

Administrator's Update for 1/16/2009

By Roger Baltz

In our on-going efforts to close out the financial portion of hurricane recovery, our Budget office has gained another \$3 million reimbursement from FEMA. This continues to be a very complicated process, but one that is important to our full economic recovery.

We received the formal Certificate of Occupancy (CO) for the Stadium at the Charlotte Sports Park last week. The project continues to be under budget and we are working with the Tampa Bay Rays to incorporate items into the project that had been deleted in previous cost-cutting efforts. Under our contract with the Rays, they will play sixteen (16) spring training games in Charlotte County.

The Growth Management Department has refined their Planner of the Day (POD) services. The POD is always available to work directly with callers or walk-in customers and to assist them with their planning issues. There are now a series of back-up employees available to handle overflow or to cover phones during breaks in coverage. This will enable the department to provide better customer service.

Our Manchester Lock removal project is now complete following nearly 8 years of environmental permitting. The County removed the decaying lock structure from the Manchester Waterway, restored natural flow ways adjacent to Lewis Creek and installed various structures to impede the ability of motor boat traffic through salt marsh areas that lie between Charlotte Harbor and the Manchester Canal System. We appreciate the patience of our residents in this area as we worked our way through the complicated permitting process.

Our County Public Works Department has completed the first portion of the Peachland sidewalk, which was a 2002 sales tax project. The project was comprised of approximately 5 miles of 6 foot wide sidewalk from Forrest Nelson Boulevard to Loveland Boulevard including associated drainage improvements. There is one small portion of sidewalk crossing a canal that will be finished later this year when we complete a nearby road and drainage project.

Utilities Director Jeff Pearson met with Jerry Olivo, Assistant Superintendent for Charlotte County Public Schools, to discuss reclaimed water, Charlotte County's Toilet Rebate Program and other items of mutual interest. Utilities staff also met with representatives of the Burnt Store Village Property Owners Association to review plans for an upcoming Utilities project in their community. CCU will be rehabilitating the wastewater collection system in Burnt Store Village to bring it up to modern standards and improve system performance. We will continue to coordinate with this community to ensure that residents are well-informed throughout the project.

Kay Tracy, from our Economic Development Department, has been appointed to the Board of Directors of the European Business Council (EBC). The EBC's mission is to form a diverse group of international professionals dedicated to facilitate business between Southwest Florida and Europe. We believe this will help in our efforts toward creating economic diversity in Charlotte County.

Our County Emergency Management staff traveled to Bradenton for a Firewise workshop with the Florida Division of Forestry. This program shows neighborhoods and gated communities how to take specific steps to limit their exposure and vulnerability to wildfire. The meeting fulfills the need to produce a community Wildfire Plan for the urban-wild land interface of Charlotte County. We have certified a number of communities across the County as Firewise. This improves the County's ISO rating which ultimately results in lower fire insurance premiums for our residents.

Our County library usage has been robust. Compared to last year our Materials in circulation increased 13%, visitors 10% and computer use 14%.

We have received notification from the Department of Community Affairs that Charlotte County will be receiving \$557,478 from the Income Home Energy Assistance Program. We have been authorized to begin accepting applications from low-income households and the funds will allow us to assist approximately 1,827 households to pay their electric bills.