

Administrator's Update for 6/26/09

By Roger Baltz

We have continued working on our County budget for next fiscal year. Our Commissioners have approved roughly \$15 million in reductions to our BOCC controlled operations part of the budget alone to date.

The County is finalizing an agreement to distribute Coast2Coast Rx discount cards. The cards will be available free of charge to all residents and offer drug discounts up to 65%. Distribution will begin in July.

Our Transit division has begun using bus wrap advertising. These colorful mobile ads showcase a number of local businesses and currently provide \$18,000 a year in revenue to the County.

Our Commissioners recently selected the design firm for the Placida Road widening project. This 2008 sales tax project will now enter the design phase, which will take approximately 18 months.

Real Estate Services has completed the final land acquisition for the Piper Road project that runs from north Jones Loop Road to Henry Street in Punta Gorda. Construction should start on this phase of the project in September 09.

As part of the County changes to become more efficient and reduce expenditures, our Fire / EMS personnel now assist with lawn maintenance at each of our County fire stations. Using on-duty personnel to maintain the lawn and landscaping at each station results in a \$29,316 per year savings.

Our Utilities Department has begun using our mass notification program for special messages to their customers. Recently, residential customers with excessive water consumption were reminded of the need to continue practicing water conservation. Billing and collection services staff have also started using the system to notify customers of various issues with their account and to update contact information. Future uses identified for this program include boil water notices and information on water outages in a particular section of our service area. The mass notification system is also utilized to distribute our Charlotte Alert messages and emergency bulletins to our residents.

Tourism staff presented the summer tourism initiatives to area business leaders during the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce meeting on June 17. This included the ECONomical Summer Escape promotion which offers visitors savings, packages and giveaways when vacationing here and the Risk-Free Vacation Guarantee to encourage travel to the area during the 2009 summer season. The strategy is to combat the negative stigma and resulting reluctance of travelers to book their vacation in Florida during hurricane season. Details for both programs can be found at CharlotteHarborTravel.com.

The First Punta Gorda Home Site Historical Marker dedication took place last week. The marker, the ninth historical marker to be placed in and around Charlotte County, provides information regarding James A. Lockhart and his wife, Josephine, who moved into the area in June, 1876. The dedication ceremony was attended by several City and County staff and elected officials as well as citizens interested in history and historical preservation. The marker and the dedication ceremony were a joint effort between Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda.

The Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center recently hosted Touch-A-Truck. Dump trucks, back-hoes, bulldozers, RV's, cranes and garbage trucks were on display for children to explore, climb inside and honk the horns. Vehicles were provided by companies and organizations such as the Charlotte County Sheriff's Department, Punta Gorda Fire Department, Charlotte County Public Works, Florida Fish & Wildlife, Kelly Tractor and Waste Management. In addition, there were bounce houses, face painting, temporary tattoos, concessions provided by Boston Culinary Group and a showing of the Disney movie classic "Cars" inside the Event Center. An estimated 800+ people attended the free event.

Summer Safari Camp began this past week at the Harold Avenue and South County Recreation Centers. Activities included arts and crafts, structured games and swimming at the South County Regional Park. Our South County Regional Pool saw children from 13 different community camp programs use the pool for a total of 597 swimmers for the first week of summer.