

Administrator's Update for 1/23/09

By Roger Baltz

The County Commissioners have approved a list of projects totaling just over \$350,000,000 to be used to apply for any Federal Economic Stimulus funding which may be approved in the coming weeks. We, along with communities throughout the country, are expecting further direction once President Obama's staff settles into the White House.

This past week marked our County grand opening for the new Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center. A large crowd toured the facility for several hours taking the opportunity to experience the spectacular view from the wall of windows in our main seating area, to listen to local musicians, and to sample food offerings from Boston Culinary, the Center's caterer.

Our County Commissioners have approved a re-organization which will result in consolidations of several existing departments in the County. Among the actions taken are that a new Budget and Administrative Services Department will now include our functions of purchasing, information technology, real estate services, budget, and fiscal operations. Fiscal staff throughout our County will have a centralized reporting structure under these changes. Five positions currently funded and not filled were also eliminated as a cost saving measure. In the coming weeks and months we will also be moving forward with our budget workshops using a performance based budgeting process to evaluate services, programs, and expenditure levels.

The Charlotte Visitor & Convention Bureau participated in the Columbus Golf Show in Columbus, Ohio. This annual show is attended by thousands of area residents looking for new destinations where they can travel to play golf. Several hundred people visited the VCB's booth which touted *Golf Digest's* rating of Charlotte Harbor as the 3rd Best Place in the Country to Live and Play Golf.

Charlotte County has entered into an agreement with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to install traffic signals at the intersection of Coliseum Boulevard and SR 776. Construction will begin as soon as final plans are received from FDOT.

The County has begun the resurfacing of Peachland Boulevard between Loveland Boulevard and the Morningstar Waterway. The project will continue through the month of January and at times will reduce traffic to one lane of travel. We appreciate our resident's patience as we complete this much needed road work.

Charlotte County recently hosted a regional meeting of the Emergency Management personnel of the ten counties of southwest Florida. Along with a presentation from the State Division of Emergency Management, there were

discussions of how the counties can work cooperatively together in light of current economic conditions.

Our Veteran Services Officer gave a presentation to approximately 20 veterans at the Vietnam Group meeting. The largest number of questions asked involved secondary claims to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), specifically Coronary Heart Disease. If you'd like information regarding the benefits you are entitled to as a result of your military service, our Veterans Services Office will be happy to assist you.

As one of our cost cutting initiatives we are utilizing inmate labor to paint the interior of the County jail. The cost of hiring a painting contractor was valued at \$256,000. With the inmates providing the labor, the only expenses incurred were the painting materials and staff supervision.

Our County performed a 40 acre prescribed burn at the Tippecanoe II Scrub-jay Mitigation Area this month. The prescribed burn was conducted to improve Florida scrub-jay foraging and nesting opportunities. We also use prescribed burn to reduce the threat of devastating wild fires, by the reduction of vegetative fuels. Tippecanoe II is located along Flamingo Blvd in Port Charlotte.

Shell Creek Preserve, a purchase of the Conservation Charlotte program, was visited by 27 avid bird watchers from the Audubon Society. Staff from the Natural Resources Division led the group on a walking tour of the Preserve. Twenty-nine species of birds were observed including the Crested Caracara, Redstarts, White-eyed vireo, and various warblers. Tour members ranged from residents in Charlotte and Sarasota county and as far away as Toronto, Canada.

Our County Geographic Information System (GIS) efforts were recently recognized for providing data for hurricane analysis. The data that we had gathered, both before and after Hurricane Charley, was used in a research project that compared building codes with hurricane damage