

OPINION

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Team Punta Gorda's vision for the city's future

Our community has witnessed a significant transformation in four "short" years. On a drive along U.S. 41 through Charlotte County you'll see many examples of change. New shopping areas, new buildings, new multi-use buildings, renovated buildings, new building facades, more consistent architecture, enhanced landscaping, new landscaped parking areas, new pedestrian areas, new bridge lighting, new bridge banners, a new park, a new performance stage, a new marina, a rebuilt marina, a new event and conference center, new hotels, a new church, and the list could go on and on. A drive throughout our county will add many other examples to this already long list.

While Mother Nature was a catalyst for change, many people had a hand in producing the results. From individual citizens to community organizations; from private industry

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to politicians, county and city staff; many people have played a role in guiding this change and helping shape our communities and landscapes. Some change came easily. Some change came through persevering arduous processes. Some change came through individual efforts. Some change came by people working together fulfilling visions of the possibilities.

We applaud those who have helped our community create positive change. Your efforts don't go unnoticed. Two days ago, citizens celebrated change at the dedication of the Whalley Stage at Laitshley Park. The January 2009

grand opening of the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center will give us another opportunity to celebrate change. Grand openings for new businesses are also planned in the not-too-distant future. Look for the opening day of the Farmers Market in Punta Gorda on Oct. 4.

Is more change coming? You bet it is! Despite tough economic times, citizens continue to be filled with the hope and expectation of the possibilities. Exciting projects are in various planning stages. The basic building blocks are in place, put there by private enterprise, civic groups, and government leadership. Team Punta Gorda's Higher Education, Artisan's Village, Rails-to-Trails, and Maritime Development committees are examples of groups working on projects that will have a long-term impact.

What are the next steps that we must take as a unified community to

insure Punta Gorda's and Charlotte County's future development? How will we bring wealth generators into our community that will attract people of all ages, retain our skilled labor force and provide career employment? Wealth generators will help us take our community to the next level, help us diversify our community's income stream, grow the tax base, and cushion the impact of economic downturns. Which wealth generators will build on the great accomplishments thus far and those being planned? Only through working together can we take advantage of synergies, exchange ideas, and develop a common plan for the future.

If you would like to join Team Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 941-637-8326 or visit our Web site at www.teampuntagorda.org. This is your chance to personally have an impact on our community. Your contributions are also welcome.