

Charlotte County update for 2/3/21

Communication strategies evolve with the times

By Hector Flores

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of communication in organizations and communities. Consistent and accurate information is a must. In emergency management, the mantra is “Get the right information to the right people at the right time.”

Sources of information have evolved rapidly in recent years, making communication even more challenging. Our strategy is to reach people how they want to be reached. That means using traditional media, social media and even direct contact via people’s phones and email addresses. To get information to residents about vaccine availability, we used a tool typically reserved for hurricane season. The text service known as CharCoCares went from 1,700 registered users to more than 40,000 in two weeks.

The county has two dozen social media portals for various departments, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn. In the middle of the pandemic, we added NextDoor as another source because the platform allows local government agencies to reach every account holder in their communities with emergency information, rather than messaging to the hundreds of neighborhood groups that make up the bulk of the service’s userbase. To view all the county’s social media pages, visit CharlotteCountyFL.gov/social.

Speaking of the website, we updated it in August to make it easier to use. Since then, users have viewed more than 2.4 million pages. In a survey conducted for the county in November, participants were asked what they consider major or minor sources of information about Charlotte County and its activities. The county website was a major source of information for 58% of respondents, more than any other source.

That same survey confirmed we are on the right path when it comes to communicating with our residents and stakeholders by targeting them through multiple channels. Fifty-three percent of respondents said television news was a major source of information. For newspapers, the number was 42%, social media 32%.

Several figures tell us how vital it is that our employees strive to deliver exceptional service in every interaction with the public. Forty-six percent of respondents said a major source of information was a direct phone call with a county employee. In the past year, 55% said they had contacted the county by phone. How they perceived the information and service they received in those calls matters greatly because 35% of people said a major source of information was word of mouth.

I write often about the county’s organizational culture, our mission, vision and values. These survey results, along with others covering perceptions of our emergency services, infrastructure, appearance, economy, parks and more, are a direct reflection of how our staff puts our culture into practice. We’ll never be perfect, but if people sense we care and are doing our best to serve them, they not only feel better about living and working here, but they tell their family and friends, too. That’s critical, because word of mouth is the most trusted advertising in the world.

Vaccine update

The Department of Health vaccination effort in Charlotte County continues with 2,400 vaccinations administered or scheduled from Feb. 1 through Feb. 9. Nearly 20,000 people have been vaccinated, including more than 3,000 who have completed their two doses series. To view the latest vaccination update, visit tinyurl.com/FLvaccinations. The tally is updated daily.

A new pre-registration website was launched where Florida residents can sign up to be contacted when vaccine appointments are available. Visit myvaccine.fl.gov. Pre-registration may also be made by calling 866-200-9160 (or 833-990-3549 for TTY users).

I realize many of you have questions about the vaccination process, even after you've pre-registered or received a first dose. Charlotte County has been assisting the Department of Health with outreach, as well as the vaccine venue, equipment and planning. We've created a vaccine frequently asked questions page on the county website that is continuously updated as new questions arise. Visit CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Vaccine Information at the top of the page.

More good news came from the Centers for Disease Control this week that retail pharmacies will be receiving vaccines next week. We'll share more information about local locations and appointment procedures when it is available.

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