



Help wanted: Volunteer leadership needed!

With the onset of Punta Gorda's busy season, TEAM Punta Gorda, the volunteer organization you love to hear about, is back on track and busier than ever. We mobilize over 500 volunteers each and every year! Thanks to them, the free yellow loaner bikes are still rolling (over 4,000 YTD), the community gardens are still growing, and the downtown is in bloom.



With all of this going on you may wonder how we find the resources. It takes three things to make a project viable at TEAM Punta Gorda: Mission, Money, and Manpower. First, projects we take on must be consistent with our mission, which is to help make the greater Punta Gorda area a better place to live, work and play. Second, there has to be a viable funding plan, and third there must be volunteers who want to carry out the project.

So, you may ask, where is the shortfall? It's in volunteer leadership. Everyone wants to help but not necessarily be in charge. We're in need of a few volunteers with great organizational skills to coordinate some of these committees. Our chairs need not be year-round residents as most of our projects occur from October through April.

In the remainder of 2023 and 2024 we'll be continuing to focus on the three pillars of our volunteer work: community improvement, community service and community development.

Those award-winning Punta Gorda in Bloomers are currently planning to replant the downtown for the holidays. They have installed 60 planters on Taylor and Marion Streets, all with private funds. Volunteer plant-parents maintain the pots and the resulting display won them a national award from America in Bloom last year. The Bloomers also enhance the History Park and Bailey Park.

TEAM's Water Quality Task force volunteers have been working closely with both City and County officials and other non-profits such as CHNEP, CHEC and Heal Our Harbor to shine a spotlight on water quality in Punta Gorda. While monitoring occurs in other

parts of the county, it is not being done in Punta Gorda, with its extensive network of canals. In the planning stage is a water testing program for Punta Gorda Isles to gather the data needed. The goal is to educate the public and to propose solutions.

Just recently 66 kayakers hit local waterways for Paddle Punta Gorda, a fun day of kayaking and environmental education. In partnership with the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, paddlers participated in naturalist guided tours of the area's waterways followed by lunch and educational programming.

We have designed most of our community improvement projects to be self-sustaining, which is a great model. For example, the fees that gardeners pay to be in the community garden cover the costs to operate it. The registration fees for Pedal and Play, our spring bicycling event, helps us pay for the bicycle loaner program. Our golf outing and sponsorships fund our administrative costs.

We have a steady flow of volunteers coming forward to work on community service projects like Paint Your Heart Out and TEAM Builds. In November, 60 volunteers will paint 5 homes for deserving families in Charlotte County. In February we'll paint 5 more. In January TEAM volunteers will assist Habitat for Humanity in building a home. We hold food drives and community clean-ups. We regularly partner with other non-profits and the business community.

Formed after Hurricane Charley to help develop a master plan for putting the city back together, TEAM is a unique program model for improving and sustaining this special corner of Charlotte County while utilizing no taxpayer dollars. As we turn 20, we have begun to examine our long-term impact. To hear more, join us at our Annual Community Meeting on January 25th at the Punta Gorda Civic Association.

Nancy Johnson, CEO