

OPINION

Saturday, September 27, 2008/ The Sun

www.sunnewspapers.net c Our Town Page 15

Team Punta Gorda aims to restore waterfront

Water — it's everywhere in this community. For many of us, it's one of the reasons we've moved here to join those who have been here for many generations. Historically, Charlotte Harbor provided a livelihood for many. The long dock that was located west of where Fisherman's Village now stands was the center of marine activity where the steam ships, sailing vessels and the railroad met.

The Punta Gorda Hotel graced Charlotte Harbor where the vacant City Marketplace property now lies. Its majestic swimming pool was northward toward the harbor with summer houses serving as shade structures and markers defining the area. The history of Punta Gorda's waterfront is richly pictured in the book "Punta Gorda and the Charlotte Harbor Area: a Pictorial History" by Vernon Peeples. The waterfront was once a prominent part of our community's life and commerce. It's a fascinating story.

Then came progress. The waterfront was filled in and access to it

Nancy Prafke

Nancy Prafke is the CEO of Team Punta Gorda.

became limited. We are fortunate that the city had the foresight to protect most of its waterfront — yes, 2.4 miles of it, from Fisherman's Village to Charlotte Regional Medical Center. That's what differentiates Punta Gorda from many other communities whose citizens have limited access to the waterfront.

Team Punta Gorda embraced the rich history of our harbor in developing a waterfront master plan for the city. Many groups and citizens had input into this plan. It's a concept that includes potential uses for the waterfront that citizens and visitors will enjoy.

The plan involves elements that fundamentally transform the waterfront and link it more fully with the downtown retail district. The backbone of this plan is a promenade, a 20-foot to 30-foot-wide path where possible, that will accommodate a variety of uses. Walkers, bicyclists, families, school groups, gather-

ings, art fairs, festivals, community events and even convention meetings can take advantage of what the promenade will have to offer.

Imagine the promenade being connected to the linear parks, just being started, that will eventually extend throughout the city with bicycle and walking paths that also extend to other communities. Over time, the addition of new venues and amenities will further enhance the waterfront experience.

Team Punta Gorda also embraces the use of materials and symbols that reflect the history of our community. For example, the old fish fertilizer plant, whose ruins are still visible near the Punta Gorda Boat Club, was built using a material called "tabby." The previously referred to "summer houses" can serve as way-finders along the expanse of the promenade.



The City Council has included elements of the harbor walk in the projects to be funded by the recently renewed 1 percent infrastructure sales surtax. The first step is to develop a detailed plan for the promenade. If approved,

it will become the basis for a consistent "look and feel" that is uniquely Punta Gorda.

We are ready to help our city bring this vision to reality. Join us! Citizens make the difference.

If you would like to

join Team Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call 941-637-8326 or visit our Web site at www.teampunta.com.

This is your chance to personally have an impact on our community. Your contributions are welcome.