



For the January 25 Charlotte Sun:

Celebrating the Arts

Have you ever watched a theatrical or musical performance that brought tears to your eyes, that made you laugh until you doubled over, or made you believe in something again? When you look at a piece of art, do you study it and try to see it through the artist's heart and vision? Do you strive to understand where they're coming from or are you simply thinking "that would look great over the sofa!"

TEAM Punta Gorda recently held our Annual Community Meeting. Each year we highlight a community issue or segment of the community to help us better think about the future. This year we shone the spotlight on local arts organizations, a segment of our community that is alive, well and thriving. By doing so, we hope to illustrate the value added that the arts bring to our lives. Our artists not only enrich us, but they are also bring economic vitality to the community. It is essential to have high quality educational and cultural resources available for visitors and residents alike.

Our recent community meeting featured just a sampling of the opportunities we have available to us, and showcased only a few of the many excellent arts programs in Charlotte County. We also have a public-school system with very high quality arts programs, and that understands what an important role creative development plays in the education of our young people. We'd like to see a collaborative and unified approach to moving the arts forward in Charlotte County. We know that well developed arts programs not only enrich us, but serve as economic development drivers for the region. People seek out destinations with fine cultural programming. It's what people expect when they choose a place to live, work or play, whether temporary or permanent.

As we move forward in Punta Gorda with our new community-wide master plan we must revisit the central role our arts organizations play in the health of our community. Developing the arts is also a part of the City of Punta Gorda's strategic plan. As we take the next steps in the community-wide planning process, it will be important to support and enable policy-makers and developers to think strategically about the inclusion of cultural resources in the portfolio of our community. They inspire, enlighten, and inform us and enrich our daily lives.

TEAM Punta Gorda has a number of events and activities coming up over the next few months. We recently launched our annual "Friends of TEAM" fund raising appeal seeking financial support from those in the community who value our work. For more information, visit

www.teampuntagorda.org. The schedule is being finalized for the next round of “TEAM Builds,” where we work with Charlotte County Habitat for Humanity to construct a home for a deserving family. This build will likely kick off in March. Stay tuned for details. This year’s annual bicycle event will be held Saturday, March 14, and will feature special rides hosted by City Manager Howard Kunik. Visit the Pedal and Play website for more information, www.pedalandplayinparadise.com. On March 21, we will sponsor our popular annual golf tournament at the St. Andrews South Golf Club. Details and registration for all of these events is available at the TEAM website, www.teampuntagorda.org.

We encourage you to learn more about TEAM Punta Gorda. No matter what your passion might be, we invite you to join our band of dedicated volunteers who make a difference in our community.

Nancy Johnson is the CEO of TEAM Punta Gorda. TEAM Punta Gorda is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Ideas or questions can be addressed to team@teampuntagorda.org or visit our website, www.teampuntagorda.org.