

Charlotte County update for 9/28/16

A transformative 25 years in water service

By Gary Hubbard, Utilities Department director

As Charlotte County Utilities nears completion of its 25th year providing water service to our community, we're proud to celebrate some transformative improvements and changes we've made in recent years.

The Charlotte County Utilities Department launched its Transformation Initiative in 2014 when consultant KPMG conducted an operational audit of the utility, which serves 58,000 water and sewer customers. The audit found 45 areas where utilities could improve customer service, enhance employee training, focus leaders on long-term strategy and save money.

We're pleased to share that most of these focus areas have been addressed through process improvements, technology upgrades, strategic planning, training and employee retention programs — with a few remaining focus areas to be implemented by 2018. While the Utilities Department has received awards from national and state organizations for this work in recent years, we have set our eyes on the future of excellence in service delivery.

As you drive around the county you'll see project areas where we are hooking up customers to our sewer system, which will improve infrastructure and the long-term health of our Charlotte Harbor estuary. We are developing a comprehensive sewer master plan to map out the future of our wastewater service systems. Master plans for reclaimed water and potable water will follow.

Customer service improvements are also on the horizon, primarily as we upgrade our existing software system (implemented in 2001) to a more robust system. This upgrade is scheduled to take place during the first week of November, during which time we will not have access to our computer system. Online bill pay will not be available, and billing and collection activities will also be suspended while the system is down. Please plan ahead as there will be longer than normal wait times on the phone and in the lobby of our customer service office.

Our Utilities Department knows real transformation takes time, resources and collaboration between departments, contract partners and the public. The heavy rainfall has challenged our timetable, however, our teams have worked together to keep our potable, sewer and reclaimed water lines running as efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, the progress of construction and on-lot sewer connections in some areas has been delayed by the excess water. We appreciate your patience as we tackle maintenance of aging infrastructure while planning for future growth and development. The Utilities Department strives for excellence in potable, reclaimed and sewer services.

We look forward to your engagement as we present our plans during upcoming County Commission workshops and meetings. We encourage you to like Charlotte County Utilities on Facebook, visit the Utilities section of CharlotteCountyFL.gov or call us at 941-764-4507.

Gary Hubbard is the director of the Charlotte County Utilities Department. Readers may reach him at Gary.Hubbard@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.