

Administrator's Update — 10/31/08

By Roger Baltz

Our County Budget Director, Ray Sandrock, and his staff have had success in regards to our efforts to finish up remaining loose ends from Hurricane Charley and FEMA reimbursements. Due to these efforts, FEMA has now restored \$861,627 of the original \$949,649 on imminent danger tree removal that they had originally denied. This goes back to some of the oldest debris issues we have been working to resolve.

In a continuing effort to reduce current and future costs, the Board of County Commissioners approved the Early Separation Incentive Program for qualifying employees. Letters were sent to 170 qualified employees and applications are currently being processed.

Charlotte County has participated in the National Association of Counties Prescription Program Discount Drug Card program since March 2008. According to the September report we have received for March through September, the total savings to uninsured and underinsured Charlotte County residents is \$37,215. Average prescription price savings is \$9.12 and average percentage prescription savings is 19.05%. The September report showed a 20.70% savings with 369 participants.

Providing wireless internet access has been moving forward in our County. Due to upgrades provided by our information technology network equipment vendor and existing County wireless devices we are now able to provide public wireless internet access at the following locations: Murdock Administration Complex (in Building A floors 1, 2, 3, and 5 which includes Commission Chambers-Room 119; Building B Conference Room 106; and Building & Construction Services), The Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center, all Charlotte County Libraries, the Public Safety Complex including the Emergency Vehicle Maintenance Facility on Airport Road, West County Annex on San Casa, Public Works facility on Florida Street in Punta Gorda and the East Port Environmental Campus on Harborview Road.

Over 80 citizens attended a one-day gardening symposium on Saturday, Oct. 18. This annual program, sponsored by our Charlotte County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, featured a series of five workshops. The classes included bougainvilleas, staghorn ferns, vegetables, palms, hibiscus, succulents, ground covers, bromeliads and fertilizers.

The annual Affordable Housing Fair was held Saturday, Oct. 18. It is estimated that over 400 individuals participated at the event held at the Gulf Breeze Apartments in Punta Gorda. The County's State Housing Initiative Program (SHIP) funds provided partial funding for this new complex which was originally destroyed by Hurricane Charley. The County's Housing Division also distributed the newly printed catalog of Affordable Housing Opportunities

Our Growth Management Department assigns a Planner of the Day (POD) to field questions and phone calls from the public. This is a vital link between Growth Management and the local community. Reflective of the current economic downturn, many of the recent calls have come from people wanting to rezone their property to better enable them to sell it. While this is not always possible, the POD has an opportunity to explain how our planning and zoning regulations work and to present alternatives, if they exist.

Plans for the Phase 1A Regional Loop Transmission Pipeline are continuing to move forward. This pipeline will bring water from the City of Punta Gorda's Shell Creek Water Treatment Plant to customers of the Regional Water Authority and vice-versa. Drawings for the preferred route, easements needed and selection of a location site for the regional storage and pumping station are nearing completion. This project is under the direction of the Water Authority with Charlotte County providing a large piece of the funding.

Our County Visitor's Bureau will be working with members of the tourism community to develop winter and spring travel packages and promotions geared towards the Tampa Bay market. We expect that the Tampa Bay Rays participation in the World Series will bring added focus on Charlotte County, the new Spring Training home for the team. The baseball success

combined with Direct Air's commitment to fly commercially in and out of Charlotte County make for exciting and encouraging times for our community.