Our affordable housing staff organized a tour of two green certified homes available for purchase utilizing various housing programs. At our Environmental Campus, Charlotte Utilities and Environmental Services held an open house that offered free document shredding, low flow shower heads and water conservation kits.

Our County Commissioners approved an upgrade of the County-wide emergency radio system, estimated to cost \$2.4 million. By upgrading the existing system, rather than buying new, the County anticipates a savings of over \$5.2 million. We will be applying for grant funds to reimburse the County for the cost of the upgrades.

Charlotte County Fire/EMS Firemedic Michael Harper Jr. was recognized as the local Paramedic of the Year by the VFW Post 10178 in Englewood. Mr. Harper was then deemed eligible for the VFW District Title, which he was awarded last week.

Last year we asked residents to assist in tracking the Green and Spiny-Tailed Iguanas, which can cause extensive harm to the natural ecosystem's flora and fauna. These locations have been plotted on a map which can be viewed at the Iguana Reporting section of the County website. The map presents an excellent visual picture of where residents have reported seeing these creatures.

We have recently completed a variety of improvements at Hathaway Park on Washington Loop Road. A driveway, parking area, ADA accessible picnic pavilion, outdoor theater, nature trails, canoe/kayak launch, outdoor festival space, and educational kiosk have been added to the park. Fifty percent of the park project was funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program.

Charlotte County staff attended the National Association of Sports Commissions Annual Sports Event Symposium recently. Meetings with sporting event owners helped us to build destination awareness, educate them on area sporting venues and encourage the location of their events to Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands.

Our Affordable Housing Advisory Committee has allocated \$2,000,000 of Impact Fee Incentive Funds that Charlotte County has received. These funds are to be distributed among Habitat for Humanity and the Housing Corp. of Charlotte County to be used for down payment assistance. The money will fund approximately 71 housing units.

Charlotte County's draft comprehensive plan is available for public review and comment on our website, CharlotteCountyFL.com. The interactive and user-friendly plan, known as Smart Charlotte 2050, is believed to be the first of its kind in Florida. Residents can read every word and chapter (called elements) of the draft plan and submit comments that will be routed directly to county staff. The website also allows residents to read the comments of others, bookmark pages and to sign up to receive notices when changes are made to specified sections. Smart Charlotte 2050, the county's comprehensive plan, is intended to provide a blueprint for growth over the next 40 years.