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a resident's guide to
PARKSIDE



Sunday, March 17, 2013  A special section of the Sun



Nicole Noles
Editor's Corner
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Not in my backyard: refusing to accept decline in Parkside

When the Mackle brothers developed Port Charlotte, they weren't after the rich or famous. They reached out to everyday people, the hardworking middle class who wanted the American Dream and somewhere warm and affordable to retire to when they were done working for everyone else. They gave thousands of people the hope that their sunset years would be filled with fun, sun and a quaint little home to call their own. The Cultural Center bloomed soon after, filling an educational, entertainment and social gap in the new town.

Over the years, I've watched Port Charlotte expand while the center of town, the Parkside District, was forgotten in the midst of economic booms and financial busts. But decline is not inevitable in my part of town. So I'm happy to introduce a section devoted exclusively to the heart of Port Charlotte. Here's hoping it not only opens people's eyes to issues that need fixing, but also highlights the vibrant sense of community that keeps Parkside kicking.

The transformation of Parkside

A transformation is taking place in Port Charlotte and it's happening in neighborhoods right in the middle of town. The property owners, business owners and interested stakeholders are making it happen and it is working.

The area between Conway Boulevard and Lakeshore Circle between Midway Boulevard and U.S. 41, which surrounds the Promenades Mall and the two hospitals, is now known as Parkside.

Several years ago, these same neighborhoods were in severe decline. A group of citizens, who formed a non-profit organization known as Team Port Charlotte, has been working diligently behind the scenes to improve their neighborhoods. They are partnering with Charlotte County in this endeavor. Together they have been successful in cleaning up these areas. This is obvious by driving around and seeing that most of the junk-like conditions and high grass have been reduced significantly. They have had several neighborhood cleanups and more are planned. Just recently another abandoned property was demolished. A neighborhood garden has been built at the Family Services Center and many residents are growing vegetables and herbs. Five Neighborhood Watch groups have been set up and are doing patrols and other great things. A Christmas decorating contest has been held for two years in



Tricia Duffy
Tricia Duffy is a Charlotte County Commissioner representing the Parkside District.

a row and awards have been presented to the winners. A Parkside Business Association has been formed they have had numerous meetings. A huge Fall Festival was held in November. Numerous community meetings have been held with 100 people or more in attendance.

Many committed citizens and business owners have contributed their time and input to Charlotte County on what they want Parkside to look like in the future. The enthusiasm in Parkside is infectious.

All of this and more has been accomplished by citizens who just want to make their community safer and a great place to live, work and play. They have lots of plans to do more. Team Port Charlotte has formed a partnership with Charlotte County Government and is working closely with the County Commission, administration and staff. For their part, the county has approved the Parkside area as a Community Redevelopment Area, just like Punta Gorda has a CRA.

The improvements to Punta Gorda over the last several years have been very impressive and have changed the face of the city. Another group of concerned citizens, Team Punta Gorda, has worked very hard to bring positive change to their community. In fact, they have been very supportive of Team Port Charlotte and have helped them to organize and move forward as an organization.

The first noticeable improvements to Parkside will occur on Elkcam Boulevard. As water lines are installed, a walkway will be added that will allow residents to walk, ride bikes and possibly even golf carts as ways to get around in their neighborhoods. Other improvements will include landscaping. Similar plans for Harbor Boulevard are in the works; hopefully construction will begin later this year. In the future McGuire Park and Lake Betty Park will be improved with exciting amenities added. A central square is anticipated to be built near the Promenades Mall once funding sources are determined. All of these plans have been made by the citizens as they created their Master Plan in a series of work sessions over the last two years.

It's obvious there is a great deal of vision, hard work and excitement happening in Parkside. The transformation to a more vibrant community is underway so stay tuned for more exciting news in upcoming months!

Parkside — A diversified community

The Parkside area was once the centerpiece of the Port Charlotte community — Promenades Mall with its variety of shops, two major hospitals, the Cultural Center, two actively used parks, numerous medical offices and retirement centers, flower shops, professional offices, banks, fast food restaurants, convenience stores and much more, all located within a community of affordable housing. Guess what? It is all still there. The once-thriving area looks a little worn and much of the area has become blighted. However, with the support of the County Commission, an enthusiastic Team Port Charlotte membership, a determined group of property owners, residents, supporters and business owners, Parkside is on its way back to its glory days.

Parkside is rich in diversity, is on track to become a complete community with the basic needs of daily living, while providing the small-town feeling where neighbors know each other by name and speak to each other on the street. Many changes have been undertaken and will be ongoing for a long time to come including, but



Nancy Padgett
Nancy Padgett is the Community and Business Liaison for Charlotte State Bank & Trust and a volunteer for Team Port Charlotte. She can be reached at npadgett@csbtfl.com.

not limited to, neighborhood cleanup days, neighborhood watch programs with the support of the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office with regular and bicycle patrols, enhanced code enforcement, a Communities for a Lifetime Committee, establishment of a community garden, improvements to the two parks, a Parkside Business Association, many activities at the Cultural Center for all ages and a vital Family Services Center. Sidewalk improvements and shade trees are being planted together with other infrastructure improvements in progress. The Parkside International Fall Festival was held and holiday decorating awards were given. A group of residents conducted garage sales and used the funds to purchase gifts for needy children in the community. This is just the beginning.

Soon, two Beautification Awards will be given each month — one for a business and one for a home. A sign will be

placed in the yard and on the business premises for a month to recognize the commitment and improvement to the property. The winners will receive a certificate and pictures will be taken for the news media. Charlotte State Bank & Trust will sponsor the program. You may nominate your own home, business, or any location that you feel deserves to receive an award. Please send your nominations to nnoles88@gmail.com. Please include the address of the home or business you are nominating.

As you can see, there is a lot of activity happening in Parkside. Many towns across the country are attempting to bring back a small-town feel with enhanced walkability and not based on the 1950's automobile-centric mindset. The Parkside revitalization includes efforts to reverse that outmoded model and build a stronger sense of community and human connectivity placing people at the forefront of needs, not automobiles. Think trees, grass, flowers and green space — not parking lots. We welcome your input and participation and hope that you will assist in being part of the solution to this undertaking. As a comparative, think about the difference in the city of Punta Gorda now as opposed to 10 years ago. The improvements will take time, but are well on their way.

Vision becomes a reality in 2013

PROVIDED BY JIM FENDRICK

The Cultural Center meeting room was packed. Partitions were moved to double the room's size. The buzzing of ideas overflowed into the hallways. This was the first of many well-attended and exciting Parkside meetings. Residents from throughout the county participated.

Team Port Charlotte and Team Punta Gorda Team volunteers helped, as the county facilitated the planning process. From these meetings, the Citizens' Master Plan was developed. The plan

remains the recipe for the district's transformation.

As we wait to see the first shovel turn this year, many people are working to make the plan a reality. Citizens, commissioners, county staff — people and the plan they are implementing are the secrets of Parkside's ultimate success. Your involvement in Parkside's redevelopment will result in transformation of the heart of Charlotte County, ultimately benefiting all residents.

Read the plan; find it on the County's website at www.charlottecountyfl.gov. Find your part in the positive development of Charlotte County.



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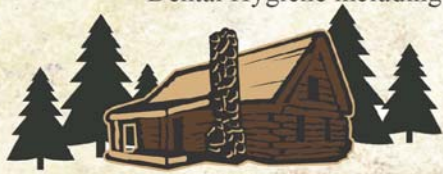
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Fawcett Memorial strives to be an 'overachiever' in health care

By **BOB MASSEY**
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

"One thing about Fawcett is we've always prided ourselves on being overachievers," said Thomas J. Rice, president and CEO of Fawcett Memorial Hospital, 21298 Olean Blvd., Port Charlotte.

To prove his point, Rice cited three external groups that measured the hospital in areas of safety, performance and overall achievement. Fawcett was top-rated by all of them.

"So it's whatever we work at, we're not satisfied unless we score very well," he said.

Indeed, the hospital has not seemed to slow down in its quest for excellence — not even after the devastation caused by Hurricane Charley in 2004.

A dream come true

In 1975, there was the Chapel Manor Nursing Home, owned and operated by Charland Inc.

But it wasn't enough for Dr. Fred Nisi, who had a vision of turning the facility into an acute care, general medical/surgical center. With the help of a friend, Ted W. Parker, he was able to do just that.

Fawcett Memorial Hospital was named for a trio of brothers — J. Waldo, Bayard and Arthur Fawcett — who had been philanthropists in Charlotte County. They were last in a family line that reached back to Huguenot persecutions in France, and grew up in Pennsylvania.

Charland became one of the original hospital investors, claiming ownership of Fawcett until Basic American Medical Inc. acquired the majority of Charland stock in 1981. Fawcett was then acquired by Hospital Corporation of America (HCA).

"I can remember in the weeks after Hurricane Charley when one of the floors was out of commission," Rice said. "The chief nursing officer at the time said the Joint Commission has a new designation. Hospitals can become primary stroke centers. So even among the rubble, the idea was: let's apply. Fawcett applied, and we became the first HCA hospital to become a primary stroke center in the state of Florida."

Today, the 238-bed hospital boasts 1,400 employees, physicians and volunteers — and a nearly \$81 million economic impact on the community. Fawcett treats more than 67,000 patients a year, and has about 22,000 visit the emergency care center.

With more than 900 employees, Fawcett pays out more than \$57,000 in salaries and benefits. More than 300 physicians and about 250 volunteers round out the roster.

The hospital also offers an impressive array of services.

Strong points

Rice believes Fawcett has several strengths that set it apart from other health care facilities in the community. These include the stroke program, the licensed oncology unit. The latter is a 33-bed area staffed by specialized nurses as well as staff who are accredited in chemotherapy administration, treatment of side effects, blood product infusions, pain management and care of patient/family in end of life care in collaboration with hospice, dietary, radiology, lab, pharmacy, therapies, and case management.

As for the former, Fawcett is designated as a Primary Stroke Center from the Joint Commission. The Stroke Center of Excellence is a 33-bed progressive care unit consisting of specialists in stroke nursing.

"We also have a licensed rehab unit," Rice said. "Now the rehab unit is certified by an outside group called CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), and — again — it's the only one of its kind around. Spine and orthopedics is a strength of ours. We've seen that volume grow and grow."

Fawcett's Spine, Orthopedic and Neurosurgical Program is another area of



SUN PHOTOS BY BOB MASSEY

The nurses' station at the entrance to the cardiac unit is a place where heart patients can find a smile.

excellence. It's composed of specially trained physicians who work with a team of nursing and rehab personnel, concierge, discharge planners, and pain management specialists.

The hospital has also received recognition as an Accredited Chest Pain Center (CPC) with percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI, commonly known as coronary angioplasty or simply angioplasty) by the Society of Chest Pain Centers. This unit is a 20-bed "Level 2" emergency care center with the most up-to-date emergency equipment, and the staff are nationally cardiac and stroke certified.

Hurricane Charley was a catalyst for another important, though brief, experiment that would set the stage for Fawcett's latest venture.

You've got to have heart

"After Charley, all three hospitals evacuated completely," Rice said. "All three had significant damage. I was standing on the roof with the Secretary of Health at the time, who asked how quickly could we get something going for cardiac because nobody else was doing it, because of the damage. So we pulled in a trailer, we brought in staff from another HCA hospital, and we started doing PCI procedures here right after Charley. And then when Charlotte Regional got up and running, we closed — because it was for emergency purposes — but we saw that we could do it well. So as soon as we could qualify for a permit license, then we did so."

Now cardiac care is the focus of Fawcett's next major venture. "We've started doing the PCIs for the interventions — the stents, for example, for heart attack patients — for a number of years. We qualified under state rules that now we can start providing open-heart surgery, so we'll be doing that mid-year."

Not all of Fawcett's service are found on the main campus. Some reside within Promenades Mall across the boulevard. The services there include wound care and a hyperbaric oxygen program.

"We have something called Company Care, and that's a service for local employers if they need pre-employment physicals or their employees get injured on the job, then they can be seen here under the Workmen's Comp laws," Rice said.



Cardiovascular disease specialist Dr. Sergio F. Cossu, third from left, is flanked by members of Fawcett's cath lab staff.



Fawcett's volunteers dedicate countless hours to help keep the hospital running.

"Our outpatient sports and rehab has its own swimming pool — you don't see that very often — and they use it very effectively with aquatic therapy with patients."

There's also the offices for a program called H2U, a social organization for people aged 55 and older. Activities include trips, craft days and educational programs.

"The H2U program numbers over 2,000 people," Rice said. "That's the 13th largest chapter of its kind in all of HCA, which has 164 hospitals."

Rice seems most proud of being able to provide the most modern, high-tech services to patients where there previously were none.

"Ten years ago there were more people leaving Charlotte County for these procedures than were staying home," he said. "But now you see the statistics are reversed. Not only are patients staying in the county, but people from outside are coming in. I have made an impact on the local economy — and the local community as well."

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Proposed parks and paths in Parkside





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McGuire Park a haven for kids, scouts and muscovies



SUN PHOTO BY ROBERT NELSON



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Muscovy ducks have been full-time residents of McGuire Park for a couple of decades.

McGuire Park, located at 32236 McGuire Ave. in Port Charlotte, is a gathering location for residents looking to enjoy the outdoors. Kids can climb on the playground and use the swings and slides. McGuire has a number of barbecue pits, picnic benches and horseshoe pits. There is also a basketball court and public restrooms. The park is open seven days a week from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

The Girl Scouts promote conservation with a brightly painted rain barrel collecting runoff from the gutters of the Scout House.



SUN PHOTO BY ROBERT NELSON

The Scout House is a McGuire Park landmark.

McGuire Park has four tennis courts.

Fish, picnic and play at Lake Betty Park



SUN PHOTOS BY ROBERT NELSON



Lake Betty Park, located at 2215 Conway Blvd. in Port Charlotte, offers a water view from the two picnic shelters. The park also has a number of barbecue pits, a small pier and lots of shore area to fish from. The lake is home to many different types of animals, from wading birds to snails.

The park has a large open fields divided by the basketball court, children's play area and picnic shelters. Lake Betty Park pavilions can be rented out from Charlotte County. Call 941-627-1074 for rates and rules.

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Lake Betty has a playground for children ages two to 12. The children's play area is also a smoke-free zone.

Team Port Charlotte 2013 goals

Create a stronger sense of community

- Expand community garden and identify committee members to manage it for the future
- Encourage residential landscaping through "yard of the month" campaign
- Arrange local gardening/home project seminars at Cultural Center with Lowes and Home Depot and Ace Hardware (from the Parkside area)
- Develop planning committee for next annual International Parkside Fall Festival
- Develop committee for annual holiday decoration contest
- Meet with County Parks and Recreation staff to plan Lake Betty and McGuire parks
- TPC representatives to participate in county activities to improve water quality in Lake Betty and Sunshine Lake
- Fund and develop at least one "pocket park" in 2013
- Participate in tree selection, design standards and renovation of Elkam Boulevard set to begin in 2013

Improve safety and security in Parkside for residents and businesses

- Promote Neighborhood Watch in all six residential areas
- Support regular meetings of Weed and Seed Program
- Housing committee members continue code compliance rounds in residential areas
- Conduct two annual community cleanup days
- Work with CCSO to establish dedicated community-based sheriff's office



coverage in Parkside

- Work with Habitat for Humanity renovation program in Parkside

Community for a Lifetime goals

- Work with CDBIA on completing at least one universal design rebuilt home in Parkside
- Provide results of transportation survey to county Transportation staff
- Continue to support Senior Resource Center at the Cultural Center
- Conduct an annual survey of the unmet needs of the senior citizens residing in Parkside

Parkside Business Association goals

- Gauge interest from area businesses to develop a volunteer Business Watch Program
- Establish an Advocacy Committee to represent interests of businesses in Parkside area and adjacent areas upon request
- Establish a Marketing/Promotion

Committee to benefit Parkside businesses

- Establish a Membership Committee to recruit new members to the association and identify other businesses to recruit to the area
- Participate in planning for future renovation of Cultural Center

Strengthen Team Port Charlotte as an organization

- Conduct volunteer membership campaign to recruit at least 20 more volunteers for committees
- Conduct at least one fundraiser to raise operating funds (could be the Fall Festival)
- Develop communications plan for residents and businesses in the area and supply a regular column in the *Sun* on Parkside events
- Establish a small local office for TPC in the area as an information hub for residents
- Meet monthly with county staff to stay current on progress of county-funded redevelopment progress in Parkside and report back to area stakeholders.

TEAM PORT CHARLOTTE NEEDS YOUR HELP

By SUSAN SWANSON
TEAM PORT CHARLOTTE

Who would have known that the very person that claimed through the years that she was not a "joiner" or one to "get involved in stuff" would end up a promoter of the benefits of volunteering? I always believed that I had enough going on in my life to more than fill the little time that I had. Several years ago, I was volunteered by a friend to assist with a yard sale benefiting the local historical society in our little Massachusetts town. I will admit, I went grudgingly, but by the end of the day I had made new friends, learned a lot about the history of our town and finally felt connected in the town I had lived in for four years!

As the result of that experience I gained a new appreciation for how service to your community brings personal satisfaction and provides benefits as well.

So what does this have to do with Parkside? Lots! Team Port Charlotte, a nonprofit formed over two years ago, has been working with the county on the revitalization of Parkside. We have had many residents, businesses and others contribute time, money and talent, but we need more volunteers to accomplish this challenging task. The county has worked with the citizens to create a Citizens' Master Plan, which will transform and enhance the infrastructure of the area. However, the county cannot provide some of the key ingredients of this revitalization and that is the enrichment of our neighborhoods. We have a Tree Canopy Restoration Committee, the Our Community for a Lifetime Committee and a Housing Committee. The Parkside Business Association is working to create support and advocacy for our businesses and our Events Committee and Marketing & Communications Committees are working hard to promote and establish Parkside as a venue for exciting events. To learn more about Team Port Charlotte and our volunteer opportunities, call 941-457-3126.

Multigenerational ties: Community for a Lifetime

By RENEE LePERE
SUN CORRESPONDENT

When Team Port Charlotte began its involvement in the Parkside Redevelopment project, its focus was solely on the elderly in that community.

It became apparent, however, that to address the needs of seniors in the area, it would have to serve the needs of multiple generations.

"When we started talking to the people that live there, we found out there were a lot of grandparents raising their grandchildren," said Jess Canja, chairwoman of the "Community for a Lifetime" committee. "So we had to change some of our focus."

The goal of the committee is still to enable seniors to live in their homes for as long as possible. Canja said the committee has recommended and is working on a service directory with the phone numbers of agencies to call for assistance in addition to the "Our Charlotte Elder Affairs Network's (OCEAN's) Senior Living Guide. The guide was distributed in Parkside. Canja said the committee would also like the area's residents to have trained health advocates who can accompany them on doctor's appointments to ask questions and take notes.

Canja said this year the goal is to find Parkside residents who are willing to be a volunteer health care advocate. Volunteers will receive free training for the advocacy position. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer can call 941-456-5764.

The committee has also proposed a transportation plan that includes fixed bus systems from Punta Gorda to fixed routes in Sarasota County. Included in the plan are stops at Peace River Regional and Fawcett hospitals, the Cultural Center of Charlotte County and Promenades Mall.

The fixed stops would link with rotating pick-up vehicles within the Parkside community. Canja said the committee is also working on having the routes connect with stops in North Port as well.

In a report submitted to the county, the committee said a connector vehicle may already be available. However, vehicles and operation costs are available to counties with populations under 200,000 — and Charlotte County's is estimated at 150,000, according to the United States Census Bureau. The committee said the possibilities of a public-private partnership with grants and cost sharing should be explored.

The committee is also trying to address the needs of the children living in Parkside by obtaining funding for a volunteer tutoring and mentoring program for second- and third-grade students.

The committee continues to set goals for the area. Canja said this year's goals include:

- A Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity Training for those who serve or live with Parkside's multicultural population. The free-of-charge training includes a continental breakfast and will be held April 11, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Family Service Center, 21450 Gibraltar Drive, Port Charlotte.
- Continued development of health advocacy and Parkside transportation.
- Development of a series of brochures on Senior FAQs — (frequently asked questions) on various topics, such as rehab, applying for nursing home Medicaid or durable power of attorney.
- Partnering with Peace Lutheran Church for a planting project for kids. Despite the long list of goals to accomplish, Canja is positive. "We're seeing progress," she said.

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What is Parkside? It's the heart of town

By SHIRLEY GEORGE
STAFF WRITER

Parkside is a 1,100-square-foot triangular-shaped area located in the heart of Port Charlotte, bordered by U.S. 41, Midway and Conway Boulevards. It has been designated as a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), and targeted for infrastructure improvements. Team Port Charlotte was formed as a non-profit citizens group in 2010 to represent the residents, businesses and other stakeholders, to create a greater sense of community by partnering with others to assist with events, beautification, neighborhood cleanups, and other enrichment programs.

Susan Swanson, president of Team Port Charlotte, first visited Port Charlotte in 1962 to vacation with her grandparents in their new winter home, complete with orange, lemon and grapefruit trees. Swanson's parents inherited the house. After they passed away, Swanson is now the third generation to occupy the Port Charlotte home.

"Then the homes were all new and painted in pastel colors, and were a sight for sore eyes coming from a dark, cold Michigan winter," Swanson said. "As the area aged, the number of rentals and property neglect grew and the once-attractive area became a less desirable place to live. In many cases, people left to seek better housing environments, but many Parkside volunteers and residents have opted to be part of the solution."

Swanson added that a 'walkable community' is needed to transition from an outdated auto-centric community to a more people-friendly environment. Parkside has all of the key elements necessary for a thriving community. There is a great need for emphasis on esthetics that will improve desirability, and desirability creates economic growth.

History of Parkside

Then: General Development Corporation began adult classes for residents in a storefront in 1961, and

the popular program was dubbed "Port Charlotte University." The first 'graduation' in June 1961 was covered by Life magazine, Look magazine and CBS network. The 'university' moved its classes in 1963 to the second floor of what is now Sunnydell Plaza.

Now: Renamed the Cultural Center of Charlotte County, located at 2280 Aaron St., the complex is the hub of Parkside, 'the place that friendship built.' The center has had many additions over the years that include a theater, restaurant, banquet and tea rooms, fitness center, and numerous events and education classes are held year round.

Then: Port Charlotte Shopping Plaza opened in January 1960 with national chains such as Neisner's and Kwik-Chek grocery store. It burned down in 1973.

Now: The Promenades Shopping Mall opened at the site in 1976. It is the main retail destination in Parkside that includes various businesses. The Promenade's anchor tenant,

Winn-Dixie supermarket, made \$6.7 million in renovations, including an updated produce market, deli and free Wi-Fi.

Then: St. Joseph Hospital opened at 2500 Harbor Blvd. in 1962, and expanded in 1993.

Now: Peace River Regional Medical Center is the name of the hospital today. A cardiac facility was added in 2012.

Then: Fawcett Memorial Hospital, 21298 Olean Blvd., was founded in 1975.

Now: The 238-bed acute-care hospital, owned by Hospital Corporation of America, is still at the original location.

Then: Ramada Inn was constructed in 1964 at the southeast corner of Harbor Blvd. and U.S. 41. It was later a Red Roof Inn.

Now: Medical offices are now at that location.

Then: U.S. Post Office was originally located on Harbor Blvd.

Now: It is located on the east access road for U.S. 41 near Conway Boulevard.

Speakers talk about the year's progress in Parkside



FILE PHOTOS BY ROBERT NELSON

Some of the winners for the 2012 holiday lights contest were present to receive recognition and awards at the second annual Parkside meeting held at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County Jan. 31.

RIGHT: Tom Rice, vice president of Team Port Charlotte, opens the second annual Parkside meeting at the Charlotte County Cultural Center, 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte.



Deputy Bill Miller with the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office explains the benefits of the Neighborhood Watch program. There are five neighborhood watch groups in the Parkside area. Miller said "with your help we can achieve more to help prevent crime."



Shawn Horton with the county code enforcement suggested ways to check on code enforcement violations at municode.com and also see a full list of what things could be considered code enforcement violations.

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Master gardener Mike Stevens talks to the audience about community gardens and how they are built by local volunteers. He also explains all the planning that goes into them, from funding to the first shovel of dirt moved.

Volunteers are the life blood of the Cultural Center



Sherry Bala is the volunteer coordinator at the Cultural Center. She says about 450 volunteers serve in the winter and there are about 300 who are active year-round. In 2012, volunteers gave 64,834 hours of their time to the Cultural Center. On any given day more than 75 volunteers can be found in the various departments.



SUN PHOTOS BY BARBARA HUFF

Sally Kalama has volunteered for two years and makes flower arrangements; Anna Place has volunteered for 21 years and makes cards and angel items; Frances Spring makes quilts and dishcloths and also knits at home. She's been a volunteer for 14 years and "is still going!" Doris Hopkins has volunteered for 20 years and makes the flower arrangements for the café and also potpourri for the gift shop; Janet Brinch has volunteered for four years and makes kitchen towels that hang, pillows and "anything else I can get my hands on." Mary Hall has volunteered for six years; she makes dolls, sock monkeys, children's clothing and aprons. All of these items are made from donated items and are sold in the gift shop.



Bernie Ackerman has been a volunteer at the Cultural Center since 2005 and has logged nearly 2,700 hours of volunteer time. He plays keyboard 30-40 hours a week for Fun With Music, special events and in the café. Fun With Music is a free walk-in event where anyone can come and sit and listen. With him is Donna Barrett, sales and marketing manager.



Three of the volunteers in the receiving area for the gift shop at the Cultural Center are Shellee Wright, Victoria Hogen and Carmen Nazareno. Other items donated for resale include clothing, kitchen items, jewelry, collectable items and more.



Jackie Forslund was the January volunteer of the month. She runs the bridge games. Bridge was one of the first classes at the Cultural Center and now there are bridge players at the center five days a week.



Mary Lou Kirk, a Happy Helper, makes quilts at the Cultural Center and also makes five different items at home, all to sell in the gift shop. She stresses that her quilts are truly "made in the USA." She says, "I have nothing better to do. It's better than sitting at home looking at the walls or watching TV."

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Cultural Center of Charlotte County: The place that friendship built

By **BARBARA HUFF**
STAFF WRITER

"People got bored after General Development brought them to Port Charlotte," says Donna Barrett, sales and marketing manager at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. "They said, 'Hey, you brought us here to this lovely place and there's nothing to do!'"

"The first home was built in Port Charlotte in 1955 and the original Port Charlotte University (PCU), as the Cultural Center was then referred to, was to open its doors on the corner of Easy Street and U.S. 41 in 1960, but Hurricane Donna delayed the opening until January 1961," said Barrett.

"That original site was a 750-square-foot space with the library being the back wall of the building. Classes were held across the street in the Sunnydell Plaza.

Barrett says that the library has always been a kin to the Cultural Center. Eventually it was taken over by the county, but even today people call the Port Charlotte Library the Cultural Center.

In the early days, the emphasis of PCU was on serious learning and 43 courses were offered, four of them accredited by Edison Junior College. Among the most important was that for nurses aides, which were much needed for the aging community.

At that time the population of Port Charlotte was exploding at the rate of 30 homes a day. Residents petitioned General Development Corporation (GDC) for assistance in building a larger facility.

Planned were a 418-seat theater, a 10,000 square-foot library and 16,000 square feet of classrooms. Estimated cost was \$555,000. GDC escrowed three acres of land, later increased to five acres, on Aaron Street between Gertrude and Stillwater to be deeded when a building fund reached \$325,000. (The building contract was eventually awarded to Rowe and Mitchell Company of Sarasota.)

The project gained momentum in July 1967 when the county Board of Public Instruction agreed to assume complete operational control of all adult education in Charlotte County and to help underwrite the proposed building.

Private donations were small despite citywide donations of Green Stamps, then a popular cash-rebate promotion on purchases from many retail stores.



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Cultural Center of Charlotte County in 1968.

In all, \$30,000 was collected. From a bond program in 1967, PCU was granted \$200,000, a federal library grant was given and eventually the goal of \$325,000 was reached. There was a grand opening and dedication of the complex on Jan. 6, 1968.

In the 45 years since its formation, the Cultural Center has expanded 13 times. During 2000-2002, it was completely remodeled with everything being brought up to current building codes. The Conference Center was also added at that time.

Present

According to their website www.theculturalcenter.com, there are 12,000 different events every year. Rightly so, it is called "the place that friendship built."

Besides the many classes, seminars and theater events which are advertised the second and fourth Friday of the month in an insert to the Charlotte Sun, there are other resources which may not be as well known.

The Senior Resource Center is an important place for folks to go and learn what's in the community that will meet their needs. Different nonprofits share information there about

such things as senior abuse, financial problems and home foreclosures. It's a trusted place to go because it is housed at the Cultural Center and is supported by United Way.

Another service from the Cultural Center is free transportation for necessary travel in Charlotte County to such places as doctor's offices and grocery stores. Charlotte County gave the Cultural Center a vehicle for this use and volunteer drivers perform the task.

Unknown to many is the fact that AARP has a room at the Cultural Center and works with Florida residents of Charlotte County with free income tax service. They start taking appointments in January.

The Cultural Center is a private 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization. The nonprofit runs the building and pays all its expenses. The building itself was donated to Charlotte County to insure sustainability and it takes responsibility for the outside of the building. All money raised goes back into the events and activities. The Cultural Center does not receive any government funding for support of their programs.

"The concept for the Cultural Center," says Barrett, "is to provide enriching activities for the community. It is not just hyperbole: there is no other place like this in the nation." She also says, "Bored is never a word we hear around here!"

General Development Corporation

A history of the Cultural Center could not be complete without a brief history of General Development Corporation.

The name GDC is used alternately with the Mackle brothers, for it was that family who originally were GDC. The first known migration of the Mackle family occurred during the Irish potato famine of the mid 1800s. So the story of the Mackle family in the United States began, as so many immigrant American success stories do, with a long sea voyage in the late 1800s.

Frank Mackle Sr., the father of the brothers Elliot, Robert and Frank Jr. who developed Port Charlotte, was one of the children on that ship. The brothers founded GDC in 1954 and it became one of the largest land

development companies in Florida.

During the '60s and '70s, sales teams competed up North for the real estate dollar of the soon-to-be-retired. The aging populations of northern cities shuffled to Port Charlotte to live in their "cracker boxes" and enjoy Florida. Many neighborhoods remain from these early days, including some very desirable waterfront properties.

Marco Island, Key Biscayne and North Port are among the other communities that owe their existence to the Mackle brothers' insight and planning.

As each community started, the developer built the roads, sewer and water plants, golf courses, marinas and other basic amenities. There was a money back guarantee on homes and lots. This was a powerful sales tool and combined with the ability to swap remote lots for lots in the developed areas; this allowed GDC to achieve tremendous sales success, selling several thousand lots each month and several hundred homes.

Flora Ashley of Port Charlotte says that her parents, Caleb and Ada, heard about the General Development plan when they lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. Her uncle introduced them to the concept in the mid '70s and both families came down to take a look. They liked what they saw and signed on. Their houses had the same floor plan, three bedrooms, two baths, lanai and a covered carport, but the exteriors were different. Flora remembers that her parents came down to get the keys when the house was finished. She doesn't remember the details, but she says financing wasn't difficult.

During that era GDC promoted a "Southward Ho" incentive. For a \$350 deposit, the company provided a four-day, three-night buying trip that included round trip air fare, motel room and meals for a couple. Prices for some models began at \$19,995.

Land development was not the only interest of the Mackle family; they loved racing and thoroughbred horses. Robert Sr. never owned a horse; this was not so for the sons. Throughout the 1950s, they raced from six to 12 horses at a time. The brothers owned and operated the Elkcam farm and Elkcam Stables, located first near Lexington, Ky. and then in Highlands County, Fla. As with many things, it was dad who brought the real enthusiasm and direction to the undertaking. And while, overall, there was a lot more disappointment than achievement in horse racing, it was a passion of his life.

There is an Elkcam Boulevard in Port Charlotte and one might notice that Elkcam is Mackle spelled backward.

The Cultural Center of Charlotte County is located at 2280 Aaron Street in Port Charlotte. Call 941-625-4175 for information about their programs.

ONGOING EVENTS

Flea Market - 1st and 3rd Saturday of every month, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Fountain Room. If vendors are interested in signing up, spaces are \$15 for the day, with a 10-percent discount for signing up for the month. For more information, please call 941-625-4175 ext 253.

Open Market - Every Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., there is an open market for all vendors, business and anyone who has anything to sell, held in the Fountain Room of the Cultural Center. Tables are \$15 for the day, with a 10-percent discount if you sign up for the month. For more information, call 941-625-4175 ext 253.

— Source, www.theculturalcenter.com



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SUN PHOTOS BY BARBABRA HUFF

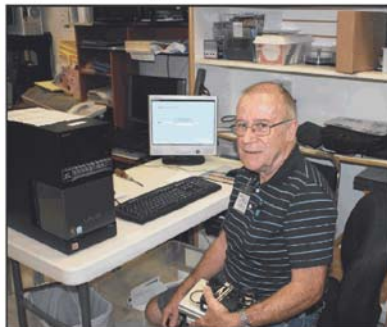
The dulcimer group is just one of many musical groups which meet at the Cultural Center. This group meets in the open space near the various retail shops. There are usually about 24 players and include guitar and harmonica players. Donna Barrett, sales and marketing manager says, "Music and arts — and laughter — completely fill the place." Group piano and guitar lessons are also offered. The Cultural Center is not just for retired citizens. There are youth choruses as well as individual instrument lessons for kids and adults.



Although the Port Charlotte Library is not a part of the Cultural Center, (it's a Charlotte County entity) there has always been a library associated with the Cultural Center. It is right next door to the Learning Center and many people refer to it as the Cultural Center Library. Staff members: Claudia Richardson, Hannah Bowman, Patti Raisch, Hana Brown, Renee Hughes and Liz Harrison. Claudia Richardson is also a member of the Parkside Development committee and displays artists renditions of the planned project.



The Chinese game, mahjong, is one of the many games which folk gather to play at the Cultural Center. Others include chess, pinochle, duplicate bridge, bingo and scrabble.



LEFT: Harold Nixon, president of the Charlotte County Computer Group Corporation. The Computer Group takes the computers donated to them and to the Cultural Center and is certified by Windows to clean out the computers. They then work with the Charlotte County Public Schools to give computers to children who do not have a computer at home. None of these computers are resold.



There are four staff members and from one to five volunteers who help prepare the meals for the Midtown Deli Café. From left are, Ashley Williams, short line cook; Chris Cooper, food service manager; Anna Matschat, volunteer; Wayne Baldwin, banquet chef; Gert Iverson, who has been a volunteer for 20 years. A sample breakfast might include an omelet for \$5.50, a bagel for \$1.25 and a cup of coffee for \$.60. Or perhaps a bowl of oatmeal for \$1.95 and two slices of toast for \$1.25. For lunch, one might choose a small salad bar and a 1/2 cold sandwich for \$4.95.



Ted Robedee is the Fitness Salon manager. He is helping Anita Watson on her first day of using the facility. Watson says that she lives just across the street from the Cultural Center and through the years has eaten at the café and attended meetings and seminars.



Jim Hageman, besides being the Executive Director of the Cultural Center is also on the board of the Parkside project. Hageman has been active with the Cultural Center for over 27 years, first serving on the board of trustees. He became Executive Director in 2005.

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Boys & Girls Club offers after school care



The computer room is a favorite of these students Paige van deer Weide, 7, Sade Romain, 10, Raelynn Ruger, 10, and Jacob Gruber, 11, who are among the more than 100 children who participate in the Boys & Girls Club of Charlotte County afterschool program at the Gibraltar Drive center.



SUN PHOTOS BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Jackie Malenzi, 10, Jagger Moody, 9, and Trea Taylor, 9, check out the game corner.



Tyler Sanchez, 9, Wesley Amboyan, 7, Spencer Eggers, 6, and Carline Stiffler, 8, have a whole wall of books, tapes and movies to choose from.



Arellius Perry, 9, finds homework time a good time to read.



Students from area public schools are bused to the center on Gibraltar for the afterschool program that also offers affordable spring, winter and summer camps.

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The newest addition to the Boys & Girls Club of Charlotte County on Gibraltar Drive is a colorful playground.

Family Services Center offers residents opportunities

By **CHRISTY FEINBERG**
SENIOR WRITER

The Family Services Center symbolizes Parkside: a community willing to do what it can to help its neighbors. Charlotte County bought the 28,000-square-foot, one-time church, located at 21450 Gibraltar Drive, in 2005. The original vision was for a youth center.

"We can't address the needs of the youth without looking at the entire family," said Emily Lewis, manager of the Family Services Division.

Nine agencies currently occupy space at the Family Services Center facility: Boys & Girls Club, Family Literacy Center, Florida Center for Early Childhood Education, Hearing Impaired Persons, Experience Works, Guardian Ad Litem, Children's Advocacy Center, Solstice Consumer Services and the Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Community Clinic.

"We're one of the best-kept secrets," Lewis said.

The Boys & Girls Club uses the area where people once attended church services. Desks and chairs have replaced pews. There is a library with shelves filled with books, all of which was built by local Girl Scouts. There is a computer lab as well.

Outside is a butterfly garden as well as a community garden.

"We have a waiting list of residents who want to garden," Lewis said. Residents can rent a large garden box for \$20 a year, or a half-box for \$10, and plant whatever vegetables or flowers they choose. There are plans to expand the garden so additional residents can enjoy the hobby.

"All of the residents get to know each other," Lewis said. "They really do work together."

While residents work in their gardens, there are others upstairs learning to read or working toward their GED through the Family Literacy Center, while older neighbors may be in Experience Works trying to gain skills needed to find a job. Still others may be obtaining hearing assistance equipment from HIP.

Safety has been a concern in Parkside for several years.

The Gibraltar Drive facility has a fence surrounding it, and Charlotte County Sheriff's regularly patrol the area.

"We've put a lot of effort to make this as sound and secure as we can," Lewis said.

For more information on the Family Services Center, go to www.charlottecountyfl.com/HumanServices/FamilyServices/ or call 941-235-0159.

Email: cfeinberg@sun-herald.com



SUN PHOTOS BY CHRISTY FEINBERG, cfeinberg@sun-herald.com

The community garden outside the Family Services Center will expand, providing residents with additional gardening opportunities.



The Family Services Center provides many services to Charlotte County, but especially to those in the Parkside community.



Girl Scouts built this library for the Boys & Girls Club, which meets at the Family Services Center in the Parkside community.




Emily Lewis, manager of the Family Services Division, looks at some vegetables in the community garden.

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Promenades Mall played a big role in Port Charlotte history

By **BARBARA PIERCE**
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Mention the Promenades Mall, and many Port Charlotte residents will give you a blank look. Mention "The mall with Beall's and Winn-Dixie," they immediately know just what you are talking about.

But things were different in the past. "Promenades Mall was a big thing," said Bill Wharton. "It was the only place to shop in Port Charlotte."

As a young married couple, Bill and Charlotte Wharton moved from Gainesville to Charlotte Harbor in 1969. At that time, there was only a Winn-Dixie and a pharmacy at the location on Tamiami Trail at Harbor Boulevard. "There was nothing in Murdock at all. We had to go to Edison Mall in Fort Myers to shop before Promenades Mall opened," added Charlotte.

"Promenades Mall was the focal point of Port Charlotte for many years," said Dave Lambert, manager of the Radio Shack at Promenades. The Radio Shack in Promenades Mall opened in 1976, making it the longest-running small business still in operation.

The Promenades Mall opened in 1973. Winn-Dixie, Qwik Chek, and Neisner's Variety Store were major attractions, along with several small businesses.

"There was opposition to the new mall," said Wharton. "People objected to a new mall built of rustic timber. They didn't like the rustic look."

In 1976, a fire in a lawn mower

repair shop burned down all the little stores, explained Ron Pitris, who grew up in the area. The rebuilt mall included Radio Shack, Eckert's drugs, Beall's, a movie theater, ice cream store, J. Byron's (an upscale clothing store), a record shop, an ice cream store, a movie theater, a plant store, Hallmark cards, and the Sweet Water Lounge.

"Business was booming then," said Lambert of Radio Shack. Lambert became manager of Radio Shack in 1999. "Our entrance faced Eckert's. We 'husband-sat' while wives shopped at Eckert's."

The Promenades Mall boomed during the 80s and the 90s. It was the place for locals to shop, the place for teens to hang out. "If you had a car, you drove around Promenades," said Ron Pitris. "You drove around the back to see who was at the movies. If no one was there, you kept driving." Pitris is now the manager of Deb's Dollar Store, which has been in the Promenades for five years.

"Driving your car around the Promenades was the coolest thing," confirmed T.J. Koontz. "In our cars, we all met at the theater and drove up to where Hillsborough is now. There was nothing else to do."

Koontz' father owned Cobb Cinema, where Koontz worked. It was a big deal that they showed two movies at one time. Koontz also worked at several other stores at the mall, including the ice cream shop, the comic book store and the candy store. Koontz now owns TJ's CD's and more, just across the street from the Promenades Mall.

As it was the only place to shop in



HERALD PHOTO BY BARBARA PIERCE

Promenades Mall in the 1970s.

Port Charlotte, the Mall was important in his life. "I even bought my first wife her diamond here," he said.

It was called Promenades Mall as the expectation was that people could promenade around the outside, Koontz explained. "But this is Florida — that really didn't work."

With the expansion of many businesses throughout Port Charlotte, and the opening of Port Charlotte Town Center mall, businesses left Promenades Mall.

Hurricane Charley in 2004 took out more businesses. Radio Shack closed after the hurricane, and did not reopen in 2007. Other businesses closed, and did not reopen. Business in the mall slacked off.

In 2011, In-Rel-Properties purchased Promenades Mall. They revitalized the Promenades, breathing new life into the dying mall.

Also in 2011, Winn-Dixie unveiled the renovation that made it an

attractive, state-of-the-art store.

"We're happy here. We like it a lot," said Mary Magagnos, RN, Manager of Hope Health Care Services which has been located in the back of the mall for two years. Hope provides specialized care for people with complex needs related to life-changing illness.

"Business is much better since they remodeled the mall," said Mike Ngyuen of Le Nails and Spa. Ngyuen's business has been there for five years. He explained that walk-in traffic to his business has increased since In-Rel upgraded the appearance of the mall.

Business has also increased at Deb's Dollar Store, said Pitris. He has been pleased to see the improvements that In-Rel and Winn-Dixie brought.

"Don't forget about the middle," advised Pitris. "Yes, there's Winn-Dixie and there's Beall's, but we're here too. Check out the middle!"

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Variety of businesses thrive in the Promenades Mall



SUN PHOTOS BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Of the 33 years in the Port Charlotte area, Stephen E. Chiarello, M.D., P.A. Dermatology and Skin Cancer Center's office has been located in the Promenades Mall for the past 20 years, making his office the longest tenant on record today. Staff members include Marilyn Tetraut, Kristie Casarella, Tina Good, Stephen Chiarello, Dianne Kozienleski and office manager Lee Mathewson.



Le Nails & Spa managed by Mike Nguyen, who along with his wife Mary, their niece Lily Nguyen, Hannah Le and other staff members, have been serving the community for the past five years at the Promenades Mall.



Tiarra Ganster, training manager Eric Gullizio, Bryce Neff, Samantha Johnson, You Fit Health Club manager Dan Bingham, Joey Chrisman and training manager Jason Woods, are a few of the staff members at YouFit, 3280 Tamiami Trail, Suite 23 in the Promenades Mall.



Debbie Wood opened her store four years ago. Deb's Store in Suite 40A now offers both retail and consignment items.



Fantastic Sams is a franchise owned and operated by Rhonda Mongeon since 2007. Tracy Geddes, Mongeon and Lisa Meyers are among the hair stylists who work in the salon.



Winn-Dixie Manager Jeff Pouk, Front End Manager Stacy Ross, Chef Bobby Sanne and Assistant Culinary Manager Rob Lamoreaux are just a few staff members who represent the Promenades Winn-Dixie that recently went under a complete facelift.

LEFT: New to the mall is the Freedom Room Ministry in Suite 32 with Pastors Marc and Tabitha Miller.



Date: Mar 17, 2013; Section: Parkside; Page: PK16



SUN FILE PHOTO BY DELORES SAIAS

Staff members of Samsom Vacuum and Appliances are, from left, Robert Covert, Jerry Lindberg and owner Paul Froschle. They service all makes and models of vacuums and also carry the Miele line of specialty vacuums. Samsom Vacuum and Appliances is located at 3500 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. Hours of operations are 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 941-629-2216 or visit samsomvacuum.com.



SUN FILE PHOTO BY SHIRLEY GEORGE

Owner Carol Diczak poses with one of many peace sign items in her shop, Down to Earth Apparel and Gifts, 2792 C Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. The store is open from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday to Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday. For more information, call 941-623-6642.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

From left, Raguel Ebersole and owner Julie Dunham of The Children's Closet offer "pre-loved kid's stuff" at 3826 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 941-743-8014.



SUN FILE PHOTO BY DELORES SAIAS

Richard's Fredgourmet employees include Russell Bantz, Jane Berger, Andy McCannan, Craig and Betty Morgan, Aron Bishop and Danielle Gwin. They specialize natural and bulk foods. Originally located in the Promenade shopping center, they are now located at 3012 N Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-766-6196.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

Nancy Olson owns and operates Cats n Dogs, playful staff for humans and the animals who adore them, located at 2826 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-276-1176.



Parkside Community Redevelopment Area 2011 Aerial Overview Charlotte County Government



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

Unity Medical employees from left, in the first row are: Anita Wilson, Debbie Bangardner and Maureen Dondinger; in the second row are Pat McIntosh, Lisa Whiting, Susan Bertoni and Leroy Enery; and in the third row are Paul Varvok, Jimmy Chance and Wayne Perry. The store offers oxygen, respiratory and diabetic supplies and other medical equipment. Unity Medical is located at 2814 Tamiami Trail next to the Suncoast Plaza in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-225-1840 or visit www.unityhse.net.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

From left, Edward Jones financial advisor Jim Fendrick, administrative assistant Kathryn Wells and financial advisor Jim Spreng are ready to help you with your investing needs at their Edward Jones office located at 21224 Ocean Blvd, Suite 28 in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-743-4121.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

Luis Cardenas is manager of El Paisano Latin Market located in the Suncoast Plaza at 3396 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. El Paisano not only specializes in produce and Latin foods, but they can also wire money, take Boost mobile phone payments and offer Best Buy Revolution phone cards. They are open from 9:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 9:30 to 3 p.m. Sundays. For more information, call 941-766-1967.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

From left, Jackie Bouscos, Charlie Hart along with owners Viviane and Ramaldo Di Majo are ready to help you with all your floral needs at Georgia Flower Shop, located at 21156 Ocean Blvd. in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-625-4355 or visit www.georgiasflowershop.com.



SUN FILE PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

The Hair Studio has been open for 20 years. From left, Morgan Ruben, Bridgett, Miranda Mandrekar, owner Diana Reeves, Karla Rojas, Amy Johnson, Donna Moore and Jackie Smalley all work together to make Port Charlotte women beautiful. The Hair Studio is located at 3826 Tamiami Trail Suite B on the access road in Port Charlotte. For more information or to make an appointment, call 941-624-4242.



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

Diana Coary and John Lewis from Mariner's Trading offers boating supplies on consignment, nautical decor, scuba and fishing equipment. They also have a bill room and a shell room for all your beach-related decorating needs. Mariner's Trading is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at 3822 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-629-1341 or visit www.marinerstrading.com.

Parkside businesses thrive in Port Charlotte



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

From left, Jessy Harding and owner Dee Dee Belcher are ready to outfit your teen in the latest upscale fashions for a fraction of the cost at Forever Young consignment shop located at 2826 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte. Forever Young is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 941-743-0004 or visit www.foreveryoungofportcharlotte.com.



SUN PHOTO BY ROBERT NELSON

Sue Chocianowski and owner Linda Empey are hairstylists at Sheers, located at 21234 Olean Blvd. in the Parkside district of Port Charlotte. The full-service salon is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and evenings by appointment. For more information, call 941-625-6779.

SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES



From left, Phillip Krum and owner Robin Donham are ready to help custom frame or shadowbox your treasures at Tamiami Art & Frame, located at 21234 Olean Blvd. in Port Charlotte. They also offer photo restoration and giclees. Tamiami Art & Frame is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 941-629-8888 or visit www.tamiiamiartandframe.com.

Businesses on the edge of Parkside



PHOTO PROVIDED

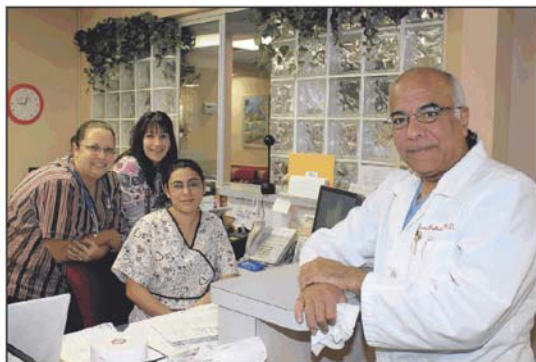
From left, Stephanie Lawrence and Gayle Fetherlin run House of Subs in the Bell Plaza, 2395 Tamiami Trail, #13 in Port Charlotte. They are open Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and on Saturday 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, call 941-629-5898.



SUN FILE PHOTO BY ROBERT NELSON

From left, Yoga at Periwinkle Place owners Virginia Williamson has been practicing yoga for 22 years and teaching in Southwest Florida for 15 years. Vibha Kumar has been practicing yoga for 20 years and teaching for 17. Yoga at Periwinkle Place is located at 2605 Tamiami Trail in Port Charlotte and offers free meditation classes every Monday morning at 7:30 a.m. and Wednesdays at 3:30 p.m. For more information, contact Kumar at 941-855-0231 or Williamson at 941-380-5845.

Medical offices provide health care in Parkside



HERALD PHOTOS BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Staff members Brianna Hard, Tara Troyano and Shiela Momeni with Dr. David S. Ballestas MD provide health care in Suite 102 at the Medical Pavillion Walk-in Clinic located at 2525 Harbor Blvd. in Port Charlotte.



Two-year-old Bryson Casagranda sits on the lap of his mother, Kelly Kartz and visits with Bettianne Jones, office manager for Dr. Rhona S. Holganza, pediatrician, who was with another patient. The Children's Quality Care office is located in Suite 204, at 2525 Harbor Blvd. in Port Charlotte.



RIGHT: The Medical Pavillion Walk-in Clinic is located next to Fawcett Memorial Hospital and across the street from Peace River Regional Hospital.



Dr. Artaro Rodriguez-Martin, MD and his staff members, Deniece Jozefick, Itzel Kauffman and Serena Maher are located on the third floor in Suite 301, 2525 Harbor Blvd. in Port Charlotte.

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Peace River Regional aims to be a hospital with heart

By **BOB MASSEY**
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

You'd be hard-pressed to tell that Peace River Regional Medical Center (PRRMC) is the second-oldest hospital in Charlotte County.

From its founding by a nonprofit Catholic organization, the hospital — at 2500 Harbor Blvd., Port Charlotte — has been revitalized and prospered under its most recent owners, the for-profit Health Management Associates (HMA). With a recently constructed dedicated cardiac facility and the acquisition of cutting-edge robotic surgical equipment, PRRMC is vying to stake a claim as the county's most technologically advanced health care facility — which is a far cry from its beginnings.

Humble origins

PRRMC was established in 1962 as St. Joseph Hospital by the Felician Sisters — a Catholic congregation founded in 1855 that migrated to the United States about 20 years later. The fledgling facility had 50 patient beds to serve a county of about 12,600 residents. There were only four physicians associated with St. Joe's, as it came to be known — three of them full time, one part time.

It was only a small, one-story community hospital, but it served its purpose, and was a cornerstone for the expansions that would come later.

By 1984, the county had grown considerably — and so had the hospital, adding a patient tower. A day surgery unit, cardiac catheterization unit and operating room suites were additions made in 1992.

But it was in 1987 that collaboration began with another Catholic organization — the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris, France — a congregation founded even earlier than the Felicians in 1824, which came to the United States in 1881. With their help, the hospital became the 212-bed Bon Secours-St. Joseph Hospital. Through this merger, the nearby Nursing Care Center (then called the Life Enrichment Center) was founded.

The years 1997-2002 saw even more services added, largely due to the hospital's foundation and its fundraising efforts. Refurbishment of patient care and clinical areas and numerous other programs were just some of the results.

Perhaps the most significant addition was the Care-A-Van program, in which volunteer physicians provided free care in both rural and urban areas through this mobile health clinic, serving more than 11,600 patients during its first three years.

As monumental as these changes were in their way to this community, 2005 marked a milestone that would catapult the hospital into the future.

Seeing the strengths

That was the year Bon Secours-St. Joseph Hospital was acquired by HMA. Renaming it Peace River Regional Medical Center, the company began investing in cutting-edge technology and expanding the facility's services. In the past five years, HMA has poured more than \$30 million into the hospital for facility and service improvements.

Now an acute care, full-service hospital with 254 patient beds, PRRMC has expanded its service area beyond Charlotte into Sarasota and DeSoto counties as well. The hospital treated more than 72,000 patients in 2011 alone.

At present, PRRMC boasts the only:
• Licensed obstetric and pediatric units — as well as Level II neonatal intensive care unit — in Charlotte County. More than 1,150 babies have been delivered at PRRMC.

• Fellowship-trained bariatric surgeon in Charlotte County.
• Physician board-certified and fellowship-trained in emergency pediatric medicine in the area.



SUN PHOTO BY BOB MASSEY

The dedicated Heart Institute is one of the hospital's most notable service areas.

• Center to diagnose and treat balance disorders using the Neurocom EquiTest in the area.

"The hospital is doing well," said Ricky Satcher, Market CEO for both PRRMC and its sister HMA-owned facility, Charlotte Regional Medical Center. "I see the strength here in women's services through our obstetrics and gynecology services and through the pediatrics that we provide. Our neonatologists here are actually out of the All Children's Hospital system. Those are things I see as very exciting."

Most recently, PRRMC has acquired a da Vinci Robotic Surgical System.

"We have the da Vinci, which is primarily cutting its place in medicine for neurological procedures, gynecological procedures and — kind of a new area for the da Vinci — general surgery," Satcher said. "In addition to the da Vinci here, we also have the Mako robot, which is specifically designed for orthopedic procedures, knee replacements, those types of procedures."

Satcher said he is also excited about PRRMC's new affiliation with the Shands/University of Florida health system.

"What we have done, both through our corporation and our individual facility, is we have executed an affiliation agreement which makes it easier to work with Shands and access their telemedicine capabilities, as well as resources that would be available to our medical staff to access research trials, clinical articles, etc.," he said. "In those cases that our physicians deem appropriate, if we have cases they believe are best served at a tertiary center like a Shands, we'll have the ability to transfer those patients there or access information from Shands to help us care for those patients here."

However, the recent development that stands out the most is the "heart tower" — the 50,000-square-foot building addition housing the Heart Institute — and the increased cardiovascular services.

A hospital at heart

At one time, Charlotte Regional Medical Center was considered to be the top cardiac hospital in the county. That changed when the lion's share of its services and staff was relocated to PRRMC just a little over a year ago.

"We continue to see the cardiovascular services grow, particularly with the capital commitment the company made in building the new heart tower," Satcher said.

"This will be a cardiovascular facility for the area well into the foreseeable future."

The new Heart Institute is the only full-service cardiac center in Charlotte County. It includes:

- A 19-bed cardiovascular intensive care unit
- 16-bed post interventional cardiac cath unit
- 8-bed pre/post interventional cardiac holding unit
- Three open-heart surgery suites.

While all the services and technology are impressive, one of PRRMC's greatest strengths is its impact on the community.

Caring community

Consider that the hospital employs about 900 staff members, paying out more than \$44 million in wages and benefits in 2011. That year, it also



PHOTO PROVIDED

Peace River Regional Medical Center.



SUN PHOTO BY BOB MASSEY

The staff of the neonatal intensive care unit, specially trained to deal with infants in distress.



SUN PHOTO BY BOB MASSEY

Stephen Flanders, director of Environmental Services, has his staff in the Heart Institute fold patients' towels to look like swans.

provided more than \$50 million in uncompensated care and paid more than \$1.4 million in taxes in 2011.

In addition to the staff, PRRMC is affiliated with more than 300 physicians representing more than 40 specialties — not to mention the more than 200 volunteers who donate thousands of service hours each year.

Through community donations, immunizations (such as low-cost flu shots), health fairs/screenings, indigent care and charitable offerings, the hospital contributes more than \$4 million in benefits for the area each year, and pays nearly \$10 million in taxes.

Community outreach initiatives include support groups, health fairs, free or low-cost health screenings for prostate, diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, skin cancer, respiratory,

osteoporosis and cardiac risk factors. CuddleBugs childbirth and parenting classes provide parents with skills in infant CPR, sibling preparation and breastfeeding. Senior Extra, a program for older residents, offers events, screenings and discounts from area merchants.

In 2011, fundraising initiatives garnered nearly \$15,000 for organizations such as United Way, March of Dimes, American Heart Association and American Cancer Society. In addition, nearly \$130,000 in sponsorships were donated to the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition, both county high schools, Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Community Clinic and the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. All told, PRRMC is a hospital that seems to have its finger on the pulse of its community.

Parkside Neighborhood Watch helps stabilize the community

By DELORES SAVAS
SUN CORRESPONDENT

When Hurricane Charley hit Charlotte County in 2004 it devastated the area. One particular location that was once known as the Medical Arts District, circled by Midway Boulevard and the Yale waterways, U.S. 41 and the Morningstar Waterway was already in disarray.

Homes that were already over 50 years old were destroyed or left with many needed repairs when Hurricane Charley hit in 2004. In an area comprised of 1100 acres, with 2,910 single-family homes, the homes were either abandoned, rented with no supervision, or foreclosed on due to the economy. The growing blight was evident. One way that was found to help this community was to start a Neighborhood Watch Patrols seven designated areas of Parkside.

Dale Phillips a specialist with CCSO Crime Prevention Unit along with DFC William Miller, Community Policing Services, worked tirelessly to get the Neighborhood Watch program off the ground in the Parkside area with input and help from concerned citizens in the area.

Miller said, "Parkside is a hidden jewel; we are all trying to bring its sparkle back."

For the past two years the Neighborhood Watch Patrol units have grown to over 120 volunteers. Miller said, "They are the eyes and ears of the community and report suspicious activity back to us. Through their efforts we have solved and prevented crime in the area."

Mary Ann Bosco, zone captain of zone 4 the newest Neighborhood Watch group, "The Double E's" which represents the eyes and ears of the community started in 2012; it covers 23 blocks with approximately 25 volunteers. Bosco said, "I believe Neighborhood Watch Patrol helps make residents more secure by patrolling the area. I want to make my home and neighborhood a safe place to live. We want to bring out the spirit and sense of Community. It is important that the citizens themselves make it a community effort."

Bosco said, "With the help of Co-Captain Don Turpin patrols are scheduled and made daily and nightly. Approximately 300-500 homes are in Zone 4. We are provided with vests, T-shirts and flashlights. NWP signs are also posted in the area."

A Neighborhood Watch Patrol Instruction sheet with 11 do's and don'ts for all volunteers from the CCSO are also given to all volunteers. Plus Neighborhood Watch signs are posted in the area.

Sandee Pellerin, captain of the Neighborhood Watch Patrol in Zone 3 said, "I joined to make this a better community. I have lived here for 30 years and have seen the changes. I wanted to help and try and bring back the community to what it once was. Everyone knew one another, there was community spirit."

There are approximately 600 homes in Zone 3 — one of the largest zones. Patrols are also made on a daily basis and all suspicious activity is reported. "Many people now look forward to us driving or walking by. This is a worthwhile



PHOTO BY DELORES SAVAS

DFC William Miller works with all Neighborhood Watch Patrols.

program. I have seen the changes. There was even a home sale in the area instead of a rental. We have to be thankful to Phillips and Miller for all their help. They go above and beyond in helping with instructions and information." Pellerin said.

Miller who, regularly patrols Parkside on his outfitted bike was recently named Law Enforcement officer of the year said Charlotte County Sheriff Bill Prummell, who has directed that officers become

more visible to the community. "I have the better of two worlds while riding my bike. I get to meet people, watch the ongoing development and investigate crimes. The Neighborhood Watch Patrols have been a great asset to the community," said Miller. "They have made a big difference."

Anyone interested in becoming a Volunteer with a Neighborhood Watch Patrol unit may call the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office 941-639-2101 and ask for Dale Phillips.

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Big shows for small prices at the Cultural Center

By BARBARA HUFF
SUN CORRESPONDENT

Although most people think of the Theater at the Cultural Center as a place to go for entertainment and fun, there are 250 families who remember it as a place of refuge during a storm. In August 2004, when Hurricane Charley hit Charlotte County, the theater temporarily housed these displaced folks.

"Not only were we taking care of people, but we were affected as well," says Patty Tooker, theater manager. Not only was the building severely damaged, but the properties of the volunteers and staff who helped in this emergency were also damaged.

Tooker is a native of Port Charlotte pursuing a degree in theater from the University of West Georgia. For the last seven years, she has been working in the music and theater industry by running sound, lights and managing stages. She feels it's important to know one's business from behind the scenes, to in front of the scenes, to gain a good appreciation for the job. Tooker can occasionally be seen in the tech booth as a sound engineer or controlling the lights.

Other theater staff include: Richie Jasinski, sound engineer; Jim Jones, technical director; Lynda Jones, house manager; and Roger Meunier, spotlight operator.

The theater houses all types of shows and events all year long ranging from musicians, comedians, authors, inspirational speakers, religious and conference-style events. Throughout the year, the Cultural Center sponsors a variety of local groups including the monthly Dinner Theater Series, the Charlotte County Big Band, the Charlotte County Concert Band and Cul-Cen Productions.

Brenda Lee, Mickey Rooney, Daryle Singletary, Dan Toler, the Mills Brothers and Gene Watson are just a few of the big names to perform at the theater. In March 2012, Stephen King held a question and answer session on the stage of the theater. Betty Ford has also been on stage there and there was a presentation on "Who Shot JFK?"

Tooker says that the affordable ticket prices at the theater are important to the community. She says that many of the same shows that are presented here for \$10-\$15 would cost \$40-\$50 in other places.

Upcoming events in the theater include The Carol and Johnnie Variety Show, Sunday March 24 at 7 p.m. According to the advertising, Johnnie and Carol will bring you back to the good ol' days of music, comedy, imperfections with a little ventriloquism thrown in for good measure.

There will also be a tribute to the



SUN PHOTOS BY BARBARA HUFF

Concert Band attendees wait in line at the box office to purchase their tickets. Although most of the license plates in the parking lot at a recent Concert Band performance were from Florida, there was a vast array of vehicles representing Charlotte County's winter residents. They included: Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Manitoba, Ontario, Massachusetts, Ohio, Maryland, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire and Minnesota. The Cultural Center of Charlotte County attracts Northerners to spend winters here in Port Charlotte.



Patty Tooker is the theater manager at the Cultural Center.

great ladies of country music featuring the hit songs of Dolly Parton, Reba McEntyre, Tammy Wynette and Patsy Cline as well as a special appearance by "Cousin Minnie Pearl." Tickets are \$10.

Another sure-to-please performance at the theater will be "Back Home Again — A Tribute to John Denver," on Thursday March 28 at 7 p.m. This one-night-only performance stars Tom Becker. His show in March 2012 was a sell-out, so reserve your tickets, which cost \$18, early.

The theater at the Cultural Center is also home of Cul Cen Productions,

UPCOMING EVENTS

Shows and events at the Cultural Center for March includes the following:

- **St. Paddy's Day Dinner** — 5:15 p.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday, March 17
- **Dixieland Jazz Night: Bob Leary and Sextet** — 7 p.m., Monday, March 18
- **Sounds of the Stage & Screen** — 2 p.m., Sunday, March 24
- **The Carol and Johnnie Variety Show** — 7 p.m., Sunday, March 24
- **Charlotte County Big Band presents A USO Tour Tribute to Toronto** — 7 p.m., Monday, March 25

The box office is located at 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte or call 941-625-4175 ext. 221 to purchase tickets over the phone.



DeVere A. Fader has been the conductor of the Charlotte Concert Band for the past two years. His wife Candy says, "He has been a band director all his adult life." He has been a high school teacher and marching band leader in Michigan. More recently, he was the director of the North Port Concert Band for 10 years and also a band director in Boca Raton. Besides conducting, he writes all the scripts for the announcer, Dick Weber, to read. He researches all the composers and songs to give the audience the extra information and nuances to make the music more enjoyable and understandable. The next performance of the Charlotte County Concert Band is on Sunday, March 24 at 2 p.m. The theme of the concert is, "Sounds of the Stage and Screen."



Kathi Orr of Lake Placid, Fla., plays saxophone in the Charlotte County Concert Band. She is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University with a major in K-12 music education. She teaches K-5 music at Lake Placid Elementary School. She and about four other band members come from the Avon Park area to play in this distinctive band.

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which is an all-volunteer performing group which has been a part of the Cultural Center Theater's annual schedule for more than 29 years.

Cul Cen Productions has recently appointed Jim Reuter to the position of music director and program coordinator for the 2013 season. Reuter served as an accompanist for Cul Cen Productions for the past four years. He is also the minister of music at Peace River Baptist Church in Punta Gorda. Reuter is well known in the Port Charlotte area for his musical abilities.

Cul Cen Productions will begin rehearsals for the 2013 season Oct. 1. The theme for this year's performances is "A Tribute to Broadway." Rehearsals are held from 6-9 p.m. Monday and Thursday at The Cultural Center of Charlotte County.

Vocalists who would like to join this volunteer choral group are invited to contact Carol Sheets at carol_alan_sheets@yahoo.com or Becky Merriman at BeckyMerriman@comcast.net (Use Cul Cen Productions in the subject line.)

Tickets for events and performances can be purchased in person at the Cultural Center box office or information desk from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday; online at www.theculturalcenter.com/theater or by phone at 941-625-4175 ext. 221. For other questions or information, call the Cultural Center at 941-625-4175 or visit their home website. The Theater at the Cultural Center is located at 2280 Aaron Street, Port Charlotte.



FILE PHOTOS BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Members of the Ingroov Band performed at The Big Easy New Orleans celebration held Feb. 20 at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County.



"A Tribute to The Beatles" followed by an overwhelming performance by Zstonez (also the Nowhere Band) featured the entertaining "Mick Jagger" from The Rolling Stones. The Nowhere Band brought back memories of the '60s and '70s as they performed at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County, Feb. 4, with Donavon Christenson as "George," Steve Lavalley as "Paul," Chuck Noonan as "John," David Radford as "Ringo" and backup Karkey Karkalits on keyboards. Here, "John Lennon" sings "Imagine."



RIGHT: Being pursued by her neighbor Henry Mitchell (Steve Pignataro) brings out multiple emotions from Mrs. Standliffe (Jeanne Marquez), Rose Cottage Bed & Breakfast owner during "Sex Please, We're Sixty," a comedy by Michael and Susan Parker and directed by Herb Berry. The performance ran for two weekends in January at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County theater.



Cul Cen Productions staged their annual show on stage at the Cultural Center theater in early February. This year's show, "A Tribute to Broadway" included a variety of song, dance and acts from various Broadway shows. The Forever Young Tappers — Phyllis Stanzione, Mary Chicoine, Judy Stafford, Belinda Seusy, Trisha Calvik, Maryanne Remer, Ruth "Booboo" Schuebel, Penny Jaekle and Doris Bates were a featured part of the show.



RIGHT: "Gypsy" was featured at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. The show was presented by The Charlotte Players with a cast of close to 40, including youngsters, teens and adults, and was directed by Nancy Fueyo. Here, Dainty June (Haley Brown) dances a duet with the infamous cow (Jackie Simiele and Deshay Burbidge).

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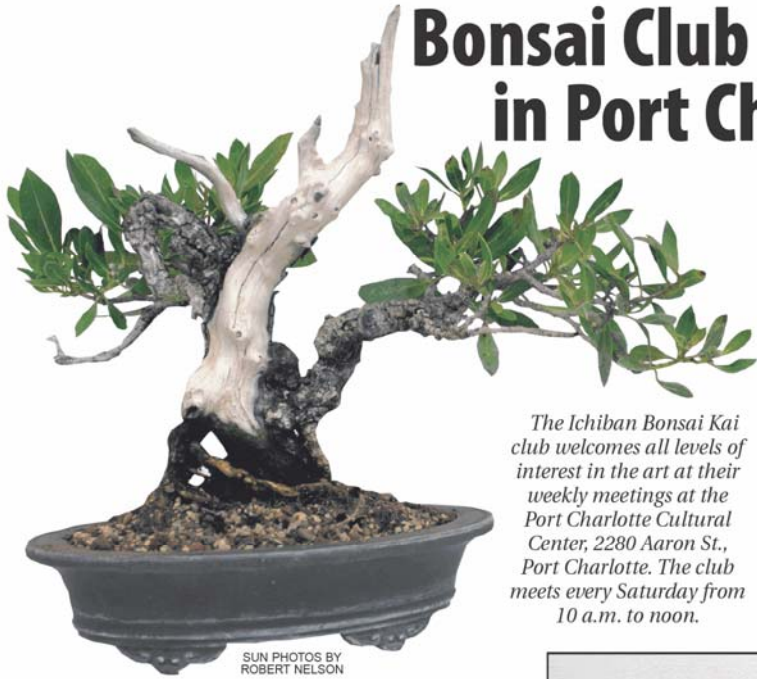
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Bonsai Club takes root in Port Charlotte



SUN PHOTOS BY ROBERT NELSON

The Ichiban Bonsai Kai club welcomes all levels of interest in the art at their weekly meetings at the Port Charlotte Cultural Center, 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte. The club meets every Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon.



Vito Morrongiello repots a bonsai during one of the weekly meetings of the Ichiban Bonsai Kai in the Parkside District of Port Charlotte. Bonsai is Japanese for "tray planting" and is the art of cultivating miniature trees. Bonsai can live for hundreds of years.



From left, Gerry Genn and Vito Morrongiello work at repotting a trident maple bonsai tree.



Nancy Lane shows off the club's bougainvillea bonsai tree. The Ichiban Bonsai Kai was founded April 18, 1989, in Charlotte County. More information on the club can be found on their website at www.charlottebonsai.com or look for them on Facebook.



LEFT: Sue Phillips trims leaves and small branches off of her Barbados cherry tree. The Ichiban Bonsai Kai offers classes, advice and workshops. The soil mix for bonsai can consist of lava rock, turface and pine bark.

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Parkside Community Garden is sprouting

By SHIRLEY GEORGE
SUN CORRESPONDENT

Mike Stevens is passionate about gardening. When he heard about the community garden at South County Regional Park in Punta Gorda in 2011, he asked to lease a bed. It was suggested that he join the Community Garden Committee for Team Punta Gorda, and is now chairman of that committee. Mike is also president of Master Gardeners Association of Charlotte County.

Stevens is proud to be the master gardener of the Parkside Community Garden, at the Charlotte County Family Services Center campus, 21450 Gibraltar Drive. The garden was developed by Keep Charlotte Beautiful, Waste Management and Team Port Charlotte in collaboration with Team Punta Gorda.

Individuals, families and organizations lease beds at a nominal fee to grow vegetables, flowers and herbs at the community garden. Every gardener is responsible for maintenance of the beds with watering and keeping the beds free of pests and weeds.

Gardeners will also get to work with Stevens to further educate themselves on proper gardening practices, and troubleshoot any issues they may have with their plants, soil, etc.

Stevens designed the layout of the beds for county approval. There are 10 beds, each 3.5 x 10 feet presently planted, with plans for six additional beds.

According to Stevens, community interest has been so good that there is a waiting list to lease beds.

As an Eagle Scout project, Aaron La



PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY GEORGE

Master gardener Mike Stevens at the Parkside Community Garden.

Plante received help from other scouts and volunteers to fill the beds with dirt, and get them ready for planting.

Stevens mentored La Plante and other volunteers.

"Aaron and his friends did an awesome job," Stevens said. "Some days

there were 15 to 20 volunteers helping him with this project."

For more information, call 941-764-4340.



The sunflowers at the Parkside Community Garden are much taller than Mike Stevens, master gardener.



Mike Stevens, master gardener, is pleased with the scouts' participation in the Parkside Community Garden. This butterfly garden was Alex Harvey's Eagle Scout project.

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St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School celebrates 53 years in Parkside



Fifth-graders pose in front of the St. Charles mission statement.



SUN PHOTO BY BETSY WILLIAMS

ON THE COVER: Seventh-grader Michelle Toefer walks back to class, walking under the tower bell in the courtyard of the mission-styled school.



Wearing their St. Charles Borromeo Crusader sweatshirts, seventh-graders Sydney White, Savannah Kreegel and Isabella Cosu along with sixth-grader Alexis Pumpinela hang out in between classes.



Kindergartners Michael Tomasulo and Madison Najar work on the computers inside the school library.



Lunchtime is also a visiting time for these young students.



Fifth-grader Camille Salomon works on a science project in the school lab.



The science lab is a great plus at St. Charles. The science curriculum is taught by John Verner.



Second-graders Anthony Hinds, Francheska and Alanna McCaughey tidy up the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the school courtyard that will be used for the traditional May Crowning that second-graders do each year.

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Churches of Parkside offer spiritual guidance

By SHIRLEY GEORGE
SUN CORRESPONDENT

The First Presbyterian Church of Port Charlotte

The First Presbyterian Church of Port Charlotte, 2230 Harriet St., has served the community for more than 50 years. The Rev. Kathleen Weller, interim pastor for over one year, says that she and the church members are working very hard to service the needs of all people.

"Indeed, it takes all of us, called here by God, to make FPC a light in a dark world. I have a few hopes and dreams for the coming year, that we are to continue on the strong financial and community growth, that lay leaders will continue to stand up and share in visioning a new mission and future, and may the Holy Spirit guide us to a year of blessing and joy for FPC," Weller said.

Every Sunday, FPC begins with praise music at 9:45 a.m., followed by the regular service at 10 a.m. that includes a choir and bell ringers. Visitors are always welcome.

The witness ministry includes an outreach team, food pantry, visitor follow-up, missionaries, tape ministry, and new member sponsors.

Family life/spiritual growth programs offered are children's church, middle and high school students groups, adult classes, bible studies, and a resource library.

Congregational care consists of many programs such as visiting shepherds, hospital visitors, prayer team, Presbyterian women, veterans group, brown bag book club,

quilts, potluck dinners, bereavement meals, and van drivers for those who need transportation.

The church has a property committee who maintains memorial and palm gardens.

For more information, call 941-625-5045.

St. Charles Borromeo Parish

St. Charles Borromeo Parish, located at 2500 Easy St., was established on May 29, 1959. The current church building (worship space) was dedicated on March 30, 1978. Presently, there are 2,475 member households, some are seasonal, but the majority are permanent residents.

The pastor is Fr. Tom Heck and the associates are Dr. Philip Scheff and Fr. Duong Nguyen, with Deacon Thomas Caliguire. There are 10 other staff members.

Weekend masses are 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Saturday (seasonal), and 7 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m. 1 p.m. (for French/Creole), and 6:30 p.m. (signed for the deaf) on Sunday. Weekday masses are 7 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:30 a.m. on Saturday.

"The source and summit of the life of St. Charles Borromeo Parish is the daily celebration of the Eucharist. In addition, there are many opportunities for shared prayer. The church doors are open during most daylight hours, and everyone is encouraged to stop by for a quiet place for private prayer," Fr. Heck stated.

St. Charles Borromeo School for grades pre K-eighth grade is

adjacent to the parish. Other education programs offered are faith formation for youth, adult education and enrichment, Catholic education and formation for persons interested in becoming Catholic, faith enrichment communities, prayer groups, hospitality ministry, and youth groups.

Self-help and helping groups include bereavement and new beginnings, care ministry, pregnancy careline, games day gathering, St. Vincent de Paul Society, shaw ministry, help for the children of Haiti group, women's council, Knights of Columbus, Isabella guild, and blood bank.

Fr. Heck expressed the mission of the church is taken from Micah 6:8, "We are called to act with justice, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God."

For more information, call 941-625-4754.

Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Skip Struebing has been pastor of Peace Lutheran Church since February 1984. Located at 21500 Gibraltar Drive, the church was established in 1956.

The church's mission statement is "Christ is our Peace. We welcome you in the name of our Lord Jesus. May you experience His peace, His presence and His joy as you join with us in worship and fellowship. We are a community of believers who are biblical, liturgical, and Spirit-filled. You are invited to come and see what the Lord is doing in our midst. If you are not currently

partnered with a church fellowship, please consider joining our family."

Sunday service is at 9 a.m. Discipleship training for children in kindergarten through high school starts at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday during the school year. A fellowship meal is shared at 7 p.m.

Charlotte County House of Prayer hosts several prayer watches throughout the week in the sanctuary, including a Friday night watch at 8 p.m.

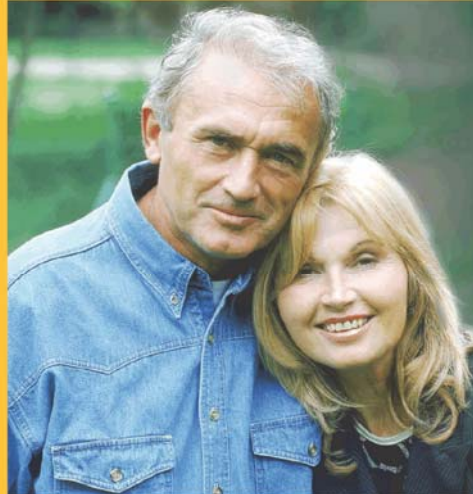
A Bible class is held at 7 p.m. on Monday. A variety of classes are offered on other days.

On the third Sunday of every month, the church welcomes all needy people to the shower ministry. Showers, haircuts, clothing, shoes, toiletries and blankets are available, and a meal is prepared and served by servants, as they prefer to be called. This ministry was started 11 years ago, serves 30 to 40 needy people each ministry Sunday, and offers prayer and fellowship. Pastor Struebing welcomes everyone, usually has a humorous story, and offers prayer before the meal.

For more information, call 941-625-4969.

KNOW ABOUT A NEW CHURCH IN PARKSIDE?

If you hear about a new church that has recently opened in Parkside, please send information to nnoles88@gmail.com for inclusion in the next Parkside tab.



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Sunshine Lake — An expensive and messy clean up

By **BRENDA BARBOSA**
STAFF WRITER

It's a sunny afternoon on Sunshine Lake in early March. A breeze is starting to kick up and a cluster of cattails shimmies in the wind. Surprisingly, the only smell wafting through the air is that of freshly mowed grass.

If that seems like a strange comment, consider that fact nearly 12 months ago, an acrid stench blanketed the area — the by-product of an algal mat that had grown so bad, environmental scientists taking samples of the algae could not navigate a rowboat through the muck. The thick layer of cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, consumed nearly 50 percent of the eight-acre lake's water volume and parts of the adjacent Sunrise Waterway. It wasn't uncommon to see birds walking on the gelatinous layer as turtles slogged through the gunk.

Ralph Montgomery of the Atkins group, the environmental consultant hired to assess the damage, called it the worst he's seen in his 30-year career.

"The lake is still in the worst shape that I've ever seen a body of water with regard to an algae bloom," Montgomery wrote in an email last year.

Residents have complained of skin rashes and respiratory problems, among other things, as a result of the horrific stench that at one time engulfed the area.

"It's a complete disaster," said resident Joanne Mulvaney.

In 2009, Mulvaney began warning Charlotte County officials of the problem when she noticed the water levels dropping in the canal behind her home and an orange-colored foam starting to develop on the water's surface.

Longtime resident Buddy DePalma, whose home sits at the north end of Sunshine Lake where the algae was at its worst, marched into county engineer Joanne Vernon's office one afternoon several years ago armed with photos of the pudding-like goop that was overrunning his end of the lake.

Vernon later described the substance as resembling "dog vomit."

Several months later, a consultant was hired to find out what exactly was growing in the lake and waterway — and more importantly, what was causing it.

In April 2012, scientists from the Atkins group published a report identifying the substance as blue-green algae which was growing from the bottom up creating an algal mat between 6 and 8 feet thick in some parts of the lake. The report determined that heavy nutrient loads — compounded by heat, low water levels, poor circulation, stormwater and fertilizer run-off from surrounding homes — were feeding the algae blooms. The Atkins report said raw sewage leaking from hundreds of homes over the course of a couple of decades — the equivalent of 100 to 150 million gallons

of waste — also could have contributed to the algae's proliferation.

"The only possible explanation that the authors can realistically envision to account for the phosphorus amount in the Sunshine Lake is if there was widespread leakage of phosphorus from the collection and delivery system of sewage treatment from hundreds of homes," the report stated.

"It is not known if the sewage collection, delivery and treatment system in this portion of Port Charlotte could have had as many 'leaks' to account for such a volume of untreated sewage entering into Sunshine Lake," the report went on to say, noting that Charlotte County Utilities has informed researchers that the sewage pipes throughout the Sunshine Lake watershed has been re-lined in recent years. "If such widespread leakage could have been a cause of the nutrient loads to the lake, it appears that this source has now been acted upon."

Indeed, after much testing from Charlotte County Utilities, public works and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agency, no signs of raw sewage appear at the present time to be leaking into the lake. Tests by the state Department of Health also determined the algae is non-toxic producing to humans. Still, they warn residents not to swim, fish or come into contact with the water.

Last year, DEP conducted tests in the sewer system using sucralose, an artificial sweetener. Sucralose does not break down in either treated or untreated wastewater, so if sewage were leaking into Sunshine Lake or the adjacent waterway, the sucralose would show up.

"We actually got no hits on that, which means that there has been no input of any wastewater in at least a few years," said Jennifer Nelson, Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration administrator for the Florida DEP at a community forum last August. "That gives us a good indication that at least at this point in time our problem in the Sunshine Lake system is more of a stormwater and internal cycling issue."

Despite that, Charlotte County officials said it's not necessary to develop a proactive plan for situations similar to what happened at Sunshine Lake because the lake is unique in its characteristics. It's the only stagnant body of water in the county that does not have any natural tributaries flowing into it.

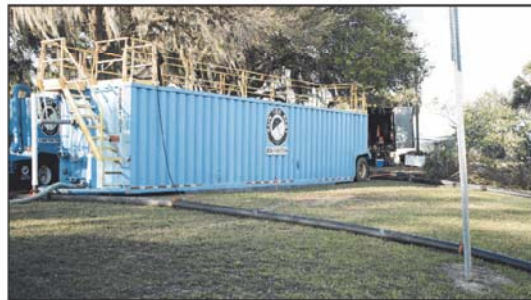
"I don't know that we need to take a strategy around this other than maybe be aware of what we've done and the things that we should have done differently or quicker," County Administrator Ray Sandrock told commissioners at a county workshop last month to discuss "areas of focus."

"We may someday — as part of the



SUN PHOTO BY BRENDA BARBOSA

Workers for ProLime Corporation operate the centrifuge used to remove the blue-green algae growing in the Sunshine Lake and parts of the Sunrise Waterway in the Parkside section of Port Charlotte. The centrifuge is a self-contained trailer with its own power generator which has enough force to suction out the contaminants from the lake as well as other types of garbage.



SUN PHOTO BY ROBERT NELSON

Equipment, temporarily located at McGuire Park, is being used to clean up Sunrise Lake and the canal that runs along the park.

(Total Maximum Daily Load) process ... but we have no current ongoing plan now to monitor the canal system," said County Community Development Director Dan Quick. TMDL is a set of guidelines, national in scope, which is currently one of the most effective ways for achieving and maintaining acceptable water quality standards.

In the meantime, the Charlotte County has contracted with Michigan-based ProLime Corp. to dredge and clean up the mess. ProLime has 270 days to complete the job.

Crews have been working five days a week, 10 hours a day to vacuum out the algae from the lake's cavity, as well as remove debris dumped, in part, by Hurricane Charley. So far, crews have picked out pieces of roofs, a section of a carport, car tires and a variety of scrap metal. Workers have also been busy cutting and removing thick clumps

of cattails that have taken root in the gelatinous mat and have contributed to the proliferation of algae in the lake.

ProLime is using a centrifuge to remove the contamination. The centrifuge is a self-contained piece of equipment with its own power generator which has enough force to suction out the muck as well as other types of garbage. Water will be extracted from the algae, which will be treated with ferric acid before being hauled off in closed-container trucks to the Charlotte County landfill on Zemel Road. Officials estimate some 6,000 to 8,000 cubic yards of material will be removed. Vernon said that about two acres of algae have been cleared thus far.

The next step, she said, will be to install recharge wells to keep the water levels up and circulating. The total cost to clean up the lake and waterway is expected to be upwards of \$2.5 million.

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SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE NOLES

Cattails are contributing to the algae issue at Sunshine Lake. When the county sprayed them to keep them under control, they died off and sank to the bottom of the lake providing a perfect medium for the growth of the algal bloom. Cattails, when not sprayed with chemicals, are considered a medicinal herb in Chinese medicine.

Bowland — not your dad's bowling alley

By **BARBARA PIERCE**
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Bowland Port Charlotte wants you to know that bowling is the number one indoor sport. More people bowl than participate in any other sport in the world. In fact, trying to knock over pins by rolling a round object towards them is probably the oldest sport in the world; it's been around for 5,000 years.

And Bowland also wants you to know that things have changed in your local bowling alley. This is not your dad's old bowling alley — not even close.

With 'boutique' lanes, glow bowl, video entertainment, state-of-the-art rocking music, awesome lighting and automated scoring, Bowland offers the ultimate in fun for recreational bowlers and serious bowlers alike for kids, teens or folks of any age.

"We have leagues; we do a lot of special events, we do birthday parties, and overnight parties for teens," said manager Mary McDonald. "And we have a full service restaurant and a full bar."

"I love it here; I've been bowling here for 21 years," said Kecia Miranda of Port Charlotte, who bowls in a team of four every Thursday night. "I've made friends; I meet new people. I like the whole environment."

Her league-mate Nelson Sherrill, also of Port Charlotte, has been bowling at Bowland for seven years. "I do it to keep active, to keep busy."

Both agreed the food in Nemo's Café is good.

Bowland has many specials to



SUN PHOTOS BY BARBARA PIERCE

Bowland on Harbor Boulevard offers fun for the whole family.

attract people like Family Fun Night every Sunday from 5 to 9 p.m. The price for a family of four is \$27 for two hours of bowling and free shoes.

Every Sunday, there is Beat the Clock, for just \$1.75 per game, from 8 to 10 a.m. Cost is \$2 per game from 10 to 11 a.m. and \$3 per game from 11 a.m. to noon.

Strike nights, every Thursday at 9 p.m., includes three hours of bowling with free shoes for \$10.

For country nights, every Tuesday at 8 p.m. again, you can also bowl for three hours for \$10.

Overnights for teens are popular. Starting at midnight, the lights go dark; the pins are lit with flashing disco lights.

"We have a dance contest; we play games; we even do a congo line," said Sharon Grower. "We have a lot of fun; the kids love it."

The overnight is for teens ages



The boutique lanes, featuring disco lighting, are popular for parties at the Bowland on Harbor Boulevard in the heart of the Parkside district.

13 through 17.

Every Friday and Saturday night there is Midnight Madness, midnight to 2 a.m. for \$10 per person, shoes included. There are music videos, awesome lights, and comfy leather sofas.

Bowland has 24 modern synthetic lanes. Six of the lanes are 'boutique' lanes with disco lighting, wide TV screens and big sofas.

When it's time to throw a party, Bowland has got what you need, even a party planner. Parties for businesses, for kids' birthdays, for anyone's birthday.

"We have several packages for

birthday parties," said Grower.

"We can close off the boutique lanes with a screen for private parties. The lanes have disco lighting, music that the kids like, and coins so they can play in the arcade. They have a blast."

Leagues are popular and play every night except Tuesday. There are many different leagues, added Grower. Two are ladies leagues, others are mixed groups, and there is a senior league.

Bowland is located at 3192 Harbor Blvd., telephone 941-625-4794, or go to www.bowlandcenters.com for more information.



Nemo's Sports Cafe in Bowland is a popular place to eat.



Sharon Grower helps plan parties, with games, dance contests and arcade games in addition to bowling.

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Neil Armstrong students enjoy Math Night at Winn-Dixie



FILE PHOTOS BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Partnering with the Winn-Dixie at the Promenades Mall, Neil Armstrong Elementary held a Math Night, inviting all their families out for a grade-appropriate scavenger hunt throughout the store that would strengthen their math skills. Vick Do gives father, Hung Do, a hug as he helps with a kindergarten scavenger list. Also helping out was younger brother, John, 2.



Fifth-grade teachers, Michael Jennings, Steve Eyrich, his son David, a freshman at Charlotte High, and Philoma Noel set up a hot dog stand courtesy of Winn-Dixie to raise funds for the end-of-year class expenses, which includes a graduation party and field trip.



Fourth-grader Jack Ialuna, with the help of his brother, Jesse, a seventh-grader, have to count out how many frozen dinners it will take to feed him for two weeks less two dine-outs, then the cost.



RIGHT: Gary Bill's first task is to count how many two-for-one specials are in the Winn-Dixie weekly flyer — 68 is what the third-grade student counted.



Fifth-grader Kylee Estrada listens to the advice of her grandfather, Earl McAfee, as they work together on solving a math problem involving feeding snacks to 100 guests.



Fifth-grade student Madison Shepard had to determine how much she would be spending on juice for a party she was to give.

LEFT: Kim Malloy helps her kindergarten student, Shayla Bronsfield, with the price of milk with a little help from her daughter, Arianna, 4.



First-grader Sophia Riggs, with the help of her sister, fifth-grader Zoe, weighs out two pounds of apples to answer one of Sophia's math questions: How many apples equals two pounds?

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Virginia B. Andes Clinic serves medically needy in the heart of Parkside

By RENEE LePERE
SUN CORRESPONDENT

An estimated 49.9 million people in the United States live without health insurance, placing them one medical emergency away from financial disaster.

Charlotte County is home to thousands of people in that exact situation. The Virginia B. Andes Clinic in Port Charlotte is trying to keep needy Charlotte County residents healthy — both physically and financially — by providing free care at its Port Charlotte and Englewood clinics.

The less money a person makes, the less likely he or she is to have health insurance, according to the United States Census Bureau. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported 26.9 percent of

people with an annual income of less than \$25,000.

According to the Florida Department of Economic Development, the median salary of a Charlotte County resident is \$28,831 — about half of workers earn more — and about half earn less. The FDED reports that salary is \$6,477 less than the national average of \$35,308 and an estimated \$2,696 less than fellow Floridians.

The VBA Clinic reports there are currently 28,000-30,000 uninsured residents in Charlotte County of the estimated 150,000 residents that reside here.

The clinic has grown with the needs of the community since it began in 1999, as the St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy of Charlotte County Inc. The nonprofit agency was



PHOTOS BY ROBERT NELSON

From left, clinic receptionist Paula Iacovetta and Andi Kaplan greet everyone who walks into the clinic doors. The Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Clinic is located at 21297 Olean Blvd. Unit B in Port Charlotte. Call 941-766-9570.

formed by Dr. Thomas F. Ferrara, who saw the need for a community pharmacy. In less than a decade's time, Drs. Mark Asperilla and David Klein recognized the necessity of a free medical clinic for the uninsured, underinsured and working poor living in the county. The objective was to "not only provide life-giving care, but also to empower patients to actively engage in disease prevention, health education and treatment plans."

The Virginia B. Andes Clinic — named after a long-time community volunteer — opened February 2008.

The clinic moved last year from a small facility on Gibraltar Drive to an 8,000-square foot facility at 21297 Olean Blvd. The new location is closer to both Peace River Regional and Fawcett Memorial hospitals.

The clinic serves Charlotte County

residents who are uninsured or underinsured and whose income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. According to the clinic's data, that adds up to an estimated 20,000 patient visits annually.

Almost 200 volunteers provide more than 70,000 hours of service, the clinic estimates. The clinic is partnered with 50 local medical providers, who have given clients health care, including preventative measures. More than 120 out-patient surgical procedures were performed on clinic patients last year.

The pharmacy provides free services to an estimated 8,000 patients — which amounts to 5,200 prescriptions filled at a "fair market value" of about \$476,000, the clinic's data states.

For more information, call 941-766-9570 or visit www.volunteercare.org.



Debby Carrier RN, director of nursing at the Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Clinic, stands behind a desk in the Susan G. Komen room. Carrier has been with the clinic since May 2012.



Suzanne Roberts, M.Ed. has been with the Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Clinic for four years as its executive director. Roberts explained that the clinic has been raising donations by giving donors either a room name or by selling bricks with the donor's name and/or message. To find out how you can help the clinic, give them a call. An estimated 49.9 million people in the United States live without health insurance, placing them one medical emergency away from financial disaster.

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SUN PHOTO BY BETSY WILLIAMS

Here comes the first busload of children to arrive for the after school program at the Boys & Girls Club of Charlotte County, 21450 Gibraltar Drive, Port Charlotte.

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