

## Hey citizens, keep doing great things for our community

There is one thing that has amazed me about this community—resilience. Let me define community as Charlotte County. A natural disaster arrived nearly four and one half years ago that significantly challenged this area. The government strived to meet that challenge but then it seems we've come to expect that from the government. What differentiates our community from others is that our citizens didn't sit back and wait for the government to come to their aid; the citizens jumped into the fray to join the government in the recovery process.

And recover we have! Government/citizen partnerships have been created that allowed us to achieve recovery beyond anything imaginable. A drive down U.S. 41 through the county will demonstrate achievements. We do this not just for ourselves but for our families, visitors, and future residents and businesses. We do this to make our community the place we want it to become.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, that's right FEMA, has also taken notice. Recently, Charlotte County, the City of Punta Gorda, and Team Punta Gorda representatives were invited to participate in a mentoring conference

### Nancy Prafke

*Nancy Prafke is CEO of Team Punta Gorda. Readers may reach her at team@teampuntagorda.org.*



call to help a five-county area of the Texas coast that was severely damaged by Hurricane Ike. What an honor for our community to be considered a "role model." We participated along with representatives from Windsor, CO whose town was ravaged by a tornado; Pascagoula, Miss., where multiple hurricanes occurred; and the state of Iowa where floods and tornadoes have taken a significant toll. Each community shared how they overcame obstacles to put their communities back together.

According to FEMA, one differentiator that is making Punta Gorda's recovery unique is clearly the involvement of the citizens in this process. Following Hurricane Charley, people gathered together to form Team Punta Gorda, established a vision of what we wanted our community to become, and shared that vision with our governmental

partners. The citizens have remained involved and the partnership continues to flourish. The FEMA representatives encouraged the Texas conferees to emulate our example and garner citizen involvement to help in their recovery planning process and in establishing a vision.

Today, Team Punta Gorda is one of many organizations working to make our entire community the most special place to work and play. These organizations collaborate on projects to help ensure success. Citizens continue the visioning process and make suggestions about what they would like to see happen. It's the commitment, spirit, and hard work of many that are making a difference. Better yet, we make lots of new friends along the way. It's what makes this place we call home so special! When the economic climate turns the corner, our community will be "miles down the road" from where we would otherwise have been.

Team Punta Gorda encourages everyone to get involved in this fun and rewarding experience. There is much to be done and organizations are waiting for more volunteers to help. Check out Team's committees on our Web site at [www.teampuntagorda.org](http://www.teampuntagorda.org). We also have links to other community organizations.

To join Team Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 941-637-8326, e-mail us at [team@teampuntagorda.org](mailto:team@teampuntagorda.org), or visit our Web site. Your contributions are also welcome.

And please, shop and dine locally. Our entire business community needs and deserves our support.