

New county website powered by SharePoint **by Elaine Jones, Charlotte County Public Information Coordinator**

Last summer our information technology (IT) department began work on a new website for Charlotte County. This project is a part of wider goals surrounding the technology we use. As we looked for ways to make our processes more efficient, increase consistency, consolidate applications and improve data quality, IT chose Microsoft SharePoint technology.

SharePoint is actually shorthand for a suite of technologies that includes a robust web-based platform that not only can host websites, but is a collaborative tool for managing work flows and a document management platform. SharePoint can also be used as a base for creating custom applications. Since SharePoint is part of the county's Enterprise Agreement for a variety of Microsoft products such as Windows and Office, the more third-party (non-Microsoft) applications that can be replaced by SharePoint, the bigger the savings to the county's software and maintenance costs.

Many websites in use today on the Internet are based on SharePoint. Government sites such as the Library of Congress, the Department of Treasury and the City of Philadelphia are SharePoint websites, as well as private sector sites such as Kraft Foods and Energizer.

Internally, Charlotte County IT has rolled out a few SharePoint-based applications, such as one for Animal Control, a facilities work order application, and a vehicle reservation form. These applications have streamlined processes and helped with workflow efficiency. In addition, our Budget department already hosts much of its work on an internal SharePoint site. Using SharePoint for our new public website is a part of the first stage of our initiative to leverage all that SharePoint can do.

The new website has been a collaborative effort between IT and the Public Information Office. Staff members from both divisions have worked together to design the site and smooth our processes for moving content to the new platform. The goal of the new website is to provide a user-friendly place for the public to find accurate, up-to-date information. The information should be easy for the user to find and simple for the departments to keep updated. Our website should engage the public, ensure transparency and help citizens feel connected to their government.

To achieve these goals, the new website has several new features. We have placed news and alerts on the main page, as well as a searchable calendar of meetings and events. A separate page is dedicated to transparency in government. Our new All Access feature is a hub where citizens can find answers on all sorts of topics, from invasive iguanas to the county charter to boat ramps. In addition, there are web pages for working (business and jobs), living (residential and safety), and playing (parks, sports, culture). We've also added a Contact Us link on every page with a form that send questions and comments to the right place.

We invite you to experience our new site while we continue to develop it: www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov. You can also get there from our current site, www.CharlotteCountyFL.com –just click the link in the big banner. There are links for sending feedback to us on both the current and the new website. Please let us know what you think, what you use or like on the new site or current site. We want to hear from you!