

Crafting, solidifying a sound economic contingency plan

When the Team Punta Gorda Citizens' Master Plan 2005 was completed, we defined what we wanted our community to become. Organizations and governments together have worked hard for six and one half years to help our community transition toward what our vision depicts. As I've said many times, this is a journey and one well worth the effort and cost of the ride.

The effort is spreading through the formation of other citizen-based groups in Port Charlotte and Arcadia. Our achievements are beginning to pay off as we hear feedback from visitors who are looking forward to coming back again. Just like me,



Nancy Prafke

some even choose to relocate here to enjoy this wonderful place we call paradise.

Yet, our economy remains seasonal. Once our valued, part-time citizens return to their environs elsewhere for the summer, our economy slows. Businesses wait in anticipation for their return to give our economy another boost. How can we help our local businesses work through this seasonal lull?

Marketing is one solution. Getting the story

out will bring more year-round residents from other communities that we anticipate will leave their dollars in Charlotte.

Putting on the press to gain more of what we already have is another solution. It's the "more the merrier" strategy. As an example, Punta Gorda restauranteurs are better off now with more restaurants that offer a variety of options than one lone restaurant that is serving all. We've now gained the reputation as a culinary destination. This took years to evolve.

Yet, our economy remains seasonal. We've long talked about making our community a premier place for people to live, work, and play. What more must

we do?

For us to diversify our economy, we must attract and retain businesses in targeted industries that will provide skilled, professional, career opportunities and yes — year-round employment. With new local businesses whose work force will also live, shop, dine, and play here, our economy will become less dependent on seasonal residents. We will build a more stable summer economy that surges when our seasonal residents return to paradise.

Several efforts are already under way to show targeted industries that Charlotte County is a desirable place to call home. Some projects have been documented in the *Charlotte Sun*

involving the Murdock and Punta Gorda Airport areas. Some initiatives are still in a very preliminary phase and not ready to be made public. Team Punta Gorda is proud to be a part of this process.

An economic transformation won't happen overnight. However, with continued focus, we will be able to someday look back and be thankful we gave our talented, young professionals a reason to stay in Charlotte County instead of relocating to another locale where jobs and career opportunities are more plentiful. We will be thankful for a more stable economy.

Keep tabs on Team Punta Gorda through Team Talk, our monthly

e-newsletter, by signing up on our website at www.teampuntagorda.org. You can also contact us at team@teampuntagorda.org or 637-TEAM. We're also on Facebook.

Have you purchased your commemorative paver to put you, your family, pet, or organization into the permanent history of our community? Get your order form now from our website and you'll join many others who already have a paver in place at the interactive fountain at Lashley Park. Commemorative pavers help fund Team Punta Gorda beautification initiatives.

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