

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 09/26/2008

By Roger Baltz

I attended and provided a brief presentation at the Real Estate Market Trends meeting which was held at the Charlotte Technical Center this past week.

The Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center received its certificate of occupancy last week. We will use the next couple of months to install furniture, test equipment and to do a number of soft openings to train the staff. A community grand opening is scheduled in January, 2009.

The County's Veteran Services Office assisted in coordinating the Southwest Florida Honor Flight which flew 60 of our WWII Veterans to Washington, D.C. to see their Memorial. Additional stops were made at the Iwo Jima Memorial and the Arlington National Cemetery for the changing of the guards. We hope to coordinate another trip next year, if sufficient donors can be found. We have over 70 vets on the waiting list for Honor flights.

Our County beaches are showing dramatic erosion as a result of storm activity. We are requesting a damage assessment from both the State and FEMA for the beaches at Stump Pass, Knight Island, Englewood, Manasota Key and Port Charlotte. We are hopeful that the County may be eligible for funding to restore the beaches to their pre-storm state.

Charlotte County hosted more than 100 members of the Florida Outdoor Writers Association during their annual conference. The writers attended educational sessions and participated in a fishing tournament, kayaking excursion, wading trip, swamp buggy tour and visit to a firing range. We had several community ambassadors who donated services and time to assist the Visitor's Bureau in making this a very successful event. The participants will use their experiences to write about the Charlotte Harbor area and its many recreational opportunities.

County staff met with representatives from Collier County government who wanted to learn more about our SMART program for seniors, adults and teens. The SMART program identifies common driver errors which aids drivers in understanding and maintaining safe driving habits. We understand that they may be establishing a similar program in Collier.

We recently completed an audit of our workman's compensation program. Focusing on our payroll classifications, the audit resulted in a \$9,300 savings in yearly premiums. Premiums are based on the risk category of each job.

Agency for Health Care Administration completed their annual evaluation and re-certification of the Charlotte County's 211 Call Center. Inspectors were impressed with our operations and are recommending re-certification of the program. Re-certification is required every year until the County receives its formal accreditation. Our 211 staff continues to work on the accreditation process, which takes several years to accomplish, and is expected to be complete in 2009.

Trail markers have now been installed at Oyster Creek Regional Park and at Tippecanoe Park. These markers will allow easy and safe access to trails by hikers and those just looking for a casual stroll through some beautiful, natural areas.

The Charlotte Harbor Community Solutions Adhoc Committee met to discuss the Charlotte Harbor-Bayshore Park area. Representatives from the Sheriff's Dept, Parks, YMCA, Human Services, and the Homeless Coalition discussed additional activities and coordination between the different entities to improve the area.

The County received fourteen (14) bids last week on Bid 08-222, Aquí Esta Drive Improvements. The bids will now be reviewed and evaluated.

We have received word that a Florida Communities Trust [FCT] grant was awarded to Charlotte County to help reimburse 40% of the purchase price paid for the Buck Creek property. Buck Creek is an environmentally sensitive property located adjacent to Lemon Bay and Buck Creek and consisting of 69 acres. This property is part of the Conservation Charlotte program's inventory. The Conservation Charlotte has now successfully acquired 2,523 acres of environmentally sensitive lands.

CCU and Public Works met this past week to discuss and coordinate timelines of the upcoming utility installation/ relocation and road widening/ paving work for Winchester Blvd, Toledo Blade Blvd, and Manchester Basin drainage area to eliminate any conflicts in scheduling.