

Community Services is hopping this summer

By Hector Flores

The Charlotte County Community Services Department, which includes parks, recreation and pools, libraries and history and natural resources, has been hopping this summer, with patron usage numbers in the thousands. Thousands of residents and visitors of all ages are using our rec centers, libraries and pools.

With the Mid-County Regional Library still closed due to damage from Hurricane Ian, our three other library branches in Port Charlotte, Englewood and Punta Gorda have seen an increase in patrons. The three branches had 5,306 visitors last week. The monthly circulation was more than 16,700, with users checking out books, audiobooks, CDs and DVDs. The three branches and Centennial Park continue to provide convenient curbside checkout service, which is being used by hundreds of patrons a month.

During the heat wave we've been experiencing, our three open pools at Centennial Park in Murdock Village, South County Regional Park east of Punta Gorda and Dever Regional Park in Englewood are bubbling with activity.

Last week, we hosted 418 lap swimmers, 282 water aerobics participants, 1,171 recreation swimmers, 78 club team swimmers, 273 participants in a club swim meet, 70 high school swim team members and 10 masters swimmers. Lifeguards conducted 150 swim lessons last week and 260 the week before. The pools hosted 242 youngsters from external summer camps, along with 567 kids from the county's summer camp. Eighteen Special Olympics athletes trained for upcoming meets.

Community Services' Get Up, Get Out, Get Active messaging continues to resonate with residents. Our three recreation centers at Centennial, South County and Harold Avenue parks are packed with summer campers and more than 1,500 "drop-in" participants for pickleball, walking fitness, table tennis, Zumba, basketball, open gym and self-guided training in our fitness centers in the past two weeks.

As the summer turns to fall, senior athletes will jump into action for the Charlotte County Fit For Life Senior Games, which features competitions in cornhole, basketball shooting, disc golf, golf, pickleball, race walking (1500 meters), radio-controlled sailing, softball home run derby, swimming, table tennis, tennis and track & field events. Registration is now open online at www.charlottecountyfl.gov/seniorgames or at any of our recreation centers. Participants who register by Aug. 20 receive a t-shirt.

The Senior Games are open to amateur athletes, 50 years of age and over as of Dec. 31, 2023, regardless of residency. Participants will compete in five-year age divisions, for example, 50-54 or 85-90 years of age. The games are sanctioned by the Florida Sports Foundation and serve as a qualifier for the Florida Senior Games State Championships.

The action begins Oct. 1 with the 1,500-meter race walk at South County Regional Park and concludes with the track and field meet Oct. 28 at Charlotte High School.

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