

County hosts Government Day for Leadership programs

Hector Flores

Charlotte County hosted the Junior Leadership Charlotte and Leadership Charlotte classes of 2026 for two sessions of Government Day. Leadership Charlotte is a program supported by the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce that runs one day a month for nine months. The program is designed to educate, connect, and inspire current and emerging leaders as they navigate the key issues shaping our community. The experience provides participants with a deeper understanding of how Charlotte County functions—covering government, social services, business, healthcare, education, and more. Junior Leadership Charlotte is an offshoot of the adult program for high school juniors. It started as a class project of the Leadership Charlotte Class of 1993.

For Government Day, both classes had a Q&A with County Commission Chairman Joe Tiseo, Deputy County Administrator Emily Lewis and me. We discussed the make-up of the county along with the other elected officials who lead other agencies independent of the county. The Leadership class members were very interested in how the county handles growth, respects private property rights and the builds and maintains the infrastructure required to support the growing population. I appreciated the presence of Punta Gorda's leadership, including the mayor, police and fire chiefs and the assistant city manager, all of whom presented an overview of their agencies, roles and services.

The Junior Leadership class members, many of whom will be attending college when they graduate high school, asked how the county could entice private entities to operate businesses that cater more to young people. Many of the class members plan to live elsewhere after graduating college. That poses a challenge for the county that our Economic Development Office is working hard to address through career training program partnerships with local colleges, high schools and technical colleges in well-paying sectors.

Both classes got to witness the lighting of the Public Safety Department's Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting prop, which was one of the most popular stops on the day's itinerary. Both classes also got up close to many of the Public Works Department's heavy and specialized equipment used for mosquito control spraying, stormwater pipe and swale maintenance, road repairs, debris collection, aquatic weed control and limb and brush cutting.

Another popular activity was meeting a pair of sentinel chicks that recently arrived and will be deployed around the county when they reach full size later this year. The sentinel chicken program pairs birds with volunteer handlers outside their homes. The birds have their blood tested regularly to detect any mosquito-borne viruses. If a bird tests positive, we alert the Department of Health and residents. The viruses do not harm the chickens. When their service is over, the birds stay with their handlers or are given to others who have signed up for one.

The Leadership Charlotte class visited Centennial Park for a tour and an ice-breaker exercise before getting a presentation from the Utilities Department's public relations management and

community outreach manager. The class was very engaged in the topic of water, wastewater and reclaimed water services the department provides.

The Junior Leadership class got a tour of Charlotte Sports Park where the Tampa Bay Rays were just beginning practicing for the Grapefruit League season.

We appreciate all the participants' curiosity and eagerness to learn more about their local government. We wish them both well with their class projects and encourage them to use the knowledge and insights the program provides to become active leaders in the community.

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