

Thrive or dive? What's your preference?

Once upon a time (no, this isn't a fairy tale), the Charlotte Harbor area was a thriving economy with a variety of industries including the visitors who arrived by rail to stay at Hotel Punta Gorda. Then came the 1950s and the advent of the mass-marketed "retire-in-Florida movement." Port Charlotte was born and the "Isles" began developing in Punta Gorda, just to name two of many areas that began popping up. Our demographics changed dramatically, eventually making us the country's oldest county in median age of our population.

Historically, major events cause changes in civilizations from which some never recover. It causes shifts in populations, economies, and political boundaries. Some respond positively to change and thrive, while others recede and



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take a dive, withering slowly into oblivion. Fortunately, major progress has been made in our community since the ravages of Hurricane Charley in 2004. Much has been done in the last seven years to make this a better place to live, work, and play. The 2010 U.S. Census data indicates we lost the "oldest county" label to Sumter County, Florida.

We're blessed to have a vast bank of "intellectual capital" in our citizenry, both working and retired, that pools its talents to make a difference as we prove to the rest of the country we know how to get things done! We've shown the world that we

are a model for recovery and revitalization.

As much as we have collectively achieved, what do you think we've really accomplished? Where are we now in a continuum of progress? Are we at a point of inflection, a tipping point? Are we ready to take our community to the next level?

Let me submit that we must still answer the question: What do you want our community to become? What are we willing to do to take advantage of existing opportunities that lay at our doorstep? Do we understand how to market our assets?

What will be the changes in lifestyle expectations between the existing retirees from a decade ago versus the coming boomer generation of retirees? What are the expectations of those who have yet to retire, who are having families, and enjoying

our area as a place to live and work as many of us did elsewhere. What are we doing to retain the intellectual capital of those who we're raising here and are now going elsewhere to apply their talents?

Are we really ready to thrive? This is such a compelling topic that Team Punta Gorda has selected "Economic Development: It's Our Future" as the theme for the 2011 Annual Meeting. Our keynote speaker will be John Rhodes, senior principal with the firm of Moran, Stahl and Boyer, who will share the results of the recent economic development study done by Charlotte County and Enterprise Charlotte Economic Council. He'll offer concepts for us to consider about how we can expand the economy, create local jobs, and thrive. This promises to be an engaging and interactive presentation that you don't want to miss!

The meeting will be held on Nov. 16 at the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association; is free; open to the public; and begins at 7 p.m. More information about the annual meeting and John Rhodes is available on the Team Punta Gorda website www.teampuntagorda.com. We'll also be collecting non-perishable food items for the Good Samaritans of Charlotte County food pantry.

We also welcome you to become a Team Punta Gorda volunteer. From office volunteers to committee members, we'll find a rewarding opportunity just for you. You can contact Team Punta Gorda at team@teampuntagorda.org or 941-637-TEAM. We're also on Facebook. Keep tabs on Team Punta Gorda through Team Talk, our monthly e-newsletter, by signing up on our website.

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