

Charlotte County update for 10/26/16

County welcomes WMU/FSW alliance

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

County commissioners and staff from many departments joined members of the public and the business and educational community at the Oct. 18 announcement of an alliance between Western Michigan University and Florida Southwestern State College. Commissioners and the Economic Development Office played a key role in fostering the relationship.

The day before the unveiling of the new WMU sign at FSW's Airport Road campus, the Economic Development Office held a roundtable meeting where business and education leaders discussed the types of classes and training programs needed to grow our workforce.

Last month, the board approved a lease on an airplane hangar at Punta Gorda Airport that will be subleased to WMU for up to five years for its aviation program. The FSW campus will be home to WMU students in programs including aviation, health care, logistics, management and others.

A large contingent of WMU officials and alumni were on hand, including university President John Dunn and Dean of Aviation Dave Powell. FSW President Jeff Allbritten and Commission Chairman Bill Truex joined Dunn and FSW Regional Vice President for Economic Development Denis Wright on the dais.

"Construction management, supply chain management, and health and wellness programs will elevate our community," Chairman Truex said in his welcoming remarks. "We are committed to partnering and becoming the community we aspire to be together."

Harbor Walk grant

The county commission on Tuesday approved an agreement with the Florida Department of Transportation that provides an additional \$1.1 million for Phase 1B of the Charlotte Harbor Gateway Harbor Walk. This project will connect the newly opened Live Oak Point Park at the base of the Barron Collier Bridge via a boardwalk beneath the Collier and Gilchrist bridges to the west side of U.S. 41, creating a continuous pedestrian path to Bayshore Live Oak Park.

The Harbor Walk has been a key part of the Charlotte Harbor Redevelopment Area master plan. The money, which comes from DOT's SUN Trail program, is the last of six funding sources pieced together by Redevelopment Manager Debra Forester. Other sources include a \$1.4 million FDOT enhancement grant, a Department of Environmental Protection recreational trail grant, a RESTORE Act allocation, WCIND Boater Improvement Fund money and engineering funding from the CRA's tax-increment financing.

Permitting and design is nearly complete and we will be going out to bid on a construction contract later this year.

Air show

Congratulations to the board of the Florida International Airshow on the relaunch of the event after a one-year hiatus. Spectators, vendors and performers enjoyed gorgeous weather for all

three days of the airshow, which received a \$50,000 sponsorship from the county along with \$30,000 of in-kind contributions for public safety services.

The event is managed and staffed entirely by volunteers and brings thousands of people to Charlotte County from all over the country. County staffers who worked the event for our public information office told me they spoke with numerous out-of-towners here just for the airshow. The new fall date provides an economic boon for our tourism-related businesses just before the winter season kicks in. I'm looking forward to many more years of air shows in Charlotte County.

Web video

The online web series *Adventure & Wildlife* — Hosted by the Shark Brothers debuted Oct. 14 during a press conference at the Charlotte County Cultural Center. Episode 1 of the series can be seen at [YouTube.com/RealPureFlorida](https://www.youtube.com/RealPureFlorida) and is part of a Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau marketing program. The goal is to attract visitors to Charlotte County who are interested in nature-based activities and exploring Florida's wild outdoors.

Episode 1 features recreational fishing, the importance of mangrove forests to Charlotte Harbor's ecology and a wading trip in Charlotte Harbor with the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center. Capt. Ralph Allen with King Fisher Fleet, Capt. Betty Staugler of Florida Sea Grant, and Chris Salmonsén, a naturalist with the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, are featured in the 16-minute episode. Additional episodes will be released at later dates featuring topics such as sea turtle nesting, area state parks and paddlesports.

The series is a collaborative effort between the visitor bureau and Sean and Brooks Paxton, also known as the Shark Brothers. The duo are internationally recognized filmmakers and adventure and wildlife personalities. Users are encouraged to share the videos on social media and use the hashtags #bestsideoutside, #ecologinomical, #thesharkbrothers and #adventureandwildlife.

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