

Charlotte County still recovering a year after Ian

By Hector Flores

Thursday marked one year since Hurricane Ian devastated much of Charlotte County, causing tens of millions of dollars in damages, including to numerous county facilities. According to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation, residents and business owners filed 105,714 insurance claims for storm damage. More than 13,000 of those claims are either still open or policyholders have not yet been paid.

The Department of Financial Services held an insurance village Wednesday at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center in Punta Gorda. Hundreds of policyholders were able to meet with representatives from the National Flood Insurance Program, the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the Florida Association of Public Insurance Adjusters, and more than a dozen insurers.

Since Oct. 1, 2022, the Community Development Department has issued 77,086 permits, including more than 32,000 roof permits. I still see numerous roofs with blue tarps around the community as people navigate the insurance and contractor process. Likewise, many business signs remain damaged or missing. County street signs are being replaced as parts and repair firms become available. More than 80,000 street signs were damaged or went missing during the storm.

Charlotte County is also working through insurance and facility repairs. Three major facilities, including the Mid-County Regional Library, the East Port Environmental Center and the Charlotte Sports Park, are still not open due to damage or repair work. The sports park will be ready for spring training February 2024 and the library will be repaired, but no decision has been made yet on whether the environmental center will be repaired or torn down and rebuilt.

The former Cultural Center of Charlotte County buildings were significantly damaged, too. It is being assessed to determine the scope of the damage and whether or not it is feasible to repair part of all. This week our Facilities Department published a survey seeking input on what programs and services respondents would like to see offered at a new facility on the property or somewhere else. To take the survey, visit tinyurl.com/Input2023.

CC-TV, Charlotte County's local government access channel, has premiered a nine-minute video titled, "Remembering Hurricane Ian." The video, produced by Emmy Award-winning Television Production Specialist Tom Lloyd, depicts footage of the hurricane, storm damage, relief efforts and interviews with government officials and local residents. The video can be viewed on the county's YouTube page. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/RememberingIan>.

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