

For 10/13/2010
County Reorganization combines several departments
by John Jackson

How lucky we are to live in such a beautiful part of our great country and be blessed with such great weather. As you read this I know you're thinking it's not great all the time. You're right, but what part of our wide-wide-world has beautiful weather all the time?

There are two items I would like to make you aware of: the JM Berlin/Rotary Skatepark and the reorganization of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources to Community Services and the relocation of its administrative offices.

There have been some significant problems at JM Berlin/Rotary Skatepark: vandalism and inappropriate behaviors head the list. This started after staff reductions when the County's daily supervision of that skatepark and the Captain Don Cerbone Skatepark in Punta Gorda ceased. A public meeting was held September 1st and from that meeting the Friends of Berlin Skatepark emerged. They have had several meetings but it's still very early in the process, the goal is to provide supervision for Berlin Skatepark, either through funding for County staff or having a slate of volunteers.

While the Friends continue their organizing, they along with Community Services are planning a Skate Party on Saturday, October 30th from 5:00 – 9:00 PM. There will be hot dogs and hamburgers, a costume contest, skate board contest, music, prizes and **ADMISSION WILL BE FREE**. The goal is twofold, fun for skaters and their friends and to educate and draw volunteers to participate in the Friends of JM Berlin/Rotary Skatepark. The public is invited!

Community Services emerged after the changes in the Charlotte County government organization provided the opportunity to make Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources more efficient. The Department of Environmental Services was eliminated, two of its divisions, Natural Resources and UF/IFAS Extension Services were transferred to Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources. This restructuring meant our name was not wholly representative of the mission of the total Department. Looking around for ideas we found that the name Community Services most closely represented the missions of each of the Department's Divisions.

Officially, Charlotte County Community Services has replaced Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources.

The Department's Divisions have also changed, Support Services which included Parks and a group that did maintenance and small construction projects has changed to Parks and Natural Resources. The new Division has been split into three sections: Sports Turf Management in the East and West sections of the County and Natural Resources. The work of this Division is very important because it not only deals with the active use parks and sports facilities but it is also responsible for the hundreds of acres of the County's environmental parks that provide watersheds, wildlife habitat and the forests. Directly related and as many of our citizens are aware, in keeping with the County Commission's efforts to economize much of the general grounds maintenance and custodial work done in parks and recreation facilities has been outsourced to private contractors.

Recreation is still with us but now it includes UF/IFAS Extension Services. This is a very significant change; the addition of UF/IFAS Extension Services adds tremendous scope to the Department. The strength and history of Extension Services allows it to be a stand alone section. At this point it is important to note that the addition of UF/IFAS Extension Services is intended to make program offerings to the residents of Charlotte County more complete. The Extension Services program in Charlotte County is seventy-five years old and provides horticultural programs, life learning opportunities and information to not only County citizens but also County businesses, especially those involved in agriculture.

Recreation will continue to be composed of the operation and programs and events at the County's Recreation Centers (South County Regional Park, Port Charlotte Beach, Harold Avenue, and Tringali), Swimming Pools (South County Regional Park, Port Charlotte Beach and Oyster Creek Regional Park), Special Use Facilities (Charlotte Sports Park, Port Charlotte Beach, Tringali In-Line Skating Rink, Capt. Don Cerbone Skatepark, J.M. Berlin/Rotary Skatepark and Englewood Beach); coordination with the youth and adult sports and recreation programs that use County sports fields and recreation facilities; and rentals of pavilions and the meeting rooms at the recreation centers and in the parks.

While the Libraries and History always seem to come at the end of the descriptions of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, now Community Services, they are so very far from least. Their new name better describes what they do, libraries and history. What community does not count its libraries as critical to its stature as a community for people to live and raise families? What community does not regard its history as critical to its future?

The four libraries in Charlotte County (Mid-County Regional, Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte and Englewood) are hubs of activity, information and entertainment. We are fortunate to have a dedicated staff of professionals who want to provide our County residents with the best service and material possible.

The History of Charlotte County is rich, going back to the Native Americans originally inhabiting the land, to the pioneers who came to a land of opportunity and to all of our cultures that make up the diversity of a growing community.

Many of you who bought annual beach and boat ramp parking stickers/permits or who rented park facilities knew that the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Administrative Offices were located in Building A at the Charlotte Sports Park. When we became Community Services that location did not change, however with an eye to a more efficient operation Community Services Administration and the Division of Parks and Natural Resources has now moved to the Mid-County Library. An important note: access to those offices is on the north side of the Library through the door marked Library Administration. Beach and boat ramp parking passes are available there but no longer available at the Sports Park.

Quality of life issues are what Community Services is all about. For many of our residents quality of life is what encouraged them to make Charlotte County their home. Charlotte County Community Services has something of interest for everyone, give us a call, we're Open for Business!

