

Charlotte County update for 4/27/16

## **Babcock Ranch ‘grand reveal’ a county milestone**

By Ray Sandrock, Charlotte County Administrator

Charlotte County commissioners, staff and I attended the Babcock Ranch “grand reveal” Friday. Developer Syd Kitson made special mention of the hard work and cooperation between his company and county officials past and present, especially our Community Development Department. Commission Chairman Bill Truex addressed the gathering of more than 640 guests and media, congratulating Mr. Kitson and thanking everyone involved in moving the project forward.

Babcock Ranch is in the southern part of the county off State Road 31 and ultimately will be home to 50,000 residents on more than 17,600 acres. Residents are expected to begin moving into the development next year. The project includes a 74.5-megawatt solar farm that will provide electricity to the new town.

On April 15, staff from Community Development met with the key Babcock Ranch contractors for a permitting question-and-answer session. Community Development Director Claire Jubb gave a presentation that included a demonstration of the department’s online permitting capabilities. The portal enables builders of homes and commercial space to obtain many permits without having make the lengthy drive to Murdock for each one. Feedback from the contractors and Babcock Ranch officials was very positive.

### **Bustling libraries**

Our county libraries are busier than ever. Looking at year-to-year statistics, summer reading program attendance grew 300 percent, e-book circulation was up 178 percent and program attendance was 112 percent higher than in 2015 than in 2014. So far this year, circulation is 106 percent higher than last year at this time, while e-book circulation is up 230 percent and more than 14,000 people have attended library programs.

Library staff continues their school outreach, making 20 visits to local schools and reaching more than 2,200 students. The number of new library card holders has grown by 8,000. Last year our “Food for Fines” initiative, which allows patrons to wipe out their overdue book fines by donating to local food banks, collected 32,000 items. So far this year we’re on pace to eclipse that figure, with 12,000 items already donated.

To learn more about our libraries and the programs they offer, visit [www.youseemore.com/charlottecounty](http://www.youseemore.com/charlottecounty) or like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/CCLibraries](http://www.facebook.com/CCLibraries).

### **Landscaping**

The county is making progress on a number of landscaping and beautification projects along key roadways, gateways and waterways, including plantings going in on State Road 776 in Murdock.

Staff is negotiating with the contractor to determine the scope of services and fees for the planning and design of improvements at gateways where Interstate 75 intersects with Jones Loop Road and U.S. 17. The project is funded, in part, by a grant from the Florida Highway Beautification Council.

The landscaping design for the I-75/King's Highway gateway is in development. The landscape and irrigation permit has been received and an application for a welcome sign is under review by the Florida Department of Transportation. Construction is pending completion of the DOT's I-75 widening project.

Pre-bid meetings were held Tuesday for median landscaping projects on Toledo Blade and Midway boulevards. The bid will be opened May 11. Once the winning bidder begins work, the project, which will include trees, shrubs and groundcover, will be completed in 60 days.

The final phase of the award-winning U.S. 41 microtunnel project involves landscaping the banks of the Elkcam, Fordham and Pompano waterways. The pre-bid meeting for this project was also held Tuesday, with a bid opening set for May 11.

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