

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 8/15/2008

By Roger Baltz

A new County mini park opened this week in Charlotte Harbor. The Chester Roberts Park uses a road right of way, off of Melbourne Road at Scenic Drive. It ends on the Peace River, providing a beautiful view and the opportunity to launch a kayak, fish from the shoreline, enjoy history, and preserve the waterfront. The Park is part of a historical area originally known as Hickory Bluff and an historical marker has been erected at the site. The funds for this park were provided through the Community Redevelopment Agency.

Our County Economic Development Office recently sponsored the Southwest Florida Regional Technical Partnership retreat. Their focus is on developing a technology cluster in Southwest Florida which assures potential business interests that we have an economy and workforce with the talent and skills they need to successfully locate here. This is part of the regional approach to luring businesses to Southwest Florida, which we have discussed in past columns.

The County landfill is testing an innovative program that we hope will reduce mowing. We will be practicing "herbicide mowing" by applying plant growth retardant. We are anticipating that this will reduce the number of times mowing occurs at the landfill's berms, which could result in a significant cost savings.

Over the last year we have had an increase in the iguana population, which continues to impact the Boca Grande area. As a result, the County established an iguana eradication program using the US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services contractor. In the last year they have captured and removed 1,750 iguanas from the island. These exotic non-native reptiles are occupying the gopher tortoises' burrows, and are eating gopher tortoise eggs and hatchlings. Gopher Tortoises are listed as a threatened species by the Florida State Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission and the iguanas could have a devastating effect on their survival.

This past week we were pleased to welcome officials from Sarasota to Charlotte County and lead them on a guided tour of the Charlotte Sports Park Complex. The officials had requested an opportunity to view the facility and to learn more about the accommodations that were being constructed for the Tampa Bay Rays. The facility is still under construction, and is anticipated to be completed in time for the Rays spring training in 2009

The County has awarded the construction contract and will soon start work on the Coral Creek Bridge Replacement project. This bridge is on County Road 771 in Placida. The new structure will greatly enhance recreational access and will add approximately one foot of additional clearance for boaters. The redesign will also eliminate the sharp curve at the junction of CR 775 and CR 771.

A British couple has won a promotional campaign sponsored by the Charlotte County Tourism Bureau and VISIT FLORIDA, the state's official tourism marketing corporation. The U.K. is Florida's top overseas market and through participating in the promotion, our area received free print and online coverage in the Daily Mail, which has an estimated circulation of 2.3 million. Accommodations and activities included in the prize package are being donated by local businesses and VISIT FLORIDA.

The County continues to explore ways to lower our insurance costs. We are currently interviewing vendors regarding the creation of an on-site medical facility. This is expected to lower our insurance premiums, increase employee productivity and streamline workman's compensation claims. Recommendations are expected to go to the Commission in October.

I want to remind our residents that despite recent rains, Charlotte County is still under watering restrictions. Please continue to observe once-per-week watering and do your part to conserve water. For specific watering days, please visit our website at CharlotteCountyFL.com

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