

**Administrator's Update 4/17/09**  
**By Roger Baltz**

The Tampa Bay Rays have now completed their first Spring Training season in Charlotte County with a total attendance of over 83,900 spectators. The Rays drew record attendance of nearly 30 percent over last year. As a reminder, we have signed a 20 year agreement between our County and the Rays. The roughly \$28 million in improvements to the Sports Park were completed as agreed. As we move forward, each party has certain obligations to one another to now work in partnership to maintain and market our facility.

The baseball activities at the Charlotte Sports Park will continue through September as the Charlotte Stone Crabs begin their inaugural season in the Class A league. Their first game on April 9, 2009 started very well with a capacity crowd of over 7,000.

Our County Commissioners recently received a status report on the 2002 sales tax projects. After discussion, the widening of Winchester Blvd., which runs from S.R. 776 to C.R. 775, has been removed from the list of construction projects. As sales tax is just a part of the funding needed for this project, and given the current economic uncertainties, the direction is now to delay the construction start of Winchester Blvd. The County will continue the acquisition of property for the right-of-way and should be completing this portion of the project within the next several months. This will allow the County to quickly move forward with construction when the project resumes at a later date. The project is estimated to cost \$64.8 million with \$12.3 million funded from sales tax.

Our County Solid Waste Division is continuing to move forward with the landfill gas to electricity project. Our Environmental and Extension Services (EES) Department has submitted the air permit "Title V Air Construction Permit, prepared by the contractor's engineering firm to Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). This permit is now under review by FDEP.

The latest Charlotte County demographic information is now online. Visit [CharlotteCountyFL.com](http://CharlotteCountyFL.com) and click on Economic Development. The Demographic Profile 2009 Edition provides a wide variety of information about Charlotte County including population data, employment, cost of living, transportation and housing.

The 2008 annual report on tourism travel to Charlotte County, provided by Research Data Services, reported that although visitor attendance dipped slightly, visitor expenditures for 2008 increased by 2.3% over 2007. That is a healthy increase under current economic conditions.

Our County Social Services division released the summer Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding on April 1. This funding assists

qualifying low-income residents with utility assistance. Since the release of the summer funding cycle, Charlotte County has been able to help 24 households.

Our Veterans Services division worked with Senator Dave Aronberg's office to host a Town hall meeting to discuss issues Florida's veterans want to know more about, from the basic services such as retirement benefits, to dealing with physical or emotional repercussion of war.

The Peace River Authority held its first Regional Water Conservation Policy Summit with elected officials and staff representatives from Charlotte, DeSoto, Sarasota, and Manatee counties and their municipalities. The message of water conservation and diversification of water resources was clearly conveyed throughout the summit as representatives discussed a variety of policy issues. We were pleased to have Charlotte County pointed out to other attendees as an example of an organization that follows good conservation practices.

I would like to thank all those who have provided input on the County's programs and services as part of our ongoing budget process. Our online budget survey has now been completed by over 1,800 people, with 650 participants taking the time to provide suggestions for additional budget efficiencies and to provide comments on County operations. Public input is a valuable part of the budget process and I encourage everyone to continue to follow our budget review workshops over the coming months.