

**WHO WAS IN THE PARADE?**

- Color Guard — Charlotte County Sheriff's Office
- Charlotte County Chamber President
- City of Punta Gorda — City Council and Fire Department
- Grand Marshall(s)
- Drug Free Charlotte County
- Charlotte County Fire & EMS
- Charlotte County Commissioners
- Charlotte County Tax Collector
- Punta Gorda **Airport**
- Charlotte County School Board
- Charlotte Local Education Foundation
- Girl Scout Troop 1611
- Peace River Sail and Power Squadron
- Phillip Wilson
- Girl Scout Troop 707
- Charlotte County Transit
- Bethel A.M.E. Church Youth and Children Department
- Vintage Motor Car Club
- Special Olympics Florida — Charlotte County
- Share the Blessing Ministry
- American Made Band
- Florida Cinderella Pageant
- Girl Scouts Charlotte 11
- Humbling A Teenager
- Justin Mellor
- Lexington Manor
- Florida Dance Workshop
- Daughters At Play, Inc
- Suncoast Youth Theatre
- Supervisor of Elections
- New Operation Cooper Street Inc
- Chick-fil-A
- YMCA Punta Gorda
- Charlotte High School Silver King Band
- Granny Nannies
- San Antonio 12456 Columbiettes & Knights of Columbus
- Center for Abuse and Rape Emergencies
- Studio Seven
- American Red Cross
- Sandman Book Company
- Punta Gorda Youth Baseball
- John & Phyllis Camarilo
- Nerds on Site
- Punta Gorda Boat Club
- Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary
- Bread of Life Mission, Inc
- Royal Order of Ponce de Leon Conquistadors
- Rescue Air Cooling & Heating
- Whiteside Orthodontics
- Florida SouthWestern Collegiate High School
- Nicholas and Jackie Mays
- Gateway Group
- Charlotte Harbor Parrot Head Club
- Harbor Corvettes
- Comfort Storage
- AllyRides
- Anytime Fitness Punta Gorda
- Charlotte Preparatory School
- Punta Gorda Cowboy and Cowgirls

- Port Charlotte Middle School Marching Band
- Baker Center
- Chelsea Place Senior Care
- Charlotte County Democrats
- Animal Welfare League of Charlotte County
- Santa Claus
- Boy Scouts of America Cub Scout Pack 338

## Allegiant adds Albany route to PGD

### Punta Gorda traffic up from last year, with 42 cities now

By **ANDREA PRAEGITZER**

ASSISTANT EDITOR

As Allegiant flies more passengers through Punta Gorda **Airport**, the airline is adding another route to its mix.

There's now a new nonstop route from Albany, New York, to Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD), the company announced Thursday.

Some one-way fares were advertised for \$62.

The Albany addition is year-round and will operate twice a week between PGD and Albany International **Airport** (ALB).

It's expected to transport 34,000 people to and from Florida annually "contributing to the local economy," according to a press release from Allegiant.

"While Allegiant offers service from multiple

cities in western and northern New York, this addition will fill a void on the eastern portion of the state while also providing a low cost option to residents of nearby Vermont and Massachusetts," said Sean Doherty, interim director of Punta Gorda/ Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau, in a statement.

With the addition, Allegiant now flies nonstop from 42 cities to PGD.

And, flights are on the rise this year through PGD.

According to the latest passenger counts from the **airport** through November, Allegiant has flown more passengers into and out of Punta Gorda this year than all of 2017.

Sixteen percent more passengers flew through the **airport** last month compared to the same time last year.

Although, like last year, November passenger counts dipped slightly from the month before.

Allegiant flies more than 300 routes across the country, and is planning to build Sunseeker Resort along Charlotte Harbor slated for a groundbreaking early next year.

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**An Allegiant A-320 airplane takes off. There are about 300 local employees based at PGD (Punta Gorda Airport) that work for Allegiant or Worldwide Flight Services, according to information from PGD on Dec. 6.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ALLEGIANT

## ALLEGIANT FLIGHTS THROUGH PUNTA GORDA AIRPORT

Albany, NY Allentown (Lehigh Valley), PA Appleton / Green Bay, WI Asheville, NC Belleville, IL / St. Louis, MO Cedar Rapids, IA Cincinnati, OH Cleveland, OH Columbus (Rickenbacker), OH Concord / Charlotte, NC Dayton, OH Des Moines, IA Flint, MI Fort Wayne, IN Grand Rapids, MI Harrisburg, PA Huntington (Tri-State), WV Indianapolis, IN Kansas City, MO Knoxville, TN Lexington, KY Louisville, KY Milwaukee, WI Moline (Quad Cities), IL Nashville, TN Newburgh (Stewart), NY Niagara Falls / Buffalo, NY Omaha, NE Peoria, IL Pittsburgh, PA Plattsburgh, NY / Montreal, QC Portsmouth, NH Providence, RI Raleigh / Durham, NC Rochester, NY Rockford / Chicago, IL South Bend, IN Springfield, IL St. Cloud, MN Syracuse, NY Toledo, OH / Detroit, MI **Seasonal routes**

Springfield / Branson, MO

## Public can comment on proposed new terminal

### Design for Punta Gorda Airport addition is on display

By **LIZ HARDAWAY**

STAFF WRITER

The conceptual site plan and floor plan for the new General Aviation terminal building for Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD) were displayed for public comment Thursday morning.

Aside from moving the terminal from the south to the north side of the **airport**, General Aviation will get a whole new building complete with a lobby, restaurant, meeting rooms and 127 parking spaces. The restaurant currently does not have a planned tenant.

“It’s a very excellent project for the **airport** and the community as a whole,” said Charlotte County **Airport** Authority (CCAA) commissioner Paul Andrews. “It modernizes the **airport**. It attracts people.”

The reasoning behind a new general aviation terminal is not only are they the “staple of our **airport**,” as CCAA Chair Pam Seay put it, but the commercial ramp that Allegiant uses has pushed the general aviation community into a tighter and tighter spot on the ramp. Moving general aviation to the north side will allow them to grow as well, without running into the commercial-side of the **airport**.

The plans presented Thursday

represented 15 percent of the design process in order to facilitate discussion. Design should be completed by May 2019, according to Charlotte County **Airport** Authority’s November capital improvement program report. Construction bids will be advertised that same month and an application for grant funding will be submitted in June.

The **airport** anticipates receiving Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) funding in August 2019, and hopes to begin construction that September. The project should take 10 to 12 months to complete, said PGD project manager, Ron Ridenour.

Some comments already submitted asked for the facility to be two stories, for Henry Street to extend to the new ramp and “Bldg makes no statement!”

written by CCAA assistant secretary/treasurer Rob Hancik.

The facility is estimated to cost roughly \$16.4 million, with \$14.5 anticipated to be spent on the apron, taxilane and taxiway design and construction.

FAA plans to fund 90 percent of this, with the remaining 10 percent coming from passenger facility charges.

Meanwhile, the building, parking lot and access road design and construction are estimated to cost \$2.4 million, with half of the funding coming from Florida Department of Transportation’s public transportation grant agreement, and the remainder coming from the Charlotte County **Airport** Authority.

“I’m very excited to be apart of the growth and success of the **airport**,” Ridenour said.

Progress on the project can be found on the **airport**’s website, [www.flypgd.com](http://www.flypgd.com).

**E-mail:** [lhardaway@sun-herald.com](mailto:lhardaway@sun-herald.com)

**A view of the conceptual design for the general aviation terminal.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY PGD

**From left to right: Ken Dieffenbach of the Experimental Aircraft Association, Rob Hancik of CCAA and PGD project manager Ron Ridenour look at the civil site plan.**

SUN PHOTO BY LIZ HARDAWAY

## Pilot tells what went wrong in Punta Gorda crash

By ANIKA HENANGER

WINK NEWS

A pilot is alive to tell the tale after his small plane crashed in the middle of a Charlotte County neighborhood last week.

On Dec. 13, a plane crashed along Papaya Drive in Punta Gorda.

The pilot was uninjured in the plane crash. After reportedly running out of fuel, the small plane clipped an oak tree and skidded down the street before hitting a utility pole, authorities said.

While the pilot, Michael Mitchell, said he certainly felt the impact, he made it out with only a few scratches.

“If you got hit by a train at the back end of your car — you’d feel it right?”

That’s kind of what it felt like,” he said.

Mitchell said that views from the sky are what keep him flying.

“My grandfather was a pilot, my father was a pilot, my brother is a pilot, kind of a flying

family and I’ve been flying for a little over 52 years,” Mitchell said.

But last week marked the first time Michael almost saw death.

“When I turned my fuel pump on, the engine just quit,” he said.

But he didn’t quit.

Mitchell tried emergency procedures while radioing air traffic controls.

“I said I cannot make the **airport**. I can tell I cannot make the **airport**,” he said.

And instead of a runway, he saw Charlotte County homes below as the plane dropped lower and lower.

“I was concentrating on missing houses,” he said.

“I just didn’t want to hit a rooftop.”

The plane jerked and hit an electrical pole then plummeted into a chainlink fence. Luckily, no one was hurt.

“One patrolman looked

in the plane and he looked around and he said to me, he says, ‘Do you know where the pilot is?’ and I said ‘I’m the pilot.’ And he says ‘you’re a lucky man.’” The cause of the plane’s malfunction is still unknown at this time, but Mitchell said he is not staying grounded for long.

Mitchell said his plane was inspected only a month ago and he completed all pre-flight routines before the flight.

“I was concentrating on missing houses ... I just didn’t want to hit a rooftop.”

— *Pilot Michael Mitchell*

**The small plane crashed into Papaya Drive in Punta Gorda Dec. 13. The pilot was uninjured in the plane crash. After reportedly running out of fuel, the small plane clipped an oak tree and skidded down the street before hitting a utility pole.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CCSO

## Promotions for Civil Air Patrol cadets

By **DONNA JABLONSKI**

### CIVIL AIR PATROL

The Civil Air Patrol's four core values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence and Respect, continue to be exemplified by the Cadets of the Charlotte County Composite Squadron. As the program continues to foster leadership and good citizenship among America's youth, several cadets from the Charlotte County Squadron moved up the career ladder at a recent meeting, receiving numerous promotions and awards.

The first milestone of the Cadet Program is the General Billy Mitchell Award, which is earned after the completion of the first eight achievements of the cadet program. In addition, the cadet must pass a comprehensive 100-question examination covering leadership theory and aerospace topics. Being such an important milestone in the CAP Cadet Program, the General Billy Mitchell Award is normally presented by a CAP Group Commander or higher. Once a cadet earns the General Billy Mitchell Award, the cadet is promoted to the grade of Cadet 2nd Lieutenant. Any cadet who has received this award, and who later enters CAP's Senior Member program, is eligible for immediate promotion to CAP 2nd Lieutenant at age 21.

Cadets who receive the General Billy Mitchell Award are also eligible for advanced placement to the grade of E-3 (Airman First Class) should they choose to enter the US Air Force. They are

scholarships, and CAP special activity opportunities.

Cadet Autumn Rhodes was promoted to Cadet 2nd Lieutenant as well as achieving her Billy Mitchell award.

Cadet 2nd Lt. Rhodes has too many achievements to mention them all, however, here are a few of her more prestigious awards: She was selected as a Group 1, "Back to Space" student ambassador member having just returned from celebrating the 50th anniversary of Apollo 7 and interviewing legendary astronauts Al Worden, Charlie Duke and Walt Cunningham. She has also been chosen as a Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholar (one of 50 out of 2,100) and will receive a 5-year pre-college scholarship. As a nine-year Girl Scout, she is working toward her Silver Award, teaching preschool and elementary children about space and space exploration.

She served on the school district student advisory committee and student textbook committee, and attends Dunbar Middle School in the talented and gifted program maintaining a 4.0 grade. She also finds time to participate in plays and musicals along with playing several musical instruments and singing in the City of Palms youth choir.

She achieved all of this while continuing to enhance her skills in the Civil Air Patrol and quickly advancing through the ranks where she currently holds the staff position as cadet executive officer and Color Guard Commander.

The grade of Cadet Technical Sergeant is the sixth enlisted grade of the Civil Air Patrol cadet program and the first of Phase II – The Leadership Phase, having completed Phase I, The Learning Phase. During Phase II, cadets become more involved in leadership roles and gain an in depth understanding of the Air Force culture and aerospace training.

Congratulations to the newly promoted cadets!

CAP is the Congressional Gold Medal winning Auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, celebrating its 77th year of serving America. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to Charlotte Squadron, 28000 A-21 **Airport** Road, Punta Gorda, FL 33982-2452.

*Second Lt. Donna Jablonski, CAP, is Asst. Public Affairs Officer for FL-051. For more information, contact her at 609-744-4664 or visit [Gocivilairpatrol.com](http://Gocivilairpatrol.com).*

**Jonathan Hemingway was promoted to Cadet Technical Sergeant. Pinning on his new rank is his father, Everett Hemingway and Cadet Lt. Col. Mikehla Hicks.**

**Cadet Autumn Rhodes was promoted to Cadet 2nd Lieutenant as well as achieving her Billy Mitchell award. Presenting Cadet 2nd Lt. Rhodes with her Billy Mitchell award was Lt. Col Jim Kaletta, Group 5 Commander, Civil Air Patrol.**

PHOTOS PROVIDED

also eligible for advanced credit in Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corp (AFROTC), various CAP

In addition, both Jonathan Hemingway and his brother, Justin Hemingway were promoted to Cadet Technical Sergeant.



## Airport takes steps to reduce bird strikes

By **BETSY CALVERT**

STAFF WRITER

The price of protecting planes from bird collisions at the Punta Gorda **Airport** will include about \$3 million to restore wetlands in DeSoto and Lee counties.

The Charlotte County **Airport** Authority voted unanimously on Thursday to pay a deposit of \$271,884.

This deposit will protect the price from a planned increase in January, **Airport** CEO James Parish told the commission. The other side of the project is that Punta Gorda **Airport** will soon be filling in about 57 acres of scattered low-grade swampy locations in and around the **airport**. Getting rid of wet lands is one of the main solutions **airport** use to discourage birds from hanging out near airplane flight paths.

Bird strikes are a regular event, with one in July causing an Allegiant Air jet to land in Orlando instead of Milwaukee after it took off from Punta Gorda. The Federal Aviation

Administration database for Punta Gorda shows 53 bird strikes in 2018, including all types of aircraft, and 138 since 2001.

Only three were listed as causing substantial damage, and those were before 2012. Traffic has increased dramatically at the local **airport** since Allegiant opened a hub here in 2012.

**Airport** Manager James Parish told the

*Sun* that the FAA did not require airports to fully address the bird collision problem until after a famous near catastrophe in New York City in 2009, when a U.S. Airways pilot safely landed a plane in the Hudson River. Two engines on the plane were disabled.

Much of the cost will be reimbursed by federal grants in the future, Parish told commissioners. Some of it will be paid by the passenger facility charge, which is going up to \$4.50 per flight in January, up from \$2.

According to state environmental regulations, the price of filling in these less than pristine wetlands is to give millions of dollars to privately maintained

wetlands located elsewhere.

While not on site, the wetlands being restored are located in the same water flow area as the **airport**. The **airport** and its consultants have negotiated a price of \$1,359,420 to Little Pine Island Mitigation Bank in Lee County, and \$1,680,280 to the Peace River Mitigation Bank in DeSoto and Hardee counties.

Little Pine Island and the Peace River location are wetland areas that were previously degraded during Florida's past history of rampant development and industry. Over the years, state and federal regulatory agencies have adopted a system where developers that must destroy wetlands can pay for this right by buying into privately brokered and publicly monitored wetland rebuilding projects.

Commissioner James Herston said he was relieved to hear that the **airport**'s consultants had negotiated lower prices by showing the low quality of the wetlands at the **airport**.

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[https://www.yoursun.com/charlotte/news/weigh-in-on-state-proposals-for-roads-and-more/article\\_970d9aae-0559-11e9-8124-43ad87409f18.html](https://www.yoursun.com/charlotte/news/weigh-in-on-state-proposals-for-roads-and-more/article_970d9aae-0559-11e9-8124-43ad87409f18.html)

## Weigh in on state proposals for roads and more

By BETSY CALVERT Staff Writer Dec 22, 2018

If you have an opinion on spending state money for projects like a rest area on Interstate 75, the widening of Harborview Road, and new sidewalks, now is the time to give it.

Comments received by Dec. 28 will go in the official record for the state Department of Transportation's legislative request for the next five years, state representatives told the county's Metropolitan Planning Organization on Dec. 17. This spring, state officials will make their pitch to the Legislature, and include your comments. And, they promised to keep reading comments that come in after Dec. 28 as well.

The widening of Harborview Road, which is just north of the Peace River and serves as an evacuation route, is a huge project introduced in 2017. The state will ask legislators for \$4 million this coming year for engineering, and in 2022, for another \$1.9 million to acquire land. The cost of construction is not on the state's budget. The county, however, is preparing for the possibility to pay for construction and for replacing underground utilities.

Commissioner Christopher Constance told the board he was happy to hear that the state was planning to contribute by paying for some land acquisition.

Harborview Road narrows to two lanes on its way to the interstate, and is considered a bottle neck due to its role as an evacuation route and a connection from I-75 to the proposed Sunseeker mega resort in Charlotte Harbor. The proposal is to widen the road to four lanes with modern drainage systems, sidewalks and new utility lines underneath. The state has proposed several routes that vary in the amount of land takings required.

The next public hearing on this project is 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Feb. 5 at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor St., Punta Gorda. To read more about the project, this is the link:

<http://www.swflroads.com/harborview/melbournesttoi75/>

Another project on the five-year plan is a rest area to be built on I-75 near the Punta Gorda Airport. The state will ask for \$5.5 million in the next two or three years to acquire land, followed by \$27.4 million in 2021 for construction.

Sidewalks are in the pipeline, including a request for \$5.5 million for sidewalks along U.S. 41 from Melbourne Street to Kings Highway in Charlotte Harbor and from Conway Boulevard to Paulson Drive in Port Charlotte. Another proposed sidewalk is .4 mile on West Retta Esplanade in Punta Gorda for \$367,000 in 2021 or 2022.

The total request for five years is \$166 million, with most of the money requested in 2021/2022. Those are the years for some expensive road resurfacing, the rest area build, and rehabilitating a runway at the Punta Gorda Airport.

One project that is beyond the five-year plan is a request for a new exit off I-75 in Charlotte County or elsewhere in surrounding counties. That project will require approval from the federal government, FDOT spokesman Zachary Burch told the *Sun*. In the coming years, FDOT will be studying surrounding exits to see if they are busy enough to pass the federal test for a new exit, he said.

To submit a comment, instructions are available at this internet link:

[http://swflroads.com/WorkProgram/2018/WP\\_comments.html](http://swflroads.com/WorkProgram/2018/WP_comments.html)

To look at the full project list, this is the internet link: [http://swflroads.com/WorkProgram/2018/WP\\_Home.html](http://swflroads.com/WorkProgram/2018/WP_Home.html)

A short video about Charlotte County proposed future projects is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4AezYU5Ksg>

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Email:ecalvert@sun-herald.com

#### RELATED LINKS

- [↗](#) The next public hearing on Harborview widening is Feb. 5, 4-6 pm at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor Street, Punta Gorda. Read more about the project here.
- [↗](#) Submit a comment to the state.
- [↗](#) Here is the full project list
- [↗](#) A short video about Charlotte County proposed future projects

## Therapy dogs bring holiday spirit to Punta Gorda Airport

By ANNE EASKER

STAFF WRITER

Travelers heading out for the holidays got some unexpected highfives and cuddles from therapy dogs visiting the Punta Gorda **Airport** Saturday afternoon.

Fansee, an English Cream Retriever, and Chick, a Chihuahua, were dressed up in Christmas outfits as they visited the **airport** to alleviate some of the stress of traveling and spread holiday cheer.

“It’s absolutely wonderful, especially during this hectic time of year to bring a smile to everyone’s face,” said Niki Dutton, petting Fansee with her daughter just before leaving for Milwaukee.

“I just wish they could come on the plane with us.”

Fansee’s owner, Kim Corby, of Therapy K9’s of Southwest Florida, said the group tries to come to the **airport** about twice a month during season. She’s been doing therapy for 25 years, and takes her three dogs to hospitals, schools,

dependency and criminal court, and even the local prison.

“I try to do something every day with one of my dogs,” she said. “I can’t even describe how rewarding it is to see people smile, change their day.”

Hope Taylor-Epstein has been a team with Chick for 10 years.

Aside from the **airport**, they do most of their therapy work at hospitals. She got Chick as a rescue at three months old, and her vet told her right away he had a special soul, and she needed to do something with him.

“He’ll paw on a door if someone needs him,” she said. “They have to have that gift.”

She said Chick is a good “ambassador for the breed” of chihuahuas, who don’t all have his calm demeanor and compassion.

“People who carry them like accessories, they don’t get the confidence he has,” she said.

Passengers young and old were excited to see and pet the dogs as they made their way through the terminal.

“It’s good to see a dog that is a therapy dog, and not just someone’s dog,” said Melvin Brown. “It’s lovely.”

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**Fansee, the therapy dog, was dressed up for Christmas while alleviating stress for travelers.**

SUN PHOTOS BY ANNE EASKER

**Megan Payne smiles after getting a high-five Chick before heading on her flight to Cincinatti.**

**Jeneene Olson, of Madison, Wisc., was happy to meet Fansee and said she also has an English Cream Retriever at home.**

## Local airports see record highs

By HZ HARDAWAY

Staff Writer

November may not have been a good month for waddling turkeys, but it was a good month for airports, local passenger counts show.

The Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD) saw 128,121 total passengers in November. This is their highest November passenger count to date, exceeding last year's by 18,024 passengers.

PGD has seen a total of 1.44 million passengers so far this year, 152,404 more than 2017's total.

The number of passengers for December are still not in, but PGD officials predict nearly 1.6 million total passengers by year-end, said PGD spokesperson Kaley Miller.

"The addition of five new nonstop routes that Allegiant began from PGD in 2018 contributed to our growth in passenger traffic, which is up 16 percent over November 2017," said PGD CEO James Parish.

The five new routes were to Albany, New York; Appleton, Wisconsin; Omaha, Nebraska; Syracuse, New York; and Nashville, Tennessee.

Meanwhile down the road, Fort Myers' Southwest Florida

### An Allegiant A-320 airplane takes off.

International **Airport** (RSW) reported recordbreaking traffic for November as well, with 810,283 passengers.

Southwest Airlines dominated most of the traffic with 148,114 passengers, with Delta Airlines coming in second with 126,275. "Allegiant flew more people out of PGD in November than Delta flew out of RSW," Miller said.

PGD exceeded RSW's Delta count by 1,846 passengers.

"Our neighboring airports to the north and south are also seeing increased passenger traffic as the demand to come to sunny Southwest Florida steadily grows," Parish said.

RSW has served over 8.4 million passengers this year so far, 445,406 more passengers than this time last year.

Though the **airport** has seen an increase in passenger traffic, RSW has seen less aircraft operations occur this year than this time last year, according to Lee County Port Authority's RSW Operations information.

RSW has seen a total of 73,914 operations this year, with this time last year having 74,635 operations. Between April and September, the **airport** saw fewer aircraft operations per month than the year before.

Between these months, RSW only saw a smaller passenger count in April and October compared to the counts in 2017.

PGD has increased passenger traffic each month in 2018 compared to that time last year.

PGD has also exceeded operations each month compared to that month the previous year, airline landing reports state.

These reports go up to September 2018.

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY ALLEGIANT

## 'Plain Jane' airport idea not for all

### PGD debates cost vs. eye appeal

By **BETSY CALVERT**

STAFF WRITER

Punta Gorda Airport commissioners disagreed on whether the new terminal design for non-airline flights makes the right statement.

It doesn't make much of a statement, said Robert Hancik, Charlotte County Airport Authority commissioner.

"It's pretty much a Plain Jane," said Hancik, at the authority meeting last week.

The airport presented its proposed terminal design earlier this month. The \$16.4 million project is not for the terminal used by Allegiant Air passengers, which is not slated to be replaced. The general aviation terminal, as it is called, is used by all the other private

planes, including corporate jets. General aviation represents fewer people than Allegiant carries, but a lot more planes taking off and landing.

"You've got to take care of the demands of the people that are using the airport," Hancik told the *Sun* of the need for a general aviation terminal.

The proposed terminal adds more space for fueling, for pilots who are waiting for their corporate passengers to conclude their business, for a restaurant, and for flight school instructor offices. Many of these operations will be leasing from the airport.

Hancik said he hopes the design will attract a good restaurant for a local population that likes to dine with a view of the runways.

Allegiant's increasing traffic did influence the need for a new general aviation terminal, Hancik said. The new terminal will move to new location that will allow for future expansion of commercial airline operations,



**Airport Commissioner Robert Hancik thinks the new conceptual design for the general aviation terminal is too much roof with not enough view of the runways. This is the terminal for the flights that do not involve the major airlines.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY PGD

Hancik said. That includes Allegiant or any future commercial airline that decides to use Punta Gorda airport as a hub.

As for the terminal design, Hancik told his fellow commissioners that a new building is an opportunity for an airport and a community to make a statement. The new design does not do that, he believes. It is too much roof, he said.

Naples is one of the highest-cost real estate markets in the country.

"I don't think the people of Charlotte County would appreciate if we spent an overwhelming amount of money on a government building," she said.

The public can still comment on the new terminal proposal by sending comments to [RRidenour@flyPGD.com](mailto:RRidenour@flyPGD.com).

Airport CEO James Parish told commissioners that he had cancelled the annual pass, which was limited to less than 80 cars with about 35 on the waiting list. Given the parking shortage that the airport is experiencing, he said he thought this was a good idea. But the complaints were hard on airport staff.

"We have received some angry responses to that," Parish said.

Other commissioners disagreed on the need to make an architectural statement.

“The statement that we make is that we are an airport that operates in a cost-effective and efficient manner,” said Commissioner Paul Andrews.

“I personally like the design,” said Commissioner James Herston.

Naples built an architectural statement for its general aviation terminal, Hancik said.

Chairwoman and Commissioner Pam Seay pointed out that

The design is not expected to be complete until April, with construction to begin in September. Much of the cost would be covered by federal grants, with the rest coming from the commercial passenger facility charge. That fee is going up in January from \$2 to \$4.50 per flight.

### **Airport parking**

Annual parking passes will be back at the Punta Gorda Airport, but at a premium.

The new fee will be \$1,000 a year and limited to 100 people.

Most of the annual pass holders are snowbirds, Parish said, or people who only live here in the winter.

The commission voted unanimously to allow the reinstatement of annual passes and fees.

Parish also said he will improve the entrance and exit technology to use affixed electronic stickers that cannot be transferred from one car to another.

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## ‘A game changer for the future of aviation’

### Charlotte snags \$1.7M grant for mechanic training hub

By LIZ HARDAWAY

STAFF WRITER

Charlotte County’s aviation industry is cleared for takeoff, literally.

The county was awarded a \$1.7 million grant to build a venue at Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD) to train aviation mechanics, the Charlotte County Economic Development office (EDO) announced Friday.

The “Florida Job Growth Grant Fund Workforce Training” grant will allow the county and Charlotte Technical College to provide training for Aviation Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics (A&P). The county and Charlotte Technical College will negotiate an agreement on how exactly the money

will be dispersed, said the EDO’s interim director, Dave Gammon. Charlotte Technical College is listed as a school on Charlotte County Public Schools’ website.

“This is a game changer for the future of aviation at PGD,” said PGD CEO James Parish. “We only see the demand for aircraft mechanics increasing as (the **airport**) continues to grow.”

The A&P certification will qualify graduates to take exams for a Federal Aviation

Administration (FAA) mechanical license with airframe and powerplant ratings, said Ken Doherty, chairman of the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners, in a statement. Students will learn about aircraft structures, power plants, avionics, system design, testing and inspection, while receiving hands-on experience with many aircraft.

“Graduates of the program will drive high-paying,

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high-skilled jobs to the county, fueling economic growth and opportunities in skilled manufacturing and maintenance,” Doherty said.

If everything is implemented on-time, courses could start as early as Fall 2020, Gammon said. The certification course requires 2,250 hours of instruction through Charlotte Technical College. The school anticipates training 50 students in their initial enrollment session, and 100 in the following session.

Initial plans call for the hub to be in an existing hangar owned by PGD under a lease agreement.

“There may be a possibility in the future to relocate on the **airport** grounds to a yet-to-be-determined facility,” Gammon said.

The FAA license is the aviation industry standard for expertise, the EDO said in its press release, with A&P-trained mechanics “often viewed with the same regard that surgeons are among physicians.”

“The A&P certification course will create a talent pool of skilled workers in the aircraft mechanics industry, which is both a target industry for the Charlotte County Economic Development Office and an industry that

of qualified personnel,” Doherty said.

Charlotte County is home to over a dozen companies in the aviation industry, the EDO reported.

Program graduates can continue their aviation career through programs at Florida SouthWestern State College or Western Michigan University/Punta Gorda.

Western Michigan offers a bachelor of science degree in aviation technical operations, and Florida SouthWestern offers an associate in science degree in aviation maintenance management.

Economic Opportunity, and will be matched by donations received by Charlotte Technical College and other in-kind contributions within the county.

Earlier this year, a public infrastructure grant of \$800,000 from the state was announced to help complete a Piper Road extension project.

That \$8 million project is designed with goals of driving growth near the Punta Gorda Interstate **Airport** Park and creating more than 1,400 jobs.

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is experiencing a very  
serious shortage

The grant came from the  
Florida Department of

## Sunseeker, Braves among top stories in 2018

Murdock Village, airport's success and historic Englewood church move also made news this year

### 2018 THE YEAR IN REVIEW

By **JOHN HACKWORTH**  
COMMENTARY  
EDITOR

When people weren't talking about red tide in 2018, chances are their attention turned to the proposed Sunseeker resort in Charlotte Harbor or the Atlanta Braves' new spring training stadium in North Port's West Villages.

While there were certainly other events that will be remembered in the past year, Allegiant Airlines' mega-resort on the banks of Charlotte Harbor had everyone's attention. Whether the resort will be a game-changing, cash cow for Charlotte County is yet to be realized

as a formal groundbreaking has been delayed for various reasons.

Plans are calling for 500 hotel rooms and another 160 to 180 condominiums in two towers as part of the estimated \$420 million project in Charlotte Harbor. The resort will feature several shops and restaurants along the waterfront, a boardwalk and what has been called the largest pool in Florida.

Progress toward actually beginning construction was made last month when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers confirmed it has issued a permit to construct a 934-foot seawall to protect the resort.

That seawall would stretch from the U.S. 41 bridge, going to Punta Gorda, west to the resort's boundary.

Right now, Allegiant officials predict a February groundbreaking and an 18-24 month construction time table.

One of the holdups, besides the Army Corps permit, has been dedication of an easement that would accommodate the harborwalk (or

boardwalk) between the hotel and the harbor that would

**A rendering of the planned Sunseeker resort along**

**Charlotte Harbor.**

RENDERING  
PROVIDED BY  
ALLEGiant

**The Atlanta Braves Spring Training ballpark is named CoolToday Park.**

SUN FILE PHOTO BY  
RONALD DUPONT JR.

be open to the public.

"We are working on the easement language in anticipation of one being submitted in the next several weeks," outgoing Charlotte County Economic Development Director Lucienne Pears said in an email. That harborwalk is required by the county to allow Allegiant to exceed building heights in the Charlotte Harbor location.

The Major League Baseball team plans to have its Tiki Bar open year round while the team also plans event such as movie nights, concerts and youth sports competition on the stadium grounds.

"This is truly a transformative investment in our community by the Braves and it's wonderful to see South County benefit from that," Marty Black, president for West

two extensions by Charlotte County with final plans yet to be revealed. Zoning official Shaun Cullinan told the *Sun* last month that the developers were still gung ho on plans for a shopping complex, hotel and Orlando-style water park for the property.

The project is planned for 157 acres in Murdock Village between State

The old Fishery complex and its restaurant in Placida were torn down recently as new owners of the property began moving to build their planned hotel/condo/retail complex. Boca Grande residents Jay Feinberg and his wife Cookie Potter-Feinberg plan to turn the 14-acre property, which once accommodated fishermen and boutiques, into a 150-room hotel, 60 condominiums for 55-and-

Another major project has had no problems with construction time tables.

That is the Atlanta Braves' new spring training facility. Construction on the stadium is on schedule for the Braves to play their final spring training game of 2019 on March 24.

The media and other officials were treated last month to a tour of CoolToday Park as workers hustle to put on the finishing touches.

The emphasis was not only on the appearance of the stadium but how the Braves plan to make it a year-round destination and a location that will be an integral part of the community.

"I've designed a lot of minor league baseball stadiums," Pendulum architect Jonathan O'Neil Cole told media members during the tour. "There's very few organizations that are more storied than the Atlanta Braves ... when you see that celebrated, it's going to blow people away."

Tickets for the March 24 game will go on sale online Jan. 15. Season tickets for the Braves are on sale now at the Braves Preview Center in North Port.

Villages, told *Sun* North Port editor Scott Lawson.

Other events that shaped 2018 included:

### **Green Street Church moved**

The 90-year-old Green Street Historic Church and Museum was moved to its new home in Englewood.

Talks and plans had been ongoing for months to move the church from its home on Green Street to the Lemon Bay Cemetery on Indiana Avenue. Donations and grants brought in \$170,000 (more is still needed) to the Historical Society to pay for the move.

Before daylight, in September, R.E. Johnson and Sons movers put the church on a trailer and eased it down Green Street to South Indiana Avenue (State Road 776). At only 4 mph, the trip took most of the night. But, when it was complete, the church sits comfortably at its new home. Landscaping, a handicap-accessible ramp, parking and an retention pond are the final touches needed before the church will be opened up to the public.

### **Water park, shops are on hold**

The Lost Lagoon Development planned for Murdock Village has been granted at least

Road 776, U.S. 41 and Toledo Blade Boulevard.

The developers are to pay the county \$6.7 million for the property but will get \$6 million back for improving the roads and adding water, sewer, lighting and landscaping.

The entire cost of the project is estimated at \$132 million.

### **Punta Gorda airport thriving**

The Punta Gorda Airport had a record year for business while its only commercial carrier.

Allegiant, continued to add flights to new cities.

Average growth for passengers was nearly 25 percent from the previous year, according to airport CEO James Parish. The expected final totals for 2018 was 1.6 million visitors coming through the airport to enjoy Southwest Florida.

Most of that growth can be attributed to Allegiant adding destinations. Among the new cities connected to Punta Gorda were: Nashville, Tennessee; Asheville, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Baltimore and Syracuse, New York.

### **Fishery is no more**

older adults along with a new restaurant and meeting space.

### **Another developer rendering of imagined downtown landscape in future Murdock Village.**

RENDERING PROVIDED

**All's well that ends well. Frank Berlin Crane and Leo Pfliger Construction crews replaced the steeple of the Green Street Church now that it's settling into its new home at the Lemon Bay Cemetery.**

SUN PHOTO BY STEVE REILLY

**An Allegiant A-320 airplane takes off. There are about 300 local employees based at PGD (Punta Gorda Airport) that work for Allegiant or Worldwide Flight Services, according to information from PGD on Dec. 6.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ALLEGIANT

## Passengers stranded as fog leads Allegiant Air to divert flights

By JANA E  
MUCHMORE

WINK NEWS

Hundreds of airline passengers were stranded at the Punta Gorda **Airport** when flights landed because of fog early Sunday.

The three Allegiant Air flights were bound for the Sanford Orlando **airport** until their pilots informed them of heavy fog surrounding their destination.

There were no rental cars left, with many scrambling to find an alternative. WINK News heard **airport** staff announce that they were struggling to find any means of transportation.

Some passengers were placed into large vans and buses, but several were left to their own means.

One man said renting a moving truck is his best option to get back home.

“Coming off the airplane, we were told literally and I recorded it,” Kenny Massingil said, “that sorry you have to make your own arrangements. We are stranded. I’ve got a lead on a U-Haul at 10 a.m.

and see if they have one of those big moving trucks and I’ll take it.”

Other passengers chose another route.

Despite Punta Gorda **Airport** being somewhat secluded, some families walked to the nearest hotel about two miles away in the middle of the night.

Allegiant Air said it was struggling to find ground transportation because of the holidays. It has forced some passengers to rely on a ride from relatives.

“It’s just outrageous that a company should abandon its customers the way they have,” John Perry said. “My folks live up on the east coast and drove to Sanford to pick us up, about an hour’s drive.”

Perry, along with other passengers, said Allegiant Air could have handled this situation better

and they will not use the airline again.

Passengers were informed they could receive up to \$225 in travel compensation to get to the Sanford Orlando area.

**Passengers stuck at Punta Gorda Airport because of dense fog Sunday morning.**

WINK NEWS PHOTO