

Administrator's Update for 11/27/13
By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

On numerous occasions, Charlotte County has been asked about the programs, activities, and events that occur at the Charlotte Sports Park. I wanted to take this opportunity to explain how our relationships work with our sports tenants and the opportunities and limitations we have in regards to programming the facility.

Per our contractual agreement, the Tampa Bay Rays have exclusive use of the entire facility during the months of February and March. This is the main spring training time. From April through mid-October, we have the use of two practice fields because all other areas of the facility are utilized during the Tampa Bay Rays minor league seasons (Extended Spring Training, Gulf Coast League, and Instructional League) and by the Charlotte Stone Crabs regular season.

During the months of November and December, we have full use of the facilities to host a multitude of events and functions. Finally, as part of our contract with the Tampa Bay Rays and in an effort to ensure that the fields are at their fullest playable level for Spring Training, there is no usage of any of the fields at Charlotte Sports Park in January and February until spring training begins.

During the month of October, the Tampa Bay Rays Instructional League practices at the facility and plays their scheduled games. In addition to those games, this past year, the facility was booked each weekend for various travel baseball tournaments. This month, November 2013, the Charlotte Sports Park hosted the Southwest Florida Lung Cancer 5K Run/Walk & Mile of Memories Memorial Walk, the Cole Bros. Circus, the 14th Annual Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival, the 2nd Annual Tippecanoe 5K/10K Trail & Mud Run, and two travel baseball tournaments. In December, the facility will host two baseball tournaments and clinics.

Over the past few years, we have hosted several concerts at the Charlotte Sports Park. Unfortunately, none of the concerts were revenue-generating events despite the fact that there was fantastic weather for each of the functions. Although the idea of booking a concert at the facility is quite enticing, it is a very risky proposition for Charlotte County community services. County staff has reached out to SMG, the facility management company contracted for the day-to-day management and operation of the Charlotte Harbor Event Center. Booking events and programs is a function that SMG performs throughout the country, and we wanted to see if they had an interest in partnering with us. They continue to explore what possibilities would make sense, but unfortunately, none have presented themselves to date.

We believe that it is in the best financial interests of Charlotte County community services for the Charlotte Sports Park to remain a facility that hosts events organized by others, rather than events organized by us, which carry with them tremendous financial risk from organizing, promoting, and marketing. We continue to actively pursue viable partners to host their events at the facility, and every indication is we will continue to have the success we have up to this point.