

ANNUAL REPORT

A Report to the Citizens of Charlotte County
2001

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The year 2001 was difficult for everyone. With the events occurring on September 11th, governmental services were stretched to the breaking point. Through it all, Charlotte County residents proved to be generous and caring. The Board of County Commissioners reallocated funds for increased security needs and prepared for anticipated drops in revenue. Security mandates and a decrease in state revenues all contributed to the budget concerns.

In this annual report we would like to share with you the County's department operations in 2001.



Englewood Beach received a face-lift this year and a grand re-opening was held in November



Citizens gathered at the Charlotte Assembly in August to discuss their vision for Charlotte County's future.

We encourage our citizens to review the information presented here and we look forward to your comments.

TO CONTACT US:
Commission Office - 743-1300
Administration Office - 743-1944
bcc.administration@charlottefl.com



Officer Federici - Just another day on the job!



Officer Juergensen, donating some off-duty time to a neglected horse, "Brandy".

Animal Control

Animal Control has undergone many changes this year to ensure better service for our community.

In August Animal Control moved to new quarters at the Eastport Environmental Campus. As part of the move the department took on a whole new look. Vehicles were re-designed and a rank structure was developed creating a corporal, sergeant and lieutenant's position.

Community programs and presentations were expanded, and officers visited local schools to educate children during Dog Bite Prevention Week. The Charlotte County website (www.charlottecountyfl.com) now offers a wide variety of information to citizens, such as nuisance wildlife, trapping procedures, animal ordinances and information about the outreach programs, as well as current press releases.

You can reach the staff of the Animal Control Department at 764-4320.

Cooperative Extension

The Cooperative Extension office is a valuable community resource:

- They organize dozens of citizens volunteers for the Master Gardener program. These "plant doctors" give thousands of hours of their time at public seminars, plant clinics, and in developing landscaping programs.
- The Sea Grant agent obtained more than 8,000 tons of donated culvert to recycle into the Charlotte County artificial reef program. Volunteers take the materials and develop them into elaborate fish habitat, a delight for fishermen and divers, alike.
- Children in the Fur and Feathers 4-H Club learn how to select feed, groom and market their chickens, rabbits and other livestock.
- 4-H cooking programs teach youth how to make good nutrition decisions, as well as reinforcing the need for math and science knowledge.

You can reach the staff of Cooperative Extension at 764-4340.





Community Development staff planning for the future.



Cathy Olsen, Environmental Specialist, works extensively with GPS systems.



Neighborhood clean-ups result in tons of trash removed from residential areas.

Community Development

Community Development works everyday to protect citizens and our environment, and to preserve the quality of life our residents have come to expect. The major issues addressed in 2001 were:

- **Airport Commerce Park Overlay District:** Identified and Designated 4,000+ acres around and including the County Airport as mixed use development.
- **Urban Land Institute Study for West Murdock:** The Urban Land Institute was retained to work with staff to study land use issues, make recommendations and develop an implementation strategy for the ultimate development of the west Murdock area.
- **Community Planning:** Staff working with local community groups and a consultant have initiated two community planning efforts, one in Placida and the other in South Gulf Cove.
- **Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency:** Staff working with the Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Committee worked on and developed substantial revisions to the Community Redevelopment Area Design Guidelines and sign ordinances.
- **Ordinances:** Balancing both property rights and overall quality of life issues staff, in conjunction with the construction industry, developed a significant revision to the Waterfront Property Regulations. The revision established a height-dependent setbacks for all waterfront properties, preventing County waterfronts from becoming 'walled-off' enclaves.
- Staff, working with the Historic Preservation Board re-wrote the County's Historic Preservation Ordinance to provide a better balance between the protection for archaeological and historic resources and property rights. The final draft ordinance will be ready for adoption in July 2002.
- **Code Enforcement:** Conducted neighborhood sweeps identifying code violations and followed-up with neighborhood clean-ups. This resulted in more than 137 tons of trash being removed from the neighborhoods.
- Recovered \$23,000 through contractor licensing investigations and returned it to homeowners, contractors and subcontractors.
- Issued 63 licensing citations to unlicensed contractors resulting in approximately \$16,000 in fines.

You can reach the staff of Community Development at 743-1546

Community Outreach



The Community Outreach Department is responsible for communications, marketing and website design. They support 25 departments in public relations and program development. In addition, they are leading the way in e-government through the redesign of our website to allow access to Charlotte County government 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Major accomplishments of 2001 were:

- The establishment of a credit card acceptance policy so that our citizens could use Visa and MasterCard for over-the-counter and internet transactions.
- The development of on-line permitting for our contractors and owner/builders.
- Establishment of the Citizen's Academy that allows our residents a "backstage" look at County operations.
- The Charlotte Assembly 2001
- Worked with the Charlotte County Red Cross in fundraising for the victims of September 11th.
- Design of pamphlets, booklets, ads and informational documents to support numerous County programs.



The Community Outreach Department won six national awards this year:

- National Association of Public Information Officers Award of Excellence for the CCNews, the internal employee newsletter.
- National Association of Public Information Officers Award of Excellence for the 2000 Annual Report.
- County/City Communications and Marketing Association Award of Excellence for the Phosphate Petition drive.
- Florida Government Communicators Association 1st Place Crystal Award for the Charlotte Assembly 2001
- Florida Government Communicators Association 3rd Place - Crisis Communication for our series on the Drought.



You can reach the staff of Community Outreach at 623-1035.
View our website at: www.charlotecountyfl.com

Economic Development Office

The Board of County Commissioners approved the funding of the Economic Development Office (EDO) in February 2001. On a day-to-day basis, the EDO works with all businesses, large or small. The EDO answers, assists and follows through on business inquiries from local businesses needing to know where to find financing, employees and products to expand their business. The EDO recruits new businesses and facilitates the needs of site selectors who are exploring our County for relocation of their client's business.



At Charlotte Harbor.
It's all work And All Play.

In July 2001, the advisory board to the Economic Development Office, Enterprise Charlotte, was formed and is made up of 21 business, education and community-minded members. Their first assignment was to determine the assets and liabilities of Charlotte County. Dr. Gerald Schoenfeld, College of Business, FGCU, facilitated the forum of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT). The results of the SWOT indicated Charlotte County's strengths included our workforce, school system and quality of life as well as our tax structure, affordable property and the location of the Charlotte County Airport as a business center. Task forces were created to study impact fees and business incentives. A communication workshop was held in December 2001, which assessed our communications infrastructure and our readiness to take advantage of the new high-speed data services.

Through a Workforce Grant local manufacturing businesses have been visited and surveyed to ascertain what training can be provided in our schools to better prepare the workforce to meet the needs of our businesses. These businesses have also been made aware of current programs available to assist them in the hiring and training of employees.

The EDO, through the Small Business College, FGCU, sponsors small business seminars; in 2001, topics included Small Business Marketing, Public Relations Marketing, e-Commerce Marketing and Customer Service Retention. Monthly business columns for the Charlotte Sun and the Association of Realtors foster community awareness of local and regional economic programs and people and businesses that help make things happen.

*You can reach the staff of the Economic Development Office
at 627-3023.*

Environmental Services



Helicopters are a necessity when battling mosquitoes.

Mosquito Control - Charlotte County Mosquito Control battles the salt marsh mosquito through a cooperative inter-department agreement with the Sheriff's Office. Charlotte County has 20,000 acres of salt-flat breeding habitat. The helicopter program enables us to maintain this vast area. Each acre of salt-flat area that is covered with water can contain up to a million mosquito eggs. The ability to treat mosquitoes before they become adults is the most efficient and economical control program used by Mosquito Control Departments.

Aquatic and Exotic Vegetation Control -The department is actively assisting in the management of 36 miles of storm water right-of ways and canals with our herbicide-treatment program; the Aquatic crew is responsible for a total of 474 freshwater locations in Charlotte County. Vegetation control helps to assure the flow of storm water in Charlotte County.



The aquatic staff gets to see Florida's natural beauty up close.

Solid Waste - The East Englewood Mini-Transfer Facility, which is located at 7070 Environmental Way, East Englewood, opened its doors for customers on August 31, 2001. They said "build it and they will come", and they have. From the opening day until the end of March we have accommodated 8,242 customers. That is an average of 284 customers per week. The hours of operation are 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. Tuesday through Saturday. A variety of items are accepted at this location. Including, recyclable items (cardboard, mixed paper, newspaper, aluminum and steel cans, glass, plastics and textiles), special wastes (household hazardous wastes, paints, pesticides, sharps, electronic, used motor oil and oil filters, batteries and automobile and truck tires). Miscellaneous materials, (lumber, metal items, pipes, furniture, appliances) and yard landscaping waste. This facility is for residential use only with the exception of recyclable materials. All other waste from business are prohibited.

Recycling -This program includes recycling, hazardous waste, yard waste, and construction debris. In October 2001 we became a certified affiliate of Keep America Beautiful. The mission is to improve the quality of life in Charlotte County through community awareness, education and public/private partnerships.



Recycling is an important part of preserving Florida's environment.

You can reach the staff of Environmental Services at 764-4377.

Fire and Emergency Medical Services



New ALS Rescue units hit the road in Charlotte County in 2001.

The year of 2001 for Charlotte County Fire / EMS proved to be a year of many department projects and additions. In January, El Jobean Fire Station #3, located on S.R. 776, received one of the first new Advance Life Support Rescue additions to be added to the fleet in ten years. By adding an additional rescue to this area it allowed emergency response times to the Gulf Cove, Englewood, El Jobean and northwest county areas to greatly improve.

Two new ALS Rescue units were purchased for the Englewood area that replaced existing Rescue units that were reassigned to other stations.

In July of 2001 a long time goal became a reality when the Special Operations Team went on line for emergency responses for calls that pertain to Hazardous Materials, Confined Space Rescue, Structural Collapse and Advanced Extrication. (Two of these rescue vehicles and the Special Operations Truck were provided by the 1 cent sales tax.)

Two new replacement Fire Engines were put into service in 2001. These engines replaced the 10 year old fire engine which was stationed at Fire Station #4, located on Marathon Blvd off S.R. 771 and 8 year old fire engine which is stationed at Fire Station #1, located on U.S. 41 and Easy Street. (The older units were placed in the reserve fleet.)

Public Educational Programs for the community hit an all time high with recorded contact hours totaling over 700 hours and programs were presented to over 29,000 people in our community.

You can reach the business office of the Fire/EMS Department at 743-1367. Please note this is NOT the emergency number. In case of a fire or medical emergency please dial 911.



Sales tax funding provided for two new fire engines.

Information Technology



Information Technology - The Information Technology Division currently supports 27 Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners' departments at 31 facilities with their technology needs. The day-to-day services provided are, Helpdesk – Desktop Support, Network Engineering and Design, Application, Program, Internet and Intranet support.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Division - GIS continues to add and maintain information about the changes in our community through detailed attention to our mapping system. Citizens can access land information on at www.ccgis.com. This special website helped Charlotte County win national acclaim for its service to the community. GIS also plays an integral part in the county having achieved a Community Rating System score of six in the FEMA Community Rating system. This gives all county residents a 20% discount on their flood insurance rate. The group wrote a post hurricane damage assessment program that was highly acclaimed at the State Emergency Operations Conference.



You can reach the staff of the GIS Department at 743-1383.

Emergency Management

Emergency Management, once again had an eventful year with planning, response, and recovery issues from ranging from Tropical Storm Gabrielle to the terrorist events of September 11. Amidst all of this, Emergency Management led Charlotte County to a Class 6 Rating in the Community Rating System under the National Flood Insurance Program. This means a 20% discount on annual premiums for flood insurance for all citizens who live in designated flood zones. This discount saves the citizens of Charlotte County \$2.3 million annually.

Emergency Management also worked to make Charlotte County the first county in Southwest Florida to be designated a Storm Ready community by the National Weather Service. This designation recognizes Charlotte County for its public education in the areas of emergency and disaster preparedness.

You can reach the staff of the Emergency Management Department at 505-4620. Please note, that if you have an emergency need you should dial 911.



Metropolitan Planning Organization



New sidewalks appeared along Bayshore Linear Trail, thanks to sales tax funding.

The MPO began the year celebrating the start-up of the Dial-a-Ride bus system on January 1, 2001 with the grand opening ceremonies held February 10, 2001. Other Federal and State funded transportation projects included the widening of SR-776 with construction of a new bridge span on the Myakka River, the opening of Phase II of Pioneer Trail, and the completion of the Bayshore Linear Park Trail.

Through out the year the MPO has produced and contracted various technical reports such as Burnt Store Road Update, Secondary and Cumulative Impact Assessment in the Planning Process, Project Feasibility Study (Aqui Esta Drive), Aqui Esta Drive Public Involvement and Technical Analysis, and Transportation Enhancement Project Selection Criteria. The MPO conducted outreach workshops for Charlotte Harbor Eco-Heritage Trail, attended "Government Day in the Mall", and sponsored "Bike to Work Day."

You can reach the staff of the MPO at 639-4676.

Human Services



26,740 trips were taken in our Dial-A-Ride buses during the first year of operation.

The Human Services Department began providing new services through the federally-funded Community Services Block Grant in February 2001. The Program targets low-income families who are in need of support or crisis services to assist them in becoming self-sufficient. Annual grant funding is a little over \$30,000 and provides assistance to approximately 75 eligible families. Types of services can include tuition, emergency rent/mortgage, or other necessary assistance.

Human Services is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Dial-a-Ride Program. A total of 26,740 passenger trips were delivered during the first year. A remarkable 11% of these trips were for wheelchair passengers. The new transportation system is currently producing more than 1000 trips per week and anticipates more than 52,000 trips in 2002.

Also in 2001, the first affordable rental housing complex using State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) Program funds opened in Punta Gorda. The Pines is a 336 unit apartment complex which rents to households below 60% of area median income. Fifty-one of the apartments are designated for very low-income households.

You can reach the staff at Human Services at 833-6500.

Parks and Recreation



Grand Opening of Englewood Beach at Chadwick Park.



Senior Games participants go for the gold!



KidSpace received a well-deserved face-lift this year.

On December 1, 2001, Charlotte County proudly celebrated the Grand Opening of Englewood Beach at Chadwick Park. This \$2.0 million project included the demolition and renovation of a 30 year old facility in addition to the acquisition of a 2.32 acre peninsula of land on the Bay side of the road. Improvements to the park are continuing with dune restoration, revegetation, and mangrove restoration ready to begin thanks to a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

On July 11, 2001, Charlotte County rededicated “KidSpace” (Maracaibo Street & Avacado Avenue) after replacing original wooden structures with state-of-the-art playground equipment, the addition of a specially designed play area for children ages 2–5, and replacing sand with colorful shredded recycled tire material, which makes the park not only ADA accessible, but compliant with the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Charlotte County Parks & Recreation hosted the 38th Annual Easter Egg Hunt and Carnival at the Harold Avenue Recreation Center. Over 800 children participated in the event collecting more than 25,000 treats, 7,000 plastic eggs, and 1000 gift prizes. Area seniors were not forgotten as over 800 event participants competed in this year’s Senior Games, which features a variety of sporting events from ballroom dancing to a 5K run.

As of December 2001, the County applied for and received in excess of \$5.3 million in grant funding which was used to purchase over 494 acres of land at Englewood Beach, Oyster Creek Environmental Park, West County Regional Park, Amberjack Environmental Park, and Sunrise Park. Further, notification has been received that grant funds in the amount of \$2.7 million have been approved for acquisition of an additional 118.71 acres of land at Cedar Point Park, El Jobean Pier Park, Bayshore Linear Park, and South County Regional Park. Grant funds in the amount of \$400,000 have also been awarded for construction of a playground/volleyball area; in-line hockey rink, and basketball courts at the Tringali Recreation Center and two additional lighted tennis courts; playground equipment, parking lot lighting, trails, and a single table picnic shelter at Franz Ross Park.

You can reach the main office of the Parks & Recreation Department at 627-1628.

Public Works



Stormwater drainage continues to be a major part of our Public Works projects.

Public Works has successfully implemented road, stormwater, and Sales Tax Extension capital projects including the completion of Kings Highway and Harborview Road, Gasparilla Road at the CR 775 intersection, SR 776 North Access Road at the March Waterway, two drainage control structures on Greater Port Charlotte waterways, Gulf Cove and Alligator Creek dredging, Lake number three and the outfall to Countryman Waterway in the Three Lakes area, and traffic signals at US 17 and Regent Road and I-75/Kings Highway northbound ramps.

Ribbon-cutting for the Winchester evacuation road (SR776 to River Road in Sarasota) will take place in June. Major work is now underway on the Sales Tax Extension sidewalks, CR775 Pine Street (Rotonda Boulevard West to Sarasota County line) and US 41/Enterprise/Paulson traffic signals.

Public Works has integrated transportation and stormwater systems in support of the economic development target areas; specifically the Charlotte County Airport area and Murdock. Coastal and navigable waterways management continues with the successful completion of the ongoing Sarasota/Charlotte County Beach Restoration Study, including timely implementation of the Stump Pass dredging project which is Public Works' coastal management priority. Establishment of a Countywide Dredging Program is the primary "freshwater" navigable waterways priority. Resumption of negotiations with Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Southwest Florida Water Management District to finalize permitting and water quality mitigation requirements is this year's primary activity for the removal of the Manchester Lock.

Public Works is assisting Community Development with Phase I of the U.S. 41 Corridor Enhancement program with preparation of an action plan to include identification of objectives, an overall corridor plan, implementation strategies and assistance with design.

You can reach the staff of the Public Works Department at 575-3600.

Public Works has extensive information available on the County's website: www.charlottecountyfl.com.



Sidewalks changed the face of our neighborhoods, thanks to the Sales Tax funding.

Tourism Development



Charlotte County's tourism industry has grown considerably over the past four years and has become a major factor in the county's economic base. Keeping it healthy and growing in the right direction is a major consideration in the preservation of the more than 6,300 jobs it supports and the \$200 million in expenditures it generates. With so much at stake, and in light of the changing complexion of tourism due to September 11, this will require initiatives that encourage the kind of tourism that will keep the industry sustainable in the long run.

On May 6, 2002, the Visitor's Bureau hosted the First Annual Charlotte County Tourism Unity Luncheon at the Best Western Waterfront in Punta Gorda. The event will be an annual forum to recognize and pay tribute to Charlotte's largest industry. Awards were presented to industry representatives whose efforts contribute to the success of Charlotte Harbor's tourism industry:

- The Florida International Air Show received the Promotional Award for its contribution to the successful promotion of Charlotte County as a tourist destination.
- The Hospitality Award for exceptional customer service went to Captain Marian Schneider, Founder and President of Grande Tours, Inc.
- The Achievement Award honored Deborah Weston for her outstanding, long-term commitment to tourism development as a charter member of the Tourist Development Council.



Becky Bovell, Tourism Director, speaks throughout the community.
Photo credit: [Charlotte Sun](#), Jonathan Fredin.

The tourism luncheon also provides an opportunity to release the latest economic impact figures emphasizing the significance of travel and tourism to the local economy. FY 2001 reflected the following:

- A record \$200,467,618 in direct expenditures;
- 343,346 visitors came to Charlotte County in FY 2001 representing a 7.3% increase over 2000
- Charlotte collected \$1,399,582 in resort taxes -- a 13.4% increase over FY 2000

You can reach the staff at Tourism Development at 743-1900.

Veterans Services



Many of Charlotte County's 30,000 plus year-round veterans visit their County Veterans Services Office each year for assistance in various areas of entitlements and benefits. They usually are qualified for these benefits and entitlements because of their many years of honorable service - often during wartime periods. The County Veterans Service Officer has a compassionate understanding of the problems that confront veterans, widows, widowers, and their children. The County Veterans Services Officer and his staff know the extent, the meaning, and the application of laws that have been passed by the U.S. Congress in the interests of veterans and their dependents. They also know the rules and regulations adopted by the Department of Veterans Affairs to clarify and implement those laws. The County Veterans Service Officer will apply specialized knowledge in the best way suited to the needs of every individual veteran or other beneficiary who comes to the office for assistance.

Last year the major accomplishments of this office included assistance in completing applications for entitlements for compensation of a service connected disability as well as earned benefits through the VA pension program. They also assisted in the enrollment of over 1,500 veterans in the VA healthcare enrollment system. This keeps the VA Outpatient Clinic very busy and creates a bit of a waiting list for their first appointment. Besides these activities they take an active, participative role in ensuring eligible veterans receive help with licenses, tax-exemption, the VA Home Loan Guaranty program, VA vocational rehabilitation and employment programs, VA Life Insurance, military burial in a National Cemetery as well as performing evaluation and appropriate referral for numerous other national, state, and local programs that may assist our veterans.

You can reach the staff of Veterans' Services at 625-4422.