

Administrator's Update for 3/23/11
By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

Last week Charlotte County Commissioners, assistant administrator Kelly Shoemaker, several directors and I attended the Curmudgeon Club town hall meeting at the Cultural Center on Aaron Street. Also in attendance were other elected officials and Punta Gorda mayor Harvey Goldberg. Citizens expressed their concerns and asked questions on a wide range of topics, from sewers to code violations.

Topping off

I also attended the topping off event at the Punta Gorda Airport, celebrating a key point in the construction of the new twelve-story control tower. Expansion like this is indicative of the forward motion we are seeing in the area, which has positive impact on economic development, tourism and many other facets of Charlotte County.

Wellness call for seniors

With collaborative support from our senior services division, our veteran services division is working with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and the Senior Friendship Centers to implement a "wellness call" program for veterans and their surviving spouses. The pool of volunteers will call aging veterans or spouses who are not seen on a regular basis to check on their well-being. The first list of eleven veterans or spouses who wish to participate in this program has been submitted to RSVP.

Tourism vision

The Charlotte Harbor Visitor and Convention Bureau hosted its first tourism industry coffee meeting last week at Tringali Park Recreation Center. A dozen industry leaders, representing accommodation rentals, attractions and tourism services, attended to share their vision of what tourism should look like in Charlotte County. The tourism office will use information gathered at these events to formulate a strategy to move the destination forward.

A sense of place

Last week our growth management concurrency manager met with staff from the parks and recreation division to discuss several citizen-driven ideas for creating a sense of place in the medical district area. The purpose of the designation of this area as a CRA and of the charrette process is to identify ideas that might promote the turnaround of the district. Citizens and business owners indicated that adding a unique system of parks and trails to the district would be an important aspect of instituting a new character into the area and of garnering reinvestment by the homeowners, businesses and developers.

Historic courthouse

Responding to a challenge from the Board of County Commissioners in 2005, many local citizens and groups throughout Charlotte County worked together to raise over \$100,000 to help save the original 1928 Charlotte County Courthouse. The historic building was rehabilitated, then re-opened in 2008, with many historical elements preserved.

A special appreciation day event was held last Friday at the Courthouse to honor contributors to the "Courthouse Challenge Fund." Speakers included County Commission Chair Bob Starr, fundraising chairs Jane Brenner and Mac Horton, longtime resident Gussie Baker, and Vernon Peebles from the Historical Advisory Committee. A reception followed in the second floor courtroom, featuring historical Florida foods of smoked mullet and swamp cabbage.

A new display in the historic building now honors the contributors and the rehabilitation project. Major contributors have donated pioneer family albums and portraits of people who made a difference in our history, while all donors are listed on a new plaque near the Taylor Street entrance. In addition, original artist renderings of Punta Gorda's outdoor murals are on display near the east entrance, on loan from the Punta Gorda Historic Mural Society.

Pickleball

Last week Tringali Recreation Center in Englewood hosted a free pickleball workshop for skills and techniques. Instructors demonstrated the skills and strategies for beginners to experts to thirty-six participants. The workshop was held in the gymnasium and three courts were set up so that everyone had a chance to participate. Indoor pickleball is held regularly on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Tringali Recreation Center. Anyone can drop in and try the game.