

Charlotte County undertaking sustainability initiatives

By Julia C. Galofre Assoc. AIA, LEED AP BD+C, GGP, FGBC, CFM, PX, BN, DEP Stormwater Management Inspector, Charlotte County Building Code and Sustainability Specialist and Caryn Huff, Charlotte County Energy Coordinator

Charlotte County is committed to protecting our resources and preserving our beautiful county by working towards a more sustainable future. From retrofit projects that modify existing facilities to be more efficient to new projects and events, sustainability initiatives and resources in Charlotte County are becoming established and making a difference.

Our Charlotte County Facilities Construction and Maintenance Department is leading by example with retrofits that are already saving over \$500,000 dollars a year. These projects include light bulb replacements with fluorescent or LED lighting and installation of timers or motion sensors to ensure lights are turned off when not in use. Another retrofit is the installation of programmable thermostats in conjunction with modified temperature settings, which has resulted in significant energy savings. The Department is also in the process of designing the county's first LEED certified building and is evaluating other remodel projects for green certification. The County is also moving forward with a solar hot water project at several fire stations and is investigating the feasibility of utilizing solar at other facilities.

Our Public Works Solid Waste Division has become a leader in renewable energy at the Zemel Road Landfill by collecting the methane gas created by the decomposition of waste materials and burning it to produce electricity. They also have launched the Curbside Single Stream Recycling Program that makes recycling easy for all the Charlotte County residents. Another program, "Keep Charlotte Beautiful," promotes environmental sustainability by working with the community in litter prevention and community cleanup events.

Our Natural Resources office acquires lands for environmental preservation, balancing the impacts of future growth while buffering sensitive areas from encroachment. This provides Charlotte County with flood control and the opportunity to recharge the aquifer to protect our water resources.

Our Growth Management Division is working in the revitalization of the County through the Community Redevelopment Agency and the Smart Charlotte 2050 planning process. The plan covers a vast range of topics including sustainability, energy efficiency and creation of walkable communities. The input of all the residents, business owners and land owners is welcome.

The Building Division has created the Green Building Program. The program is voluntary to builders and property owners and has been developed to help Charlotte County become a more sustainable community by reducing the environmental impact of buildings, and promoting economic and environmental health in the County. The

program is designed to encourage environmentally sensitive construction and development and offers incentives to sustainable residential and commercial construction.

One of the most successful sustainability events has been the Green Futures Expo and Energy Options Conference. This year, the second annual expo and conference will be held at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center in Punta Gorda on Nov. 12 and 13, 2010. The Conference will run on Friday, Nov. 12 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and the Expo is free and open to the public on Saturday, Nov. 13 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

This year's Energy Options Conference goal is to provide additional information, resources and awareness about alternative Energy Options such as Geothermal heating and cooling and Zero Energy options for residential applications.

The Green Futures Expo, on November 13, is one of the biggest tradeshow in Southwest Florida and it is designed to highlight the products and services that will benefit consumers and businesses for a future of green living. The Expo and most of the workshops are free and open to the public. It is a great opportunity to learn about and also to market green products and/or services.

For more information on the event visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.com/BCS. The Charlotte County Sustainability Team continuously offers free education to the community on Green Building and Sustainability topics. To view upcoming events and learn more about sustainability, or to sign up for sustainability updates through Charlotte Alert, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.com and click "Sustainability Initiatives" in the links on the left.