

## **Administrator's Update 10/24/2008**

### **By Roger Baltz**

The final road improvements have been completed at the Prairie Creek Preserve allowing public access. This property, formerly known as Ryals Ranch, was recently purchased using Conservation Charlotte funds. A grand opening is being scheduled for October 29, 10:00 a.m. The public is invited to take its first look at this beautiful property that exemplifies natural Florida habitat

Landscaping work has begun in the medians on US 17 as part of an agreement with FDOT. The state is funding the project at a cost of \$377,000 and it is expected to be completed within 120 days. The County will be responsible for maintenance once the project is finished.

This past week, our County Commissioners approved an Early Separation Incentive Program which is another step in continuing our workforce reductions. The program allows employees with longevity, or those within a certain age range, to take advantage of incentives to retire early, or separate from service. This is a program that had been recommended by both citizen and employee focus groups during last year's budget review process.

As part of our efforts to consider a County wide habitat conservation plan for the Florida scrub jay a scrub-jay survey will be undertaken in the West Charlotte area. This is a requirement for our Habitat Conservation Program (HCP) with the Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC). Surveys for Deep Creek and Harbor Heights have been performed by FWC over the last several years, and we are hopeful that we will not have to address these areas in the current survey. Once all data is collected it will help to determine how much land will be needed to mitigate Scrub-jay impacts. FWC provided a grant to pay for this assessment.

Jim Evetts, Director of Building Construction Services, has been appointed to the State Construction Industry Licensing Board. This is a gubernatorial appointment that means that Mr. Evetts will be part of the Board that regulates contractor licensing throughout the state.

A contract has been awarded for the removal of the geo-tubes at Stump Pass. The County installed the geo-tubes several years ago as an innovative project under the direction of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The goal was to reduce beach erosion to protect our shoreline; to reduce the costs of continual beach renourishment projects; and to reduce the repetitive dredging of Stump Pass. During a recent inspection the FDEP determined that the geo-tubes were not effective, and in fact may be detrimental to the environment. The removal project should begin within the next 30 days.

County Utilities staff have been working on a water interconnect project with the City of Punta Gorda and the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (Authority). The construction will install transmission lines to transport water from the City's Shell Creek facility, under the Peace River, to the Kings Highway area. As part of the project, the Authority has requested that the County find a suitable site to construct a water storage tank and pump house near U.S. 17. The County is reviewing its land inventory to determine the availability of land in this location.

We are partnering with the Homeless Coalition to apply to the Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care for 2009 and 2010 funding. We are requesting funds for supportive services at the Safe House Shelter and for leasing permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless adults.

Our County Utilities Department was recognized with awards and honors in two separate competitions for the 2007 Annual Report. The report received Honors in the 2007 Vision Awards Annual Report Competition, an international competition hosted by the League of American

Communications Professionals. The judges gave the report a score of 92 out of 100 points and placed it fifth overall in the Utilities category. In the 16<sup>th</sup> annual American Business Communicators Annual Report Competition, the report was awarded second place for Photography/Illustration and Outstanding Achievement in the overall competition.

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