

Administrator's Update for 7/8/15

By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

Last month our Veteran Services Officer David Donohew received an award from the local chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart for his dedication to wounded veterans of Charlotte County. Mr. Donohew was honored for his hard work in conjunction with the County Commissioners in not only naming Charlotte County a "Purple Heart County" but also initiating the Combat Wounded Veterans parking signs program and establishing the Combat Wounded Veterans Appreciation Program.

At the October 2012 Florida Department of Veterans Affairs semi-annual training, all counties in Florida were challenged to be named as a "Purple Heart County." With a proclamation from the Board of County Commissioners on Feb. 26, 2013, Charlotte County became the seventh county in Florida and the first in southwest Florida to be named a Purple Heart County.

That spring, forty Combat Wounded Veteran reserved parking signs were donated by the Wounded Warrior Family Support (WWFS) organization at no cost to Charlotte County. The WWFS offers these reserved parking signs free of charge to businesses across the nation as a public service. Businesses that receive the signs are asked to properly erect them in front of parking spaces close to the building entry ways. Our Charlotte County sign shop staff volunteered to install the donated signs so the County did not absorb installation fees. The parking space signs include the words "Combat Wounded" and a symbol of the Purple Heart Medal.

In 2014, the Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte County Veterans Council set up the Combat Wounded Veteran Recognition Program. This program recognizes those individuals who sustained injuries from combat in the defense of their country and were awarded the Purple Heart. The veteran must have served during a war time period, as set forth by the Laws of the United States, and must be considered a full time Charlotte County resident. The award is given at the Board of County Commissioners regular meeting on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

You may see the parking signs as you go around the county, and you may also see two vans with colorful wraps that display Purple Heart graphics. These Veterans Administration (VA) vans are used to transport veterans free of charge to Bay Pines VA Medical Center in St. Petersburg and Cape Coral VA outpatient clinic. The wraps were a collaboration between the Board of County Commissioners, Charlotte County Transit, Charlotte County Veteran Services and the Local Military Order of the Purple Heart.

One last sign of note: at the Charlotte County Veterans Services office on Loveland Boulevard in Port Charlotte, look for the new "A Purple Heart Community" signs. These signs were developed by the Charlotte County sign shop and put in place in May 2015 to help mark the location of the Veterans Services office. If you have any questions about these programs, please call the Veterans Services office 941.764.5579.

Park improvements

Quite a few improvements have been completed recently to parks around the county. Tringali Recreation Center in Englewood now has a new swing structure with four swings, as does Port Charlotte Beach Park. The south boardwalk at Port Charlotte Beach Park is now reopened—only the north boardwalk is still under construction.

Englewood Beach has new metal cigarette butt containers on the boardwalk entrances, and new gooseneck cigarette butt holders at the pavilions.

The small dog areas at Edgewater Park and Ann Dever Memorial Regional Park both have new shade structures with ADA access.

Visit Florida committee appointment

I am happy to share news that Chip Futch, director of marketing for our tourism department, has been appointed to Visit Florida's Advertising and Internet Committee for a one-year term beginning July 1. Mr. Futch joined the tourism department, commonly known as the Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau or Charlotte Harbor VCB, in 2013.

Visit Florida is the state's official tourism marketing corporation and their board of directors established a Marketing Council Steering Committee to enhance industry involvement. The steering committee is comprised of eight discipline-based committees including Advertising and Internet; Communications; Industry Relations; International; Promotions; and more. Mr. Futch's work with the Advertising and Internet Committee will help provide industry input, counsel and feedback on strategic matters related to Visit Florida's domestic and international efforts in direct marketing and advertising, including digital and internet marketing.