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Mayor: Punta Gorda's progress cause for celebration



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Friedman suggests party in park on Charley anniversary

By GREG MARTIN
Staff Writer

PUNTA GORDA -- One measure of a city's greatness is the extent to which it not only recovers from a disaster, but also makes the most of opportunities presented by it, according to Mayor Larry Friedman.

By that measure, Punta Gorda has earned itself a reason to celebrate, Friedman said Wednesday.

And he called for a public celebration to be held on the fifth anniversary Hurricane Charley, which struck the city on Aug. 13, 2004.

The theme would be "Recognizing How Far We've Come," said Friedman, in an e-mail to city officials and business/community leaders this week.

By Aug. 13, 2009, about a half-dozen major projects will be completed and several more started, Friedman said.

The projects include:

- The Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center.
- The redevelopment of Laishley Park, to be anchored by a two-story building with retail shops and the Crabhouse Restaurant. A stage, two pavilions and a public restroom have already been constructed, and an interactive fountain will soon be under construction.
- A 400-car parking garage near the Historic Charlotte County Courthouse.
- The four-story Sunloft building with retail space, offices and condominiums.
- The Wyvern Hotel opened in December; a Sheraton Hotel is to be completed by August; and a Hilton is expected to be under construction in the second half of 2009.
- A 2-mile Harborwalk, which will eventually link with a planned Linear Park and a U.S. 41 trail along a railroad.

"For all this to be happening despite the economy is truly exciting," Friedman said.

He said the idea for the celebration surfaced during a conversation he had with Chris Evans of Smugglers Enterprises, which is slated to operate the Crabhouse. The two discussed the fact that Aug. 13, 2009, falls on a

Thursday, so events could be planned for Thursday night through the weekend.

“What better time to enjoy the moment and recognize those individuals, groups and developers who have made it all happen,” Friedman said in his e-mail.

Friedman said he's already enlisted City Manager Howard Kunik and Growth Management Director Dennis Murphy. Friedman, in his e-mail, is asking community leaders to plan the celebration. A preliminary list of the leaders includes Team Punta Gorda President Robert Peterson, Main Street Punta Gorda Executive Director Linda Dobson, and Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce President John Wright, Friedman said.

In his e-mail, Friedman encourages the leaders to “let your creativity run rampant” in planning the “special day.”

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