

## **Charlotte County Weekly Update for 5/16/08 by Roger Baltz**

Our County has moved forward with lay offs which involved 22 positions in our Building Construction Services Department. Three of the twenty two positions were already vacant. We continue to monitor market conditions and will make additional adjustments as needed.

Budget planning continues to be a dominant activity for our County. Our Commissioners have been meeting to discuss substantial cuts to our capital project list (what we call the CIP). Several million dollars have been identified to be cut from several of our projects which are funded with ad valorem revenues.

Last week our County supported two national events, Building Safety Week and Earth Week, with a variety of local activities. Building Construction Services held an open house to provide information on construction safety and Environmental Services gave presentations at various schools to encourage children to take better care of our planet.

A ribbon cutting was held at Kosinski Bridge on Don Pedro Island. This bridge was specially constructed with wood, at the request of the residents, to blend in with the natural environment. The island residents will pay for the construction via a special assessment (MSBU).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recently determined that the Scrub Jay areas in Charlotte County have expanded. Our on-line Scrub Jay database was updated with these new boundaries as created by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Property owners and builders should check the database to determine if special USFWS permitting will be required before construction. Our County has an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which allows for such adjustments to occur.

Charlotte County Soccer Federation and Punta Gorda Soccer Federation have just completed successful spring seasons held at the North Charlotte Regional and South County Regional Park. During the month of April there were 8012 children that used the fields for soccer practices and games on fields that were built with funds from the one percent sales tax.

Throughout our County operations we continue to look for energy efficiencies in lighting, air conditioning and building maintenance. A recent report from our Facilities operations indicates that changes in these areas have resulted in a savings of \$613,499 this year to date.

Our County Purchasing department utilizes direct purchasing on our projects at times. Direct purchase allows the County to buy materials and supplies used in construction projects, rather than contractor, thus utilizing the tax exempt status to provide the County with significant cost savings. Utilizing direct purchase, the County has saved over \$114,000 in sales tax on the Charlotte County Sports Stadium and the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center.

Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands Visitor's Bureau has received prestigious recognition for its *2008 Visitor's Guide*, garnering a Silver ADDY Award at the recent Suncoast Advertising Federation ADDY Awards Competition. Two recent events planned by our Visitor's Bureau were also a great success. The Redfish Cup event hosted over 7,000 people. Our first hosting of the TriAmerica National Triathlon Series Tour included two days of events at Chadwick Park in Englewood Beach. The Triathlon had over 200 participants and was very well received by the community.

I want to thank all of our residents who volunteer to serve on our advisory boards and committees. Their knowledge and insight are very valuable to us and assist the Commission in their decision making. A great deal of work has been done by three groups over the last few weeks on special projects; the resident focus group on County budget, the Sales Tax Focus Group and the Planned Development Focus Group.

The County placed into service the new mobile Incident Command Center that was purchased with 2002 sales tax funds. This Unit will be utilized for major emergency events or incidents in Charlotte County. It will allow the Fire/EMS and Emergency Management to take the mobile unit into the field and direct operations at different locations. The unit will carry all communication equipment, planning boards, maps, copier, cell phones, and all equipment needed to manage major events within the County. The unit can also be utilized at major community events such as the County Fair and the Air Show.