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Five years after Charley hit, Punta Gorda's renaissance continues

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Two more pieces have been added to the ever-changing landscape of Punta Gorda as the city continues its rebound from Hurricane Charley.

The parking structure at the downtown Herald Court Centre opened in late July; managers of the mixed-use facility hope to have some of the retail space filled within four months.

And the Laishley Crab House, along the marina, had a soft opening last week ahead of a grand opening on Saturday that will coincide with the city's Xtreme Makeover Celebration to mark the five-year anniversary of Charley.

The ventures are the latest on a long list of hotels, restaurants, bars and business offices to spring up in the past couple of years. City officials expect the sites to attract tourists and spur downtown business.

The \$12.4 million city-owned Herald Court Centre, at Olympia Avenue and U.S. 41 North, looks like anything but a parking garage.

It has a modern, multicolored exterior that looks more like lofts or offices, covering more than 400 free parking spaces inside and 17,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor

City Manager Howard Kunik said the center is a key ingredient for downtown business.

Kunik called the Crab House "the final piece to the puzzle" for the Laishley Municipal Marina Park. The development included \$5 million to \$7 million worth of new facilities including retail space.



STAFF PHOTO / E. SKYLAR LITHERLAND
A worker pressure washes the exterior of the new four-story city-owned Herald Court Centre parking garage in downtown Punta Gorda .

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