

Charlotte County update for 10/12/16

Paying back a debt to our East Coast neighbors

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

Charlotte County opened its first-ever shelter for evacuees from other counties Thursday night. The recreation center at Harold Avenue Park in Port Charlotte housed 51 people, 7 dogs and 5 cats seeking refuge from Hurricane Matthew's dangerous path along Florida's East Coast. By 8 a.m. Friday, all of our guests were heading back home, hopefully to better news than they were expecting when they left.

County departments involved included Emergency Management, Community Services, Public Works, Animal Control, Public Information Office and Fire/EMS. We also had a number of volunteers from the county's Community Emergency Response Team. The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office provided deputies throughout the night and the Florida Department of Health provided cots, blankets and pillows. The Florida Department of Transportation used its variable message signs on I-75 to tell motorists about the shelter.

Hotels up and down the Gulf Coast were full, but our tourism department coordinated with hospitality industry partners to identify available rooms at small independent motels, condo and resorts. A special page was quickly created on the tourism website to direct evacuees to prospective lodging.

Four members of Charlotte County Fire/EMS reported to Lakeland for potential deployment to the East Coast and one worked at the state emergency operation center in Tallahassee. All returned home to normal duty Monday.

Many thanks to all involved for helping Charlotte County make a modest payment on the debt it owes to its fellow Florida counties for all their help during and after Hurricane Charley.

Gov. Rick Scott activated the Florida Disaster Fund to support individuals who are impacted by Hurricane Matthew. To make a contribution, please visit www.FloridaDisasterFund.org. The fund is administered by the Volunteer Florida Foundation. One hundred percent of funds raised will go toward those in need. Donations to the Florida Disaster Fund are made to the Volunteer Florida Foundation, 501(c)(3) charitable organization and are tax deductible.

Tourism marketing

Last week the Charlotte County Visitor and Convention Bureau unveiled the county's new tourism marketing brand which has been approved by the Charlotte County Tourist Development Council and is designed to position Charlotte County as a top Florida destination for experiencing the outdoors.

The new branding includes key components that emphasize the outdoor amenities that draw visitors to the county. These include a new logo and a marketing message positioning Charlotte County as "the one Florida destination that provides all the best of Florida's coveted outdoor activities all in one place." Marketing will use the new tagline "Our Best Side, is Outside," and the new destination name "Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach." An additional geographic indicator,

“The Charlotte Harbor Gulf Island Coast” continues the destination’s historic name while incorporating the mention of a unique visitor asset — islands. The tourism office will also be using the website www.pureflorida.com to promote the destination.

Twitter feed

We expanded our footprint in social media with the addition last week of a Twitter feed, @CharlotteCoFL. The feed will feature information about county services, meetings and programs, video and photo content and retweets from feeds we follow.

The new Twitter feed joins our stable of existing social media offerings from county departments, which includes 15 Facebook pages, five Twitter feeds, five YouTube channels and two Instagram accounts. The Facebook pages have been liked nearly 20,000 times, providing a powerful outreach for county messaging. Two new Facebook pages — maintained by our Community Development Department and Veteran Services Division — were recently added. They will provide content specifically tailored to their target audiences.

Social media is especially useful during emergencies, when people increasingly turn to their smartphones and computers for information. Our Emergency Management page received 210 new likes last week, the vast majority of which came on Thursday as Hurricane Matthew bore down on the East Coast.

You can check out all of our social media offerings on the county’s website, www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov. Click Social Media in the top menu to see all the latest posts, feeds, photos and videos in one convenient place.

The Guide

The winter edition of The Guide is now available. The Guide is a compilation of all Community Services facilities, programs and activities. You can pick up your copy at any Community Services facility, including pools, libraries and recreation centers. The Guide is also available at the Charlotte County Administration Center and area chambers of commerce. Don’t delay, The Guide is so popular we get frequent calls to restock it after residents, visitors and our winter friends snatch them all up.

The Guide is also available online on the Parks/Recreation/Aquatics pages at www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

Services grant

With new grant funding through the Community Services Block Grant, the Human Services Department’s Family Services Division and Senior Services Division anticipate supporting 15 new vulnerable seniors needing in-home care assistance. These seniors are currently on a waiting list for services for other grant-funded programs and will now get the support needed to help maintain them in a safe environment in their own homes.

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