

Welcome to Community Services for 6/2/2010
by John Jackson, Director of Charlotte County Community Services

Charlotte County Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources is no more. Like most of the world, change is the only thing we can rely upon.

The changes in the Charlotte County Government organization provided the opportunity to make Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources more efficient. The Department of Environmental Services was restructured with two existing divisions, Natural Resources and UF/IFAS Extension Service, transferred to Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources. This restructuring meant our name was not wholly representative of the mission of the total department. Looking around for ideas we found that the name Community Services most closely represented the missions of each of the Department's Divisions.

So, officially Charlotte County Community Services has replaced Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources.

The department's divisions have also changed. Support Services, which included Parks and a group that did maintenance and small construction projects, has changed to Parks and Natural Resources. This new division has been split into three sections: Sports Turf Management in the East and West sections of the county, and Natural Resources. In keeping with the efforts to economize, much of the general grounds maintenance and custodial work done in parks and recreation facilities has been outsourced to private contractors. The work of the Parks and Natural Resources division not only involves the active-use parks and sports facilities but also includes the hundreds of acres of the County's environmental parks that provide watersheds, wildlife habitat and the forests.

The new name for the Recreation division is Leisure Services / UF/IFAS Extension Service. The very significant change is the addition of UF/IFAS Extension Service. The strength and history of Extension Service allows it to be a stand alone section. The addition of UF/IFAS Extension Service is intended to make program offerings to the residents of Charlotte County more complete. The Extension Service program in Charlotte County is seventy-five years old and provides horticultural programs and scientific agricultural information to citizens and businesses alike.

Leisure Services will continue to be composed of the Recreation Centers (South County Regional Park, Port Charlotte Beach, Harold Avenue and Tringali), Swimming Pools (South County Regional Park, Port Charlotte Beach and Oyster Creek Regional Park), and Special Use Facilities (Charlotte Sports Park, Port Charlotte Beach, Tringali In-Line Skating Rink, Capt. Don Cerbone Skatepark, J.M. Berlin/Rotary Skatepark and Englewood Beach). Leisure Services will also continue to coordinate the youth and adult sports and recreation programs that use County sports fields and recreation facilities, rentals of pavilions and use of the meeting rooms at the recreation centers and in the parks.

While the Libraries and the Historical Center always seem to come at the end of the descriptions of the old Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, they are so very far from least. Their new name in Community Services is Libraries and History, which better describes what they do. What community does not count its libraries as critical to its stature as homes are for people to live and raise families? What community does not regard its history as critical to its future?

The four libraries in Charlotte County (Mid-County Regional, Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte and Englewood) are hubs of activity, information and entertainment. We are fortunate to have a dedicated staff of professionals who want to provide our County residents with the best service possible.

The history of Charlotte County is rich, going back to the native Americans originally inhabiting the land, to the pioneers who came to a land of opportunity and to all of us who make up the diversity of a growing community.

Quality of life issues are what Community Services is all about. For many of our residents the quality of life is what attracted them to Charlotte County. This summer we have a number of programs and activities for our residents, such as the Summer Reading Program in our County Libraries. The reading program benefits young people in school but is also fun for us older folks.

Swimming lessons and aquatic exercise classes are available at the county pools for all ages. With our abundance of water in Charlotte County it is important to know how to swim. Visit our website www.CharlotteCountyFL.com to find the pool nearest you and the class that best suits your needs. Then there are the Summer Safari Camp programs at South County Regional and Harold Avenue Parks. These camps are more than day care, they are an opportunity for your child to meet new friends and to have an experience of a lifetime.

UF/IFAS Extension Service has a number of programs during the summer and year round. Let me suggest the Master Gardeners. They are avid in their love of the soil and the bounty it provides, not to mention an endless source of useful information on what best to do in your home garden.

For another experience of a lifetime the Charlotte County Historical Center has a Summer Camp program. Your child will learn about the County's heritage and diversity and learn first hand about the people who founded Charlotte County.

Charlotte County Community Services has something of interest for everyone, give us a call, we're Open for Business! 941.625.PLAY (7529).