

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 9/12/08

By Roger Baltz

As many of you may be aware, our Commissioners have approved an agreement with the Ripken Rays to bring a Florida State League baseball team back to Charlotte County. We will now have baseball in play from February through July each year, with Tampa Bay Rays spring training in February and March, and minor league play from April to July. This new agreement includes maintenance and upkeep of the Charlotte Sports Park which is a significant cost savings to the County. Roughly 70 games per year will be played at our Sports Stadium under the terms of this agreement.

We continue to stress cooperation and partnerships. We have negotiated an Interlocal Agreement between Charlotte County, the City of North Port and the City of Venice setting guidelines for the use of Building Department staff between the jurisdictions, both in times of emergency and times of higher than anticipated demand for service. This regional approach will enable cross-training and ensure a highly qualified workforce, during a local disaster or in times of peak construction activity. This is a great opportunity for the participating jurisdictions to work together for the benefit of all our taxpayers. The Agreement will be taken forward to our BOCC to consider approval in September.

Also looking at regionalism, our Utilities Department held coordination meetings with neighboring utilities to discuss regional water supply issues. Staff met with Englewood Water District to develop protocols under which water could be transferred through the water interconnect under emergency and non-emergency conditions. We also met with North Port Utilities to discuss growth and expansion plans for the next five years, and identified ways they could provide assistance to one another during this interim period.

Last week the Utilities Department presented the Board of County Commissioners with an update on its 2006 Rate Study. Despite a decrease in projected revenues, the report concluded that, due to an early proactive approach by the County through various budget cuts and cost-saving efficiencies, no additional rate increase will be required beyond what was approved in the 2006 rate study.

In the August primary Charlotte County residents voted to extend the local option sales tax for another six years. County staff is now developing a work plan and time line for each project and will be presenting the information to the Commission for review.

The completion of the Bay Shore Live Oak Park in Charlotte Harbor has spurred activity in this historic neighborhood. The Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency is funding a part-time special events planner to organize a variety of activities for the park. A community sign was also installed to

welcome travelers heading north from Punta Gorda into Charlotte Harbor. The sign complements the landscaping that was recently installed at the foot of the bridge.

In our recent budget reductions, the County eliminated several full-time staff positions in our Parks Department and replaced them with newly created part-time positions. This will provide us with a greater flexibility in scheduling events that run from early morning to late evening and result in substantial cost savings. We received over 800 applications for the 40 part-time positions. All positions have been filled with well-qualified applicants and these new employees will be reporting to work over the next several weeks.

As a result of our workforce reductions, we are reallocating office space to various departments and agencies. We have moved the MPO to our Environmental Campus and the State Health Department has relocated staff to the South County Annex. This has enabled us to cancel our lease for office space on Taylor Road. This will result in a yearly savings of \$219,900.

This was a very active campaign season, as demonstrated by the unusually large number of political signs that dotted our community. We remind those candidates that are not going on to the general election that their signs need to be removed as soon as possible. These signs can be recycled, free of charge, at our two recycling facilities located on Kenilworth Blvd. in Murdock and Environmental Way in Englewood.