

Administrator's Update for 10/8/14
By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

On Oct. 1, Lee County hosted the first Southwest Florida Regional Summit. The all-day event included the Board chairmen and administrators from Collier, Charlotte, Sarasota, Hendry, Glades and Lee County. With an overall theme of focusing on regionalism, the goal was to identify issues that impacted all of the participating counties and determine the best way to partner together to make our regional voice be heard by either the federal or state authorities. Commission Chair Ken Doherty and I attended the event.

Flood insurance was identified as the highest priority. The regional group determined that FEMA and the associated high flood insurance increases cannot be the only option for our citizens living in certain flood zones with homes below the identified height requirements. Identifying options will be the key. One option might be to drop out of the federal program if a state program could be developed. The regional group decided to send a letter to state and federal legislative delegations outlining who is part of the regional group, their issues and that together we represent more than one million voters.

Florida is a donor state with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). As an example, Charlotte County residents have paid approximately \$20 million dollars a year into the insurance program since 1978. During that same period, Charlotte County residents have received only \$10 million in flood insurance claims. To quantify even further how disproportionate Charlotte's insurance position has been from 1978 to 2014, Charlotte citizens have paid into the NFIP \$720 million dollars and have received only \$10 million dollars or 1.4 percent of the amount paid into the fund.

At the summit, the regional group also discussed other important issues such as economic development, tourism and water quality. Everyone that attended acknowledged that the meeting was meaningful and successful and future meetings will be scheduled.

Increase in permits

Over the past few months, the community development department has seen a slow but steady increase in residential permits and new single family homes and it seems that this trend is starting to show in the Charlotte County commercial sector. New commercial construction has been coming in over the past few months as well as remodels and updates of existing structures. In the past few years, commercial permits have been based on necessary repairs rather than remodeling, modernizing and updating. This change could be an indication that confidence is growing, our business owners are looking towards a brighter future, and putting in the efforts to update their businesses. It is too early yet to say this is a trend but it's certainly an encouraging sign. The community development department is doing everything they can to speed up review times and keep up with the additional workload. The department is adding three new employees and closely monitoring service levels and volumes to keep up with increased demand.

Certification

Congratulations to human services department employees Althea Connor and Jessica Ralston for earning their certifications in financial social work through The Center for Financial Social Work. This certification program teaches the skills to help others improve their present financial

circumstances as well as help them avoid the cycle of financial despair by changing destructive spending and saving behaviors. Financial literacy is a key component of human services' Family Self-Sufficiency program. For more information visit the human services department pages at www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

More numbers are up

The annual Florida Governor's Conference on Tourism was held in Boca Raton last month. At the conference there was much discussion and celebrating of Florida tourism numbers —the goal of 100 million visitors to Florida, set by Gov. Rick Scott, is very close to reality. That goal, coupled with incredible growth, has the Florida state government estimating there will be over 120 million visitors to the state by 2020. This growth will require over 300,000 new employees in the hospitality and tourism sector.