

Administrator's Update for 5/4/11
By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

I traveled to Wisconsin Dells last week to participate in a meeting between Water Park Ventures LLC, Ripkin Baseball, Southwest Land Developers and Charlotte County to further the process of establishing a proposed entertainment district in Murdock Village. This was a key meeting in that there is a synergy between building a waterpark and having youth baseball tournaments. Each complements the other and increases the potential for success. We are fortunate to have Ripkin Baseball well established in our community. There is a desire by everyone (including me) to have the deals signed immediately but the reality is due diligence takes time, feasibility studies need to be fine tuned and funding in this economy is difficult. The good news is that all parties view Charlotte County as the spot to be, however, patience is needed until everything gets worked out. I remain optimistic.

Budget Workshops

Last week we held the first of three budget workshops which included discussion of three of our strategic focus areas: economic development, growth management, and water resources. We are on target for balancing the budget this year, continuing on track with the two-year budget cycle. We believe the revenue shortfalls are slowing and the worse is behind us. Our strategic focus areas are incorporating long-range plans into the discussions, including a ten-year economic development plan, long-term water alternatives, and sewer sustainability plans.

Moving towards a two year budget development process will allow us to focus on measuring levels of service to the community as well as continuing to identify and implement efficiencies.

Joint meeting

Earlier in April the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and the Sarasota Board of County Commissioners held a joint workshop which included discussion on how the two counties could work together. This discussion resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding, which will soon be executed by each county, regarding economic development marketing practices such as promotions, generation of leads, and project management. Another positive outcome is the potential to partner with Sarasota and Manatee counties to provide our 2-1-1 service. Over the past several years counties across Florida have been joining together regionally with a central point to provide this service resulting in economies of scale and savings to the citizens. We will continue to explore this opportunity as we move through the budget process. We had an excellent meeting between the two Commissions which is critical to maintaining positive relationships. During Hurricane Charley, Sarasota County provided wonderful mutual aid in helping our community recover.

Enhancement zones

At last week's Commission meeting, the BCC approved the expansion of the brownfield area at the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP) and the renaming of this brownfield area to the "ECAP Enhancement Zone." This designation may provide bonus tax refunds of up to \$2,500 for each new job created in the ECAP Enhancement Zone. At the same meeting the BCC approved moving forward with the recommendation to create a Murdock Village Enhancement Zone. Two public hearings will be held at future BCC meetings, one on May 10; and the second on May 24.

Travel and tourism week

In recognition of National Travel and Tourism Week, May 7 through 15, our Charlotte Harbor Visitor and Convention Bureau has developed a plan to demonstrate to area businesses and residents that tourism works for Charlotte County. This promotion includes the economic impact of tourism on Charlotte County displayed on t-shirts worn by members of the tourism industry and placed on drink coasters in participating restaurants. Hotel guests will be given removable stickers stating "Tourism is Everybody's Business" to place on bills (currency) to demonstrate the power of visitor spending in Charlotte County. In 2010, visitors to Charlotte County spent more than \$205 million which created nearly 6,000 local jobs and more than \$19 million in sales tax revenue. This reduced every Charlotte County household's tax bill by \$300.