

## **Tornadoes highlight need for preparedness**

By Hector Flores

Sunday's tornadoes that destroyed 21 mobile homes and damaged 18 more are reminders of the importance of preparedness for severe weather. We've had two such events in the past month that came out of cold fronts, not tropical systems we're so used to seeing.

Preparedness is not just about being ready for storms, such as cleaning up potential debris and securing vital documents and valuables, it's also about what to do afterwards, such as staying safe around damaged structures, downed power lines and debris and having a plan for where you're going to stay if you have to leave.

I want to commend the residents of the impacted communities on their readiness and response to the tornadoes. The Gasparilla Mobile Estates community has trained Citizen Emergency Response Team members and were quick to help one another after the storm even as emergency responders were conducting rescues.

I also want to commend county staff on their response. More than two dozen staff from eight departments and divisions were involved, including Fire & EMS, the Office of Emergency Management, the Community Development, Community Services, Human Services and Public Works departments, the Public Information Office and Charlotte County Transit. I'd also like to thank our partner agencies for their assistance, including the Englewood Area Fire Control District, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, Florida Division of Emergency Management, the National Weather Service, the American Red Cross and Salvation Army. Lastly, thanks to our volunteers on the Community Emergency Response Team for interrupting their holiday weekend to help.

If you want to help the residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed, the Charlotte Community Foundation has set up a relief fund. To donate, visit [CharlotteCF.org](http://CharlotteCF.org).

## **Committee vacancies**

We're so appreciative of the dozens of volunteers who serve on our advisory boards. They play a vital role in reviewing county projects and policies and making recommendations to the County Commission. We have numerous opportunities for more volunteers who want to play this role. Currently we have 29 vacancies on 21 advisory boards.

All but one of the vacancies are on street and drainage, waterway or stormwater drainage advisory boards. We are making a concerted effort to raise the profile of these vacancies. We recently added a link to the county website homepage, so you can simply visit [CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://CharlotteCountyFL.gov) and click on Find Vacancies. The page includes instructions on how to apply for an appointment to the board on which you would like to serve.

To be eligible to serve on these and other advisory boards, there are residency and/or occupational requirements. If you have any questions, the staff member who coordinates advisory boards can answer them before you apply.

**Water quality**

We held two public input meetings Wednesday and Thursday to solicit comments and provide information about the county's water quality monitoring efforts. The third and final session is scheduled for 6-8 p.m., Jan. 26 at the Charlotte Harbor Event Center. No pre-registration is required, but seating is limited.

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