

Your efforts paved the way for great progress

Triumph over tragedy. It feels like that should be the mantra of a small community in southwest Florida that was ravaged by Mother Nature nearly five years ago when Hurricane Charley made landfall on Aug. 13, 2004. As the shock of what had happened was setting in, hordes of angels came swooping in to help begin something that has been nothing short of miraculous.

These helping hands came from not just other parts of Charlotte County or Florida but all over the United States. They brought with them things like gloves, water, ice, tools, and kindness. Their support was an enabler, boosted morale, gave encouragement, and helped us see a dim light at the end of the tunnel.

These helping hands inspired citizens to band together to form a non-profit organization to assist the community in

Nancy Prafke

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



the rebuilding process. This organization, Team Punta Gorda, clearly believes that "Together Everyone Achieves More," and from what you will witness in Punta Gorda, it's visibly true.

Team Punta Gorda raised the funds and hired renowned urban planner Jaime Correa, Knight Professor of Community Building at the University of Miami. Eight days of charrettes provided input to a vision of what a new Punta Gorda could be, which became the Citizens' Master Plan 2005. More than 90 percent of it has been implemented or is in progress, an amazing result in four years. "It would not have been possible without a significant amount of

collaboration from government entities, businesses, other organizations, and local citizens," states Roger Peterson, president of Team's board of directors.

When asked when the recovery process will be complete, Team CEO Nancy Prafke replied, "We view this as a journey to build a community better than we had before. It is not a process of simply replacing what we had." FEMA has documented the community response as a role model for other communities throughout the United States.

Please come and see our progress for yourself! Punta Gorda has new restaurants; a wine bar; pubs; hotels; banks;

mixed-use commercial buildings with residences, office space, parking, and retail; a yacht club, marinas; parks; an interactive fountain; a performance stage; a conference and event center; award-winning affordable housing; incredible landscaping; Punta Gorda Middle School; and rehabilitated historic structures like the County Courthouse, Ice House, and Charlotte High School. Our 2.4 mile Harborwalk and first bicycle path are in progress. This doesn't include all of the other homes, businesses, and government buildings with new roofs, paint, windows, and landscaping, all giving the community a welcoming appeal.

Please accept this special invitation to come to the free Punta Gorda's Five-Year Xtreme Makeover Celebration on Aug. 15 at the new Lashley Park. Festivities begin at 1 p.m., with

Charlotte and Port Charlotte High Schools' marching bands playing together symbolizing how rival schools had to share the same campus after Charlotte High was destroyed. Trolley tours will be running to exhibit many of the new projects in town. A huge children's area will feature interactive activities from Home Depot; police, fire, and public works equipment to view up close; face painting; juggling; the interactive fountain and playground; and more.

Hear energetic music; watch cooking demonstrations; choose from a wide variety of food and beverages concessions; and purchase a commemorative poster. Hear special messages from dignitaries like Sen. Mel Martinez, Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, state Sen. Nancy Detert, and State Reps. Gary Aubuchon and Paige Kreegel. Watch dance teams and view a fabulous fireworks display

at night. This will be a festival like no other! The latest details are available at www.pgmakeover.com. You'll also find a list of our generous sponsors who are helping the City of Punta Gorda, Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Punta Gorda, and Team Punta Gorda make this day special and free!

If you live in the area, volunteers are needed for the Xtreme Makeover Celebration in two-hour shifts, handling out programs, helping out in the kid's area, checking IDs, etc. If you are interested in helping with this fun event, please contact Team at team@teampuntagorda.org or 941-637-8326. Your assistance in making this event a smashing success is appreciated.

Helping hands — your generous deeds are bearing great fruit. We hope you find it rewarding that we are well under way in building a new and vibrant Punta Gorda.