



MANATEE COUNTY  
FLORIDA

**2011 Annual Report to the  
Board of County Commissioners**

In accordance with Florida Statute 125.74, I present to you today the 2011 Annual Report which is a state of the County address along with a concise summary of the work this organization accomplished over the past year, and a preview of the goals we aim to accomplish in 2012.

Though there were indications of economic recovery, 2011 continued to be a very difficult year for our community and for county government. The year ended with unemployment still above 10 percent in Manatee County, but it is far better than the 12.6 percent who were without a job to begin 2011.

As a result of the continued recession, we were again faced with the reality of significant revenue reductions. After a series of public budget workshops, the Board adopted an annual budget that is \$22 million less than the prior year – including a \$7 million reduction in property taxes – bringing the total amount reduced to nearly \$140 million since 2007.

Last year's budget also afforded you with the opportunity to provide employees with a one-time salary supplement. However, for the fourth consecutive year there was insufficient funding to provide County employees with an annual salary adjustment. Many of our best and brightest employees are now leaving the County for higher paying private sectors jobs. I expect this trend to continue in 2012 and beyond until there is adequate funding to provide pay for performance salary adjustments that reward hard work and dedication.

Last year's 4 percent budget reduction was again done in a careful way that avoided major service interruptions to the community and which did not harm the County's strong bond ratings. Thanks to consistently conservative budgeting philosophies of this Board, the budget reductions have not come at the expense of public's wellbeing. As testament to YOUR commitment to a secure community, you found funding for an additional 10 sheriff's deputies who are at work today keeping local neighborhoods safe.

We continued to streamline and reorganize services to better meet a changing community's needs in 2011. The Planning and Building Departments joined efforts in February to become the Building and Development Services Department, a one-stop shop overseeing development from plans submittal and permitting to inspections and code enforcement. Similarly, the Agriculture and Resource Conservation Department was brought under the auspices of the Community Services Department and our Transit operation was moved to Public Works.

There were signs of recovery and positive news throughout the year. It was a banner year for the tourism industry and our Island communities as visitors flocked here in record numbers to enjoy pristine beaches, friendly accommodations and a host of arts and cultural events. Much of this success is thanks to direction the Board of County Commission and the Tourist Development Council. Visitation increased 5.3 percent in 2011 resulting in \$430 million flowing into the local economy from visitation to our county.

The Board continued to take steps to improve the economic climate for local and prospective business owners in a number of significant ways. Throughout 2011 the Board approved more than \$3.6 million in Economic Development Incentive grants to 39 companies. Those businesses will use the money to create or retain more than 2,300 quality jobs here over the next five years. With representation from each county department, the Jobs Now team was focused on economic development in 2011, ensuring that companies receive consistent, predictable and friendly service when they do business with Manatee County.

In addition, the Board heard the business community's concerns and unanimously adopted a new impact fee schedule which reduced fees using the latest post-recession data. The Board also extended the suspension of school-related impact fees until 2013.

Also in 2011, a national youth advocacy organization named Manatee County one of the country's "Best Communities for Young People" and Parents Magazine placed Coquina Beach among the nation's Top Ten Beaches for families.

National recognition for our community did not happen by accident or coincidence. This Board's dedication to providing our community with excellent quality of life services and facilities was evident in nearly every decision you made over the past year.

Rather than listing all of the remarkable organizational achievements over the past year, I have provided you with a detailed report of each department's major accomplishments. However, I do want to touch on some of the organization's most important advancements, awards and distinctions including these four areas where Manatee County has become a state leader:

- (1) One of our earliest events in 2011 was held on the banks of the Manatee River at the dedication of the new Fort Hamer Rowing Park. That ceremony was the culmination of a quick response construction project to

accommodate elite rowing teams from around the country. The facility has spawned a new Palmetto High School rowing team and it continues to host world-class collegiate teams in training. The Fort Hamer Rowing Facility has primed Manatee County to be an integral part of the region's fastest-growing sport.

- (2) Under the direction of Brenda Rogers, Manatee County's Green Team led our organization's path toward becoming a Green Certified Government in April. For more than 18 months, Manatee County staff and the Green Team worked toward the certification by conserving energy, improving recycling habits and cutting down on carbon emissions.
- (3) Another organizational success story resulted in thousands of Manatee County property owners saving millions of dollars a year on their annual flood insurance premiums. In September, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) presented Manatee County with a prestigious Class 5 Community Rating, which will save thousands of Manatee County flood insurance policy holders millions on their annual premiums. This rating could not have been possible without significant efforts from several county departments led by the Building and Development Services Team.
- (4) The Board moved to become a more animal friendly community in October by unanimously adopting a "no kill" policy and directing Animal Services to work toward a 90 percent live release rate for all dogs and cats that come through our doors. Manatee County is the first community in the state to adopt such a policy, paving the trail for other governmental agencies across the country to do the same.

The sustained recession underscored the importance of working smarter and it led to additional opportunities to pursue public and private partnerships. Here are four areas where collaborative efforts and community partnerships generated some quality results for Manatee County:

- (1) Bunker Hill Park opened in May as the result of an important joint venture between Mosaic and Manatee County Government. The fertilizer company agreed to pay start up and operating costs for the first three years of operation totaling \$319,000. Mosaic also donated the land and all construction costs for a new fire station and the park as part of an agreement

with the Board.

- (2) Our Human Resources Department worked with the Suncoast Workforce Board and State College of Florida to offer employment-related training to 163 supervisors, utilizing \$12,000 in employer-matched funds through the Employed Worker Training program.
- (3) Our Natural Resources Department negotiated an arrangement to accept nearly 20,000 tons of the old Skyway fishing pier that will become valuable artificial reef at nearby artificial reef sites. The material was accepted at no cost to the County with a donation value in excess of \$2 million.
- (4) Our Traffic Engineering team has completed two Automated Traffic Management System projects that will improve traffic flow on some of Manatee's biggest roads, meaning a smoother ride to and from work each day for thousands of people.

It was also a year when many major capital projects were completed and long term County investments began to pay dividends.

- First, the Board's continued commitment to providing employees with a competitive health and benefits package was rewarded in September when the *Tampa Bay Business Journal* named Manatee County Government the healthiest employer in the region. The Manatee YourChoice health plan was named tops in the region from among hundreds of employers from seven counties during the Journal's 2011 Healthiest Employer awards in September. This award-winning plan has not only meant a significant improvement in the health of our employees, it has also led to a \$2.4 million savings in patient claims in Fiscal 2011.
- Second, Manatee County's new beach concession vendor, United Parks Services succeeded in breaking the \$3 million gross revenue mark within its first year of operations resulting in more than \$369,000 in revenue for the County, an increase of \$155,000 from the prior year. Along the same lines, the County's two golf courses were successfully transferred to Pope Golf in October resulting in a savings that could reach more than \$1.5 million over the five-year period of the lease.

- Third, the consummate professionalism from our Property Management Department brought several major capital projects to completion in 2011 including the new Marine Rescue Headquarters, Tom Bennett Park, the Palmetto Transit Station, Myakka Community Center and Rocky Bluff Library, which was a prime example of stellar teamwork and community collaboration.
- And finally, our great team at Public Works helped to oversee the widening of U.S. 301 from Erie Road to County Road 675. It is now involved in the oversight of the long-awaited dredging of Wares Creek.

While these accolades and achievements may have grabbed the public's attention in 2011, there were no doubt thousands of unheralded accomplishments by hundreds of County employees who work behind the scenes to keep this community operating smoothly. Here's a sampling of notable statistics from seven areas that regularly work with the public:

- (1) Staff at your Parks and Recreation Department taught more than 500 children and adults to swim.
- (2) Your Citizens Action Center responded to more than 28,000 citizen inquiries and requests for service.
- (3) Your Veteran Services Officers assisted over 10,800 Veterans and their dependents obtain more than \$1.5 million in benefits and entitlements they earned during service to this country.
- (4) Your Community Services Department assisted 269 Manatee County households with payments of electric bills through the state's program assisting seniors.
- (5) There were more than one million patron visits at our public libraries in 2011 and more than 200,000 uses of public computers to apply for jobs, build resumes and obtain job skills assistance.
- (6) Your Code Enforcement officers responded to more than 4,100 complaints of junk vehicles, trash and debris.

- (7) Employees within our Neighborhood Services Department in 2011 oversaw the expenditure of more than \$5.2 million in federal Housing and Urban Development funds throughout Manatee County. Over the past 10 years, our Community Development Block Grant staff have worked diligently to ensure more than \$32 million in federal funds is spent responsibly in the areas it's needed the most.

Though economic conditions will continue a slow rebound in 2012, I believe there is much to look forward to in the coming year. The newly independent Economic Development Corporation, under the leadership of Sharon Hillstrom, is primed to place Manatee County in an even greater position for job recruitment and business investment from around the state, region and country.

We will also usher in a new era at Port Manatee under the direction of Carlos Buqueras who is an excellent leader heading into the 2014 Panama Canal expansion. Carlos has a proven ability to create business at a port which will only mean good things for this community and the region.

The County's I.T. Department will continue to help Manatee Utilities to phase in new software that will improve communication and customer service. The software will soon mean paperless utility billing and web-based access to account information for our customers.

Also during 2012 we will present our findings from the "How Will We Grow" exercise and offer the Board a selection of long-range growth scenarios that will become the guiding principles for community growth decisions for years to come.

We will continue to be a state leader in emergency and hurricane preparedness through direct participation in annual disaster exercises with local hospitals and the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. We will also host one regional preparedness exercise focused on terrorism and another that will mimic the 1921 Tampa Bay hurricane. Along the way we'll continue to enhance and refine the WebEOC database which will provide our EOC staff with more accurate and timely information than has ever been available in the past.

But, 2012 will not be without its challenges. The economy's slow rebound will mean another year of difficult budget decisions and that will sometimes mean delaying projects or having to say no to important requests from our community.

We will again be faced with the reality that our most talented employees will leave this organization for higher paying jobs in 2012 and beyond until we can begin to address the situation. If we want Manatee County Government to continue to be an employer of choice, we cannot continue to fall behind employers in the region who offer more competitive salaries. As our springtime budgeting discussions approach, I hope you'll remember that until employee salaries are addressed, Manatee County Government will continue to become a training ground for other companies and organizations.

As I've mentioned in the past, this organization's greatest strength is its employees, the people who are committed to carrying out the Board's direction to making this a business-friendly organization. For the better part of four years now Manatee County Government has worked hard to polish the customer service and responsiveness we provide this community.

Our own Building Official's exceptional customer service approach earned him recognition as the region's 2011 Building Official of the year. In awarding our own C.J. Dupre' this honor, the Gulf Coast Chapter of the Building Officials Association of Florida noted that C.J. "is caring and helpful and Manatee County should be proud of the Building Official that represents this government."

I'm certainly proud of C.J. And I'm proud of the 1,600-plus employees who carry out the critical work of this community every day. In conclusion, I hope this report serves as a reminder of the incredible scope of work this local government performs on a daily basis.