

**Your Charlotte County Fire/EMS** (Charlotte Sun Article to be published Feb. 6)  
by Chief Dennis DiDio

Charlotte County Fire/EMS is a full service fire and emergency medical services (EMS) organization, delivering superior level public safety to the citizens and visitors of Charlotte County's 693 square miles. We are a career department serving from 16 stations with 227 personnel. We provide fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention, public education and specialty team response (hazardous materials, technical rescue, marine rescue and firefighting and airport rescue and firefighting). These response capabilities bring with them inspection and accreditation obligations from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the state of Florida, of which we have routinely surpassed expectations. Charlotte County's EMS operation has scored as exceptional for more than 10 years and continues to be a leader in the standard of care delivered and of technology utilized. The hazardous materials and technical rescue teams at Charlotte County Fire/EMS are state teams and have continuously scored in the top percentile in the state's operational readiness evaluations, and the Airport Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) operation has passed their FAA inspections without exceptions.

In 2012 Charlotte County Fire/EMS responded to 27,093 calls for help. This is a 3.8% increase from the year prior and is consistent with the rise in responses in previous years. An important part of meeting the growing call volume is resource availability and location. As units respond to calls and move outside of their coverage district, additional units must move to cover these areas.

The EMS portion of Charlotte County Fire/EMS is carried out by personnel who staff of 11 Advanced Life Support (ALS) Ambulances. ALS is the highest level of pre-hospital care possible and requires highly-trained paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and highly technical equipment. Supporting the medical portion of our mission are 13 fire engines and their staff. Eight of these units are also capable of delivering ALS-level care and help to provide emergency medical treatment until an ambulance arrives, or help in conjunction with an ambulance when conditions warrant.

As part of its regular operation, Charlotte County Fire/EMS maintains a full service emergency vehicle maintenance (EVM) division. This division supports the 142 specialty vehicles of the public safety department and the many small power units within our operation. The EVM division also tests and maintains the organization's fire pumps and ladders as required by the National Fire Protection Association. Recently Fire/EMS has started refurbishing our ambulances rather than purchasing new units. This effort has been facilitated through EVM and has resulted in a \$60,000 savings per unit. In addition, EVM has stretched the service life of the fire engines by two years resulting in a \$350,000 savings.

Public education is an important component of the many services provided through Charlotte County Fire/EMS. There are 17 different programs in the areas of medical information, injury prevention and fire prevention. The majority of these programs are self-funded or funded by community sponsors. Trained personnel provide education through programs such as child

passenger safety, safe sitter, red dot medical information and senior safe at home. A listing can be found on the Fire/EMS pages at [www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov) or call 941.833.5610.

Through the use of impact fees, Charlotte County Fire/EMS has initiated a number of programs that will positively impact the services we provide. In December of 2012 Fire/EMS put into service Marine 2, a 27-foot Vigilant built by Boston Whaler. This vessel will improve firefighting and rescue capabilities in the Peace River and upper Charlotte Harbor area and provide support to Marine 1 in the west county area, intercostal waterway and Gulf of Mexico. Located at Laishley Marina in Punta Gorda, Marine 2 is equipped with basic life support (BLS) and will respond to emergencies 24 hours a day, staffed with two certified firefighter/EMTs.

In all of our services and programs, Charlotte County Fire/EMS is working hard to help the county meet the economic challenges of our community by researching and implementing operational efficiencies where possible. For example, the fire stations and parking lots are currently being converted to highly-efficient and long-lasting LED lighting. These systems are also equipped with motion-sensing technology, reducing the time the lights are on. The water heaters throughout the stations are being converted to solar and air conditioner settings are fixed and controlled through a network. These improvements are at a minimal initial cost and will provide a greater savings over time. We take our role as your emergency services provider seriously and will continue to research and implement efficiencies while still providing the highest standard of care that you have come to expect from Charlotte County Fire/EMS.