

Administrator's Update for 3/16/2009

By Roger Baltz

The Commissioners and I attended a regional Economic Summit organized by the *Charlotte Sun* newspaper. Over 100 community leaders from Charlotte County, Sarasota County North Port, Desoto County, Punta Gorda, and Arcadia came together to discuss ways of supporting economic development and creating jobs.

Our Commissioners also conducted the first of what will be many budget workshops on the upcoming budget. The workshop focused upon estimates for our anticipated revenue short fall and a discussion of our challenges with the Constitutional Officers.

Our Environmental & Extension Services department (EES) has received a grant from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, in the amount of \$27,982. The grant will co-fund the Sea Grant Program Assistant position for this fiscal year. The Foundation determined that the research and educational activities such as artificial reef placement, Master Naturalist program, Kids Cup fishing tournament, and other marine-related programs provided by Sea Grant are valuable to Southwest Florida.

Our County's Fire/EMS received \$52,473 in grant funds from the Homeland Security Grant Program. The grant requires no local match and will be used for equipment maintenance and specialized training for the Special Ops/Hazardous Materials Unit.

Our Fire/EMS Department also participated in a Student Career Shadow Educational Program with Charlotte High School. This is a Charlotte County Public School Program that allows students who are seeking a career as a Firefighter or Paramedic to ride along with the Department to see first hand what patient care and the fire profession is all about.

Our County Commissioners approved the Frequency Reconfiguration Agreement with Sprint for rebanding of the 800 MHz County-wide Radio System. The rebanding will buffer the public safety frequencies from civilian cellular phone transmissions. Sprint is funding the project and Charlotte County will be reimbursed for of staff time and expenses, estimated to be \$341,000. The 800 MHz system is utilized by all public safety organizations in Charlotte County.

Building Construction Services department (BCS) held another session in their "Ask the Building Department" series of informational programs. This presentation covered the purchase of partially finished and foreclosed homes and included speakers from the realtors association, the Housing Corporation and staff from BCS. Over 40 people were in attendance and topics ranged from

the questions to ask before you purchase a foreclosed home, to how to find a realtor and the right home for you, to how to get assistance if you are facing foreclosure. The program is being replayed on CCTV-20 and can be accessed anytime through our online video archives at CharlotteCountyFL.com.

The Facilities Department, with the assistance from the Purchasing Department, has saved \$54,411 so far this year by making direct purchases of material for county-wide projects such as the Sports Park and Event Center, rather than having the contractors make the purchases. The savings come from eliminating the contractor's markup and sales tax costs. It is anticipated that an additional \$173,000 will be saved by making these direct purchases on the jail expansion project, currently under construction.

The County's Transit Division received its preliminary report on its Bus Transit System Safety and Security Review, as required by the Florida Department of Transportation. The report indicated 100% compliance and looks at areas such as system safety, selection and training of drivers, bus maintenance and vehicle safety inspections.

The road and drainage work at Carmalita and Cooper Streets is proceeding on schedule. This past week Carmalita reopened with three full lanes, enabling vehicles making left turns to move out of the way of through traffic. Further paving will be completed within the next few weeks.

We have completed the paving of Olean Boulevard from US 41 to Aaron Street. This work was done at night due to heavy traffic during daytime hours. The intersection is a very busy area and had experienced severe deterioration of asphalt. Another paving project completed this week was the resurfacing and widening of Riverside Drive in Punta Gorda (Cleveland). This roadway was widened from 18ft. to 24 ft. for approximately 2.5 miles from Cleveland Drive to U.S. 17.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District has declared a Phase III Extreme Water Shortage for our region. This order includes additional water restrictions, such as a reduced establishment period for new plantings. Additionally, local governments and utilities are required to step up enforcement efforts, including the issuance of fines and citations for water restriction violations without first issuing a written warning. For more information on Phase III water restrictions, visit SWFWMD online at www.watermatters.org.