



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY**  
Economic Development

# WEEKEND WAVE



## Friday Economic Roundup

**AREA NEWS**

## Veterans Day

This Veterans Day, an American flag that was flown over the United States Capitol will be flown over the Charlotte County Historic Courthouse. On Tuesday, Nov. 11 visit the courthouse on 227 Taylor Street in Punta Gorda to see the flag being flown. The flag will be later placed in a flag case and displayed on the first floor of the courthouse.



## The sky 's the limit

By CHRISTY FEINBERG SENIOR WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

### WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY FACTS

**Established:** 1903 as a preparatory school for teachers

**Main campus:** Kalamazoo

**Enrollment:** 24,294 (Fall 2013 figure)

**Mascot:** Buster Bronco

#### AVIATION PROGRAM

**Established:** 1939 as a two-year aviation mechanic program

**Location:** W.K. Kellogg Airport in Battle Creek

**Students:** More than 700 undergraduate students

#### HISTORY:

**1941:** Begins offering ground school classes

**1947:** Creates a four-year bachelor's degree called Air Transportation

**1955:** Offers flight training program

**1958:** Offers bachelor's degree in aircraft engineering technology

**1972-1981:** Expands program

**1995:** Becomes School of Aviation Sciences

**1999:** Becomes College of Aviation

**2013:** Changes its name to the Aviation Science and Administration program

**2014:** Partners with Haworth College of Business to offer a master's in business administration with an aviation concentration

— Provided by  
Western Michigan University

### Western Michigan University explores partnership with Punta Gorda Airport and Florida SouthWestern State College

Charlotte County is gaining speed and about to take off in a new partnership with Western Michigan University College of Aviation.

"They look to become a major footprint in our community," Economic Development Director Tom Patton announced Wednesday during the Enterprise Charlotte Economic Council meeting, which was packed with Punta Gorda City Council members, Charlotte County commissioners, Punta Gorda Airport Authority commissioners, Florida SouthWestern State College leaders and other movers and shakers that could help solidify this partnership.

If all goes well, Western Michigan could have 50 pilots training in a 14-month program at the Punta Gorda Airport by next summer or fall, Patton said. Western Michigan and Florida SouthWestern likely would partner, with Florida SouthWestern offering a two-year degree, followed by Western Michigan with a four-year bachelor's.

"There's a technician demand as well as a pilot demand that is huge in the future," Patton said.

That would be just the first stage of what could be a multi-industry presence by Western Michigan in Charlotte County. Western Michigan could soar beyond aviation and into the fields of health care, medicine and arts as several deans from WMU have made multiple trips to the Punta Gorda area. Western Michigan has already been talking to local doctors about bringing physician assistant students to the area for one to two months of training.

"Right now I can tell you we are enthusiastic about potential opportunities in your area," said Cheryl P. Roland, spokesperson for Western Michigan University. "One real draw for us is the

fact that we have more than 1,300 alumni in the area, and we know they'd like to have us connected with the community. Several of our university leaders have visited the area, met with local representatives and continue to explore the opportunities. They are in the process of collecting specific details to proceed with final approvals for an initiative."

In order for this to happen, however, Charlotte County needs to address a few issues.

Western Michigan needs a custom hangar at Punta Gorda Airport, but there is one available on an interim basis. They also have been looking at the Impac building in Punta Gorda, where flight simulators could be housed in the gymnasium. The long-vacant, multimillion-dollar building, once known as Impac University, also needs upgrades and modifications.

Patton didn't want to go into details of how the Impac discussions were going, but he did say: "I think they are as interested in making this happen as we are."

Patton also is working with local condos on lease agreements to house the students, but private developers building a dormitory in the future is a possibility as well. Florida SouthWestern also may need a large building on its Punta Gorda campus to house airplanes and parts, and Patton encouraged those attending the meeting to support Florida SouthWestern's efforts in this partnership.

"We need to get behind whatever FSW needs," Patton said. "We need a facility for that program."

There are a few other issues such as parking at Impac and student transportation, but City Manager Howard Kunik seemed confident that these would not impede any progress.

As the parties move closer to finalizing the partnerships, a clearer picture will emerge about costs and the economic impacts to the region. For example, the number of physician assistant students hinges on the number of local doctors willing to work with them. Another variable is how much money the State Legislature is willing to allocate to Florida SouthWestern to build an Aviation Maintenance Technology facility.

Patton told the packed room that he is looking for volunteers to form the team that will travel to Kalamazoo, Mich., to show the university how interested Charlotte County is in Western Michigan University.

"I look at this as our Super Bowl," Patton said. "It's ours to lose and they should be here next summer if we can get the job done."

Among those in attendance was Fort Myers resident Jim Williams, who happens to be best friends with Dave Powell, the dean for WMU's College of Aviation. The two started talking about the need for more training opportunities for the students and that ultimately led to Wednesday's announcement about the possible partnership with Charlotte

## **PUNTA GORDA AIRPORT HISTORY**

**1941:** Planning for the Punta Gorda Air Field begins.

**1944:** Combat air training reaches its peak, housing 1,000 people. After the war, the complex is turned over to Charlotte County.

**1965:** The State Legislature creates a special taxing authority, which is amended several times before being revoked in 1993.

**1998:** The legislation is recodified and the Charlotte County Airport Authority takes shape.

**2007:** Skybus Airlines announces plans to offer commercial air service to Punta Gorda.

**2008:** Skybus Airlines ceases operations; Direct Air later begins service to Punta Gorda.

**2009:** Allegiant Airlines begins service to Punta Gorda

**2011:** The Charlotte County Airport is renamed to the Punta Gorda Airport.

**2012:** \$4 million air-traffic control tower becomes fully operational; Direct Air ceases operations.

**2104:** Multimillion-dollar terminal expansion begins.

— Information provided by the  
Punta Gorda Airport and  
Sun newspapers articles

County.

The skies above Fort Myers are a bit congested with two airports. Punta Gorda's is more open, making it more enticing for an aviation program.

"The people of Punta Gorda were really receptive to the idea," said Williams, who stressed the planes used by the students wouldn't be a noise factor for Charlotte County.

Having Western Michigan and Florida SouthWestern training technicians and pilots could lead to additional aviation businesses looking to hire qualified, educated employees.

"If we have a facility that is pumping out graduates. ... You can only see where this might lead," Patton said.

Florida SouthWestern officials attending Wednesday's meeting also expressed excitement over the potential partnership with Western Michigan.

"I think it would be a draw from every direction," said John Meyer, Dean of the School of Business and Technology for Florida SouthWestern.

## Charlotte Harbor eyes brighter future

By GARY ROBERTS STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

They hold major investments in the same neighborhood, but they have different priorities for the future. The homeowner doesn't want growth, preferring a quiet place to live. The merchant

would like more development, with fewer restrictions to accommodate new businesses.

"I've

been on (U.S.) 41 for almost 18 years, and I haven't seen any development in Charlotte Harbor," said Duane Needham, owner of Tile and Carpet World on Tamiami Trail, "so I'm glad to see the improvement."

The proposed Charlotte Harbor Community Revitalization Plan aims to balance the commercial and residential interests for the overall betterment of the community. And each side realizes change is needed.

Homeowner Bob Barnhart has lived on Melbourne Street for 30 years, and decries the speeders that zip along in front of his house, putting school children at risk. For reasons of safety, he wants his street to be made a priority in the planned sidewalk program.

"How long can we put that off?" he asked.

The plan's intent is to promote redevelopment along U.S. 41, from the bridge up to the northern border of the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area, at Westchester Boulevard. While this takes place, the county will preserve its natural assets of Bayshore Live Oak Park and Charlotte Harbor.

Meanwhile, the residential neighborhoods would also benefit, county officials said, with new sidewalks and lighting bringing more visitors into a newly created mixed-use district.

A draft of the revitalization plan and proposed land use changes was presented at a public meeting Wednesday night at the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center. More than 50 residents, property owners and business people turned out to provide input, with most agreeing the area is in need of rejuvenation.



Left: As part of promoting redevelopment, county leaders are moving closer toward beginning work on the proposed Charlotte Harbor CRA's Harbor Walk project.

Charlotte Harbor is one of the oldest developed areas in the county, originally settled in the 1860s. To rejuvenate the community, the Charlotte Harbor CRA was established in 1992 and a plan was developed in 2004. The revitalization plan is a tool to achieve that vision.



Debrah Forester, redevelopment manager for the county, explained that the overall goal is to provide connections in the community, between the commercial and residential areas and within the neighborhoods themselves. To accomplish this, there are several projects on the horizon.

Chief among them is the Harbor Walk, designed to increase pedestrian and boater access to Charlotte Harbor on both sides of the bridge. The first phase, at a cost of \$2 million, will begin early next year.

The second phase, slated to start a year later, would include pedestrian pathways from the promenade, located on the east side of U.S. 41, to a boardwalk crossing underneath the bridge, a fishing pier and a water taxi dock facility.

The refurbished Bayshore Live Oak Park already has injected new life into the area. "It's very active," Forester said. "There are lots of families going down there since the playground was renovated."

Proposed increases in density and height restrictions would spur redevelopment along U.S. 41, she said. In addition, tax incentives would encourage private investment in the area and help recruit retail businesses, Forester said.

Once finalized, the plan will be presented to the County Commission in January, forwarded to the state for review, then come back to the commission for a public hearing and considered for adoption into the county's comprehensive plan.

For those feeling a little more adventurous, we bring you a seven night, eight day stay in beautiful Fiji. The Fiji Islands are the essence of a tropical island paradise. With white sandy beaches, coconut trees everywhere, blue oceans and a broad range of activities, Fiji has something for everyone. Activities include snorkeling, diving, surfing, kayaking, trekking the rain forest, and you can even backpack the outer islands. Outdoors not your thing? You can check out Nadi, a city filled with action and packed with shops, dining and more.

## FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Florida construction jobs seen likely to grow fastest ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Port Everglades moves record amount of containerized cargo ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Economist's forecast for Florida strong ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- New College ready to offer master's degree ([Tampa Bay Times](#))

## US ECONOMIC NEWS

- US small business borrowing highest in 7½ years: PayNet ([Reuters](#))
- U.S. third-quarter productivity beats forecasts; pay increasing ([Reuters](#))
- U.S. adds 214,000 jobs in October, unemployment rate drops to 5.8% ([Tampa Bay](#))

[Times](#))

## **ENTREPRENEUR NEWS**

- Startups seize opportunity to make urban living greener, smarter, easier ([Miami Herald](#))

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