

Manatee County Administrator's 2017 Annual Report



This state of the County report is an overview of the incredible accomplishments our County Government achieved last year. We also preview many of the initiatives we're tackling in 2018 and beyond. The Annual Report is also a formal way to acknowledge some of the true difference makers in our organization of 1,700 public servants who perform work for this community each day of the year. So, we begin with the most significant awards and recognitions from last fiscal year.

Awards and recognition

In 2017, Manatee County Government continued to be a state leader in technology, sustainability and innovation thanks to the County Commission's direction and philosophy, but also thanks to the creative professionals and staff who work here.

Our Pretrial Release division which became one of three agencies in Florida to achieve state accreditation for both pretrial and probation services through the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission. That special designation is the tremendous kind of recognition that boosts employee morale and their confidence in their agency. Congratulations go to **Jennifer Burgh, Michael Rogers, Dana McMahon, Marla Ryder** and the entire team in Pretrial Release.

Your Emergency Communications Center also achieved a unique standard last year when it became one of only 13 agencies in the *world* to have a triple accreditation from the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch. The 911 center received the highest level of recognition for police dispatch making us Florida's second Accredited Center for

Excellence agency. Triple ACE recognition capped a remarkable year for **Chief Jake Saur, Capt. Stacy Needham, Heather Hedgcock** and the entire 911 team.

Also in 2017 our Planning Section received hard-earned recognition after years of work assisting you with your Urban Corridors Plan. The Florida Planning and Zoning Association awarded the Urban Corridors Plan with its 2017 Outstanding Long Range Plan award. That award would not have been possible without this Board's effort in approving plans for greater densities, building heights and encouraging mixed-use developments throughout the areas that need it most. Our thanks go out to Planning staff **Lisa Barrett** and **Margaret Tussing** and to Building and Development Services Director **John Barnott** for their efforts to foster the kind of development we have envisioned for years.

Maybe our most impressive accomplishment in 2017 was one that was more than five years in the making. When the Florida Green Building Coalition announced Manatee County had become Florida's first platinum-certified Green county government, it was recognition for dozens of individuals and numerous sustainable projects, policies and initiatives. This incredible achievement was led by our Green Team which logged countless hours tracking and improving the County's use of energy which has dropped 7 percent in recent years thanks to their efforts! **Diana Robinson, Michelle Powers** and **Paula Pesmark** led the effort to achieve Platinum certification but so many others contributed:

- Our Property Management team of **Charlie Bishop, David Thompson and Maggie Daniel** helped bring about the energy efficient downtown chiller plant. In its first two years, the chiller plant has lowered energy consumption by more than 64 percent while significantly reducing carbon emissions -- a remarkable achievement in sustainability and efficiency.
- **Mike Gore, Amy Pilson, Gus DiFonzo and Jeanne' Detweiler** at our Utilities Department led the countywide transition to single-stream recycling. During the first six months of the single stream recycling program, 4,700 tons more recycled goods were collected over the same period last year. The County's landfill gas generator has slashed energy costs in half at the Lena Road Landfill.

Jan Brewer and our Financial Management Team received the Government Finance Officers Association Distinguished Budget Presentation award in 2017. The Procurement Division received its third Achievement of Excellence in Procurement

award from the Florida Association of Public Procurement Officials and its fourth Achievement of Excellence in Procurement award from the National Procurement Institute in 2017.

The Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau's travel journal won the Florida Magazine Association "Best Custom Publication" for the Bradenton Area's visitor guide. Another job well done by **Elliott Falcione**, **Kelly Clark** and the CVB team who worked with SRQ Media on a beautiful guide.

The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council named Manatee County Area Transit's Skyway Connection Route its first place winner for transportation and mobility projects during the 2017 Future of the Region Awards. MCAT Manager **Bill Steele**, Planning Section Manager **Ryan Suarez** and Operation Chief **Jim Egbert** worked with the great team at MCAT to modify and expand our VA Handy Bus route into a fixed route service from Bradenton to Pinellas County, connecting Manatee residents to transit service north of the bay.

Each of those awards recognizes teams of driven people with specific goals in mind. We also had a good number of *individuals* who received special honors in 2017. **Vishal Kakkad**, our star Traffic Engineering Division Manager, was named Professional of the Year by the Florida Intelligent Transportation Society. This award came just two years after Vishal received the Young Transportation Engineer of the Year award. Vishal and his team operate your regional Traffic Management Center, monitoring traffic conditions and improving traffic flow throughout two counties. Vishal also lead an effort to secure a \$1 million federal grant to implement Adaptive Signal Control Technology to address traffic congestion along State Road 70.

In the latest in a long line of incredible accomplishments from our Public Library System, **Ava Ehde** was named the 2017 Librarian of the Year. This outstanding recognition came for Ava only one year after the Florida Library Association named the Manatee County Public Library System the best in all of Florida. As part of Ava's goal to transform our libraries from book warehouses into community centers, she has created library space for tutoring, art displays and special events like the Teen Recycled Fashion Show and Reading with the Rays. Attendance at library programs has soared 60 percent since she became manager, and library patronage has reached record highs.

In December, Ava took over as Interim Neighborhood Services Director. Neighborhood Services has grown and changed a great deal since we created it in 2008, but it has always been guided by one our best leaders. Today her title is Deputy County

Administrator but **Cheri Coryea** has held several titles and taken leadership roles in dozens of successful programs including the Board's Economic Development Incentive Package, oversight of the Children's Services millage, the Manatee Millennial Movement and healthcare services for the underinsured of our community. Already Cheri has shown she is up for the challenges of her new role as Deputy Administrator.

Major capital projects

Last year saw the advancement and completion of some significant public assets and government facilities. In December of 2016, you dedicated the new 45,000-square-foot headquarters for Manatee County Area Transit, giving our transit system room to grow and expand in the future. That project would not have been possible without the efforts of the Public Works team of **Ron Schulhofer, Chad Butzow, Bill Steele** and **Mike Brennan** working alongside our Property Management team of **Charlie Bishop, Tom Yarger** and **Michael DiPinto**.

Last January the County opened a satellite office for the Building & Development Services Department in Ellenton. The BADS North River Annex offers a full range of services, and through August it had served close to 4,000 customers. It was another outstanding effort by **Tom Yarger** and his team working this time with BADS staff **Tammy Boggs**. The annex also added space for Lee Washington, Veterans Services Officer and his team to better serve veterans in northeastern Manatee County.

2017 will also be remembered as the year we completed the long-awaited Fort Hamer Bridge. Commissioners for many years had recognized the need to create faster routes for emergency responders in East Manatee and a new evacuation route for residents when storms approach. 2017 was the culmination of a two-year construction project that today connects the two fastest growing areas of the County in Lakewood Ranch and Parrish. The bridge shortens commutes for Parrish residents who work in Lakewood Ranch, and it creates a faster link for the young families of Lakewood Ranch wanting to reach the Fort Hamer Rowing Park and boat ramp -- and one day Hidden Harbor Park.

Nearby, the aging Fort Hamer Boat ramp was completely redone with a new double wide launch ramp, docks and floating dock section. **Charlie Hunsicker** and **Alan Lai Hipp**, our Environmental Program Manager, worked with **Tom Yarger** to make this project a success.

So many people are to thank for the Fort Hamer Bridge, but we should give special recognition to Public Works Director **Ron Schulhofer**, Deputy Director **Sia Mollanazar** and Project Management Manager **Jeff Streitmatter**. Many of the same individuals can

take credit for the completion of large sections of 44th Avenue. In 2017, our newest East-West artery connected 19th Street across U.S. 301 to 45th Street East. In 2018 we enter the final stages on the road by acquiring land and obtaining permits for the Braden River crossing. Construction could begin on that segment early next year.

Last year our Parks and Natural Resources Department, under **Charlie Hunsicker's** direction and vision, completed nearly \$4 million in restoration improvements and expansion at Robinson Preserve. Charlie was able to obtain SWFWMD and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grants to fund the project. Parks also worked with Property Management to begin construction on the new Mosaic Center for Nature, Exploration, Science and Technology which opened in February. The new NEST is a marvelous learning classroom that is the combined vision of **Charlie, Melissa Nell, Aedan Stockdale, and Damon Moore.**

Throughout 2017 and 2018 our Public Works Department is replacing underground water lines to enhance water quality and to provide fire control. Aging iron and galvanized pipelines, some more than 40 years old, are being replaced with modern PVC pipes. These improvements will not only improve the integrity of our water system but provide better safety for the residents of the community when fire strikes. We're able to make these improvements without compromising the strong credit ratings of our Utility System thanks to the Board's prudent fiscal management of finances.

Innovation and efficiency

Manatee County Public Safety is constantly searching for new ideas and deploying new technology to help us respond more quickly and efficiently to a growing community. Last fall our Emergency Communications Center rolled out the new PulsePoint app that allows our first responders to crowd source Good Samaritans around Manatee County by alerting citizens trained in hands-only CPR when someone in a nearby public place suffers a cardiac arrest. Communities that have incorporated PulsePoint as part of their emergency response efforts are seeing a marked improvement in cardiac patient survival rates.

Our 9-1-1 call center also became the second in Florida to adopt new technology that will save emergency responders time when home alarms sound. The new Automated Secure Alarm Protocol (ASAP) technology allows outside alarm monitoring companies such as Brinks and Vector to send information directly to our call takers in the 9-1-1 Call Center, cutting up to three minutes from call processing time. We believe about half of all Manatee County property owners with emergency monitoring systems will benefit

from the new technology, meaning a significant improvement in public safety service to our community.

PulsePoint and the new ASAP technology come after many months of hard work by Chief **Jake Saur**, Capt. **Stacy Needham** and **Anne Chance** their IT manager.

In 2017 County Building Official **CJ Dupre** joined building officials from the cities of Bradenton, Palmetto and our beach cities to charter their own chapter of the Building Officials Association of Florida for the Manatee/Sarasota area. This allows us to bring educational classes and training for to our employees who require continuing education units.

Code Enforcement Chief **Jeff Bowman** and our outstanding team of field officers partnered with Manatee County Crime Stoppers to offer rewards for anyone who reports unlicensed contractor activity in Manatee County, cutting down on illegal activities and rewarding local business owners who do work the right way. Code Enforcement also launched a new boat patrol unit that oversees dock and seawall-related issues.

Under the leadership and guidance of director **Paul Alexander** and **Ron Hardy**, our Information Technology Department deployed Voice Over IP telephones throughout the organization. VoIP saves on costs, improves our telephone technology and creates new efficiencies across the organization. Paul and IT have led the way on the switch of Accela, BADS' new Online Services permitting system and with the County's new ONESolution finance software that ensures greater accountability, transparency and security across our government.

Last year we also took an innovative approach to our local opioid crisis by turning to one of the County's newest innovators for ideas. Shortly after he was hired, we asked Healthcare Services Manager **Joshua Barnett** for outside-the-box solutions and he quickly responded with an idea for Florida's first Opioid Peer Coaching Services Pilot Program. This Board made the pilot one of your primary requests from state leaders and lobbied hard for its funding from the start.

Together with Information Outreach Manager **Nick Azzara** and Cari Roth, our state lobbyist, we were able to obtain half a million state dollars for the pilot. It will pair those struggling with opioid addiction with trained peer coaches who have overcome opioid dependency. We're looking forward to positive returns from this unique program aimed at curbing the opioid epidemic in Manatee County.

Thanks to the Board's determination to help the residents of Rubonia, we were also successful in obtaining \$1.5 million in state funds to alleviate flooding in one of Manatee County's oldest neighborhoods. **Cheri Coryea, Debbie DeLeon** and the Neighborhood Services team worked closely with the community over the years to bring some much-needed attention to the neighborhood. Thanks to this Board's actions, staff efforts and Rubonia community leaders working together, a new era of community pride has begun. The Rubonia Community Center has reopened, the popular Mardi Gras is more popular than ever and new sidewalks and drainage improvements are on the way.

Milestones and benchmarks

Last year, in an effort to divert Emergency Room traffic and to reduce costs to local taxpayers, we launched our highly successful **Community Paramedic program** that builds relationships with frequent fall patients, mental health and substance abuse patients and other frequent 911 callers. Chief **Jimmy Crutchfield** and our Community Paramedics have helped avoid almost 200 hospital trips and nearly 300 calls for an ambulance. That adds up to more than \$427,000 in diverted healthcare dollars, a huge savings for local taxpayers. Congressman Buchanan recognized the Community Paramedicine Program with the Unit Citation Award during the 16th Congressional District Fire and Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Awards.

In 2017 we created a spending plan and solicited public input for projects that will be funded through fines levied from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Our Parks and Natural Resources team has formed a plan to use those funds on environmental restoration, tourism development, seafood-based research and economic grant development proposals that will strengthen our natural resources, improve the quality of our rivers and bays and enhance appreciation of our coastal fishing economy. Weeks ago we learned that the Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration project will receive \$1.8 million to restore 118 acres of coastal habitat and restore more of our preserve. It's an extraordinary project that was selected for sponsorship among hundreds of others by federal and state agencies, a testament to the extraordinary natural resource we have in Robinson Preserve.

Last year our new Redevelopment and Economic Opportunity Department, under the leadership of **Geri Lopez**, brought new life to our efforts to redevelop and revitalize urban areas of the county. Geri and her team bring a much-needed connection to our housing, community and economic development projects and programs. The new department developed a strategic work plan for the Southwest District, and, using funds from the new district, completed our first public-private redevelopment project at the Parkwood Professional Center on 26th Street West.

County Economic Development Official **Karen Stewart** continued her great work, helping provide County economic incentives with local job creators. Last year, with your approval, we facilitated the creation of a projected 332 high-paying jobs through the expansion or relocation of 10 businesses. Those businesses will invest an estimated \$145 million in capital improvements thanks to your Economic Development programs! Karen and Geri worked with you during the end of 2017 to revise and improve your Economic Development Incentive package. We can now offer incentives to build and rebuild in our urban corridors and in the Southwest District. The new plan also creates incentives that should boost affordable and workforce housing opportunities for young families and first-time home buyers.

Hurricane Irma

No story about 2017 is complete without discussing the remarkable response of Manatee County staff during Hurricane Irma.

Our **Public Works** team, already weary from the no-name storm one week before Irma, helped County residents prepare their homes by distributing nearly 150,000 sandbags. MCAT also helped with the incredible evacuation effort at Manatee Memorial, transporting nearly 200 patients to four hospitals around the state. We estimate that 25,000 people left their homes for temporary shelters – the largest emergency evacuation in Manatee County history. **Utilities** staff worked ahead of the storm to lower Lake Manatee and to prepare our water system for outages. They kept open the service phone lines prior to the storm to help customers in need. Then, for three months Utilities staff worked with local contractors to haul away half of one million cubic yards of debris – a monumental effort that did not go unnoticed.

Neighborhood Services, Human Resources and the Citizen's Action Center performed around-the-clock staffing of the Citizen's Information Center which answered more than 10,000 calls from concerned residents. **Tracie Adams** and the Neighborhood Services team made more than 2,000 calls to pre-registered special needs patients and worked with **Bill Steele** at MCAT to help hundreds of those special needs patients get to and from temporary shelters.

Our team of Public Information Officers held 11 press conferences, sent dozens of news releases and produced hundreds of updates on our social media pages around the clock for more than a week. Manatee County residents were able to receive information directly from the Emergency Operations Center moments after the information was available. That, no doubt, played a part in the record number who evacuated. Our

Citizens Information Center and social media pages answered upwards of 15,000 public calls and posts in a period of about five days.

Financial Management, HR and IT all worked behind the scenes to make sure staff had the proper resources and technology to respond to issues and emergencies in short order. CVB staff did its part by serving hundreds of meals at the EOC during the activation.

After Irma had passed Property Management staff worked long days to bring beaches and public parks back to the pristine conditions. Building Department and Code Enforcement officers were part of the first-in teams that assessed damages following the storm. Those crews worked tirelessly to produce property damage reports that are a critical resource to informing our state and federal partners as to the extent of damage in the community, a necessary first step toward getting any state or federal disaster relief dollars.

So many individuals shined in this event, there's too many to name them all. But I would like to give special recognition again to Public Safety Director **Bob Smith** and Emergency Management Chief **Sherilyn Burris** who showed tremendous leadership during the preparedness and response to Hurricane Irma. There were numerous issues that arose, and with their exceptional leadership, we resolved each of them quickly and efficiently.

After more than 10 years as Deputy County Administrator and more than 36 years with the County, we bid farewell and good luck to **Karen Windon** who retired last year. Karen was closely involved in countless Board actions, internal projects and community initiatives. Karen was passionate about public safety and did all she could to ensure this organization and our community were prepared to handle a natural disaster. Conveniently, Karen had retired by the time Hurricane Irma came to town but I believe her constant emphasis on training and awareness for emergencies put this government in position to respond the way it did.

Envisioning our future

I noted earlier that our Public Works and Property Management departments worked closely to construct a new Transit Fleet Facility to replace MCAT's former home on 26th Avenue.

Much of our Public Works team remains at 26th Avenue inside an aging facility that was damaged during last year's storms. 2017 brought about an Ellenton satellite campus for the Building and Development Services Department.

2018 is the year to begin planning seriously on how to relocate government centers that are now in aging facilities that cannot expand to our needs. This Board took the first necessary step during a January work session when you agreed to the concept of locating some county facilities to East Manatee. We are now researching potential properties, creating a financial plan and identifying logistical needs that will accompany a government move to East Manatee.

We know that the population center of Manatee County is shifting more toward our geographic center, and there is a growing need to provide service to residents in Lakewood Ranch and Parrish, our fastest growing areas of East Manatee. Perhaps a new government center in East Manatee could meet another community need by serving as an emergency shelter when hurricanes threaten the area.

We took another significant step in the right direction East this past December when the Board acted on a unique opportunity to invest Tourism Development revenues and impact fees in Premier Sports Park in Lakewood Ranch. The acquisition price of \$5.2 million was a substantial savings from what it would have cost to acquire land and construct similar facilities. This new County park brings a unique asset to our array of parks and we'll be able to operate the sports campus as an elite venue for out-of-town, local and regional tournaments and games.

Kudos to Deputy Administrator **Dan Schlandt**, CVB Director **Elliott Falcione** and Assistant County Attorney **Bill Clague** for turning the Premier Sports Campus acquisition around in short order.

We are on the verge of completing our Parks Master Plan which will set the policy and direction for the future of parks, trails and greenspaces for the years to come.

2018 is also the year we'll begin seeing new public safety radio towers installed as part of the Suncoast Regional Communications Network. The new P25 radio system will give police, paramedics, firefighters and other first responders in both Manatee and Sarasota counties a far more reliable way to keep our communities safe each day.

The reliance on technology will only continue to grow in 2018 and beyond, both as a way to improve our infrastructure and as a way to meet the demands of a changing workforce. **Rodney Barnes** and our HR Department have implemented new Payscale software that will help us estimate salary conditions in the marketplace in real time against our own, so we can take measures to address salaries that are not staying competitive with our neighbors in the public sector.

Through leadership from **Geri Lopez, Denise Thomas** and the Redevelopment and Economic Opportunity Department you recently approved the Livable Manatee Incentive Program that encourages construction of new affordable housing units within mixed-income developments for future homeowners and renters. This was an incredibly important step for you to take, but more work must be done in 2018 and beyond to make Manatee County a place that will attract Millennials who want to build their families here by offering affordable homes in which to live. In 2018 we must also continue to envision the future of the Southwest District. What new ideas are needed to reimagine and reinvigorate our oldest neighborhoods, so they're thriving areas to live for generations to come?

To bring more accountability and success to government-funded projects, last year through the hard work of **Susan Ford** in Neighborhood Services, we incorporated Results First-based criteria for several of our nonprofit organizations. Three County departments also piloted Results First successfully in 2017. Project-based Results First internships were a huge success in partnership with the University of South Florida. We'll continue looking for opportunities to become more efficient and responsive through Results First in 2018 and into the future.

In 2016, Manatee County voters approved the infrastructure sales tax. Collections began in 2017 and we'll begin to see construction on those projects in 2018. Financial Management Director **Jan Brewer**, Procurement Manager **Theresa Webb** and their teams will continue to work with the Citizens Oversight Committee for Infrastructure Sales Tax to ensure the projects are awarded, started and completed to extend the life of public assets throughout Manatee County.

Many hours and work sessions in 2017 were devoted to laying the groundwork for our future as a government. 2018 is about embracing that future and acting on our plans. In coming months, we will bring to you a plan to create a new government center in East Manatee County in order to bring our service closer to our fastest growing region. The east county service center is only the first step of bringing government to the people, so we'll obviously need to include them in our plans. In 2018 we will solicit feedback from Manatee County residents on the future of our community by taking the "Back to the Future" conversation to clubs, committees and homeowner associations throughout Manatee County.

We'll ask them what do you want Manatee County to look like in 2038? They need to understand that our government must keep pace with our growing population by providing new infrastructure, quality of life amenities, local jobs and housing. We'll

explain to people what the County looked like in 1998 and go into a little about how much we've changed over the past 20 years. That will get them in the mindset of how much more we'll change over the next two decades. After the presentation, we'll ask people to give us their ideas and insight on what's needed to plan the right way for 2028 and beyond.

In short, we are a public service provider and if we hope to be successful in how we provide that service to the community, we must incorporate the opinions and wishes of the people who live here, the people we serve. With at critical public input and the Board's leadership, I believe we're posed to make tremendous strides in sending Manatee County on the right path to the Future.