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Team Punta Gorda sets new goals

By **STEVE REILLY**
STAFF WRITER

PUNTA GORDA — Dan Brubeck may have voiced the best description of where Team Punta Gorda members see themselves now.

"Think of blades of grass under snow," Brubeck said to the more than 300 people who attended the first annual meeting of Team Punta Gorda Monday. Last year, the grassroots

group raised the money needed to create its Citizens Master Plan 2005, which detailed the rebuilding of Punta Gorda after Hurricane Charley.

Brubeck said the implementation of the master plan would be seen taking root and growing throughout the city, like grass pushing up through the snow. One by one, members of the various committees talked about ongoing projects and

goals on which they are focusing, as well as how they are working with Punta Gorda, Charlotte County and other governmental officials to meet those goals.

Bob Peterson said Team Punta Gorda has come to realize that housing, especially affordable and workforce housing, will be a challenge.

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"If we don't have (affordable and workforce) housing, where are the working people going to live?" Peterson said. "With the price of gas at \$2.50 or \$2.60 a gallon, they are not going to drive 30 and 40 miles."

Peterson also said Team Punta Gorda members are working with Charlotte County vocational educators and developers to establish a program to train 25 skilled workers.

"There is a shortage of skilled workers here in Charlotte County," he said. "That will help perpetuate helping to build housing in the future."

One project that may be on the horizon is a joint landscaping project of Team Punta Gorda and the city. The group also plans to work with local gardening clubs and other organizations on other beautification efforts.

Along with simple beauti-

Team Punta Gorda has come to realize that housing, especially affordable and workforce housing, will be a challenge.

— Bob Peterson,
Team Punta Gorda member

cation projects, John Benante envisioned the city becoming an artistic-oriented community. Probably the most ambitious project is to encourage the county to invest more into the reconstruction of the Charlotte County Auditorium.

"What that really provides is a modern version of what was there before," he said of the county's present plans. "We believe that center needs to be a gateway to the city for the southbound U.S. 41 bridge."

Benante said he and other Team Punta Gorda members are developing a business plan that can be presented to county officials to show how the new auditorium could be built and how it could support itself.

Nancy Johnson has joined

Team Punta Gorda as its grants writer. Johnson explained how Florida alone has more than 4,000 foundations that fund more than \$89 million in grants. At this point, she described Team Punta Gorda members as researching what grants may be applicable to their efforts and goals.

As lofty as many of Team Punta Gorda's goals appear for 2006, Roger Kress, the group's president, recalled how distant and impossible raising \$200,000 to hire noted planner Jaime Correa and his planning team appeared last year.

"It could not be possible without the community involvement," Kress said.

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