

2023 TEAM ANNUAL COMMUNITY MEETING DRAWS A CAPACITY AUDIENCE

TEAM welcomed an enthusiastic audience to the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association on January 26 for its highly anticipated 2023 Annual Community Meeting. The event was orchestrated and moderated by TEAM Vice President Betsy Spagnolo.

Attendees were welcomed at 6:00 p.m., by TEAM's Outreach Committee who also provided light refreshments before the scheduled program. Volunteers were on hand at individual tables to acquaint attendees with specific TEAM projects.

(Pictured upper right: TEAM CEO Nancy Johnson, Sunseeker President/COO Micah Richins and Mayor Lynne Matthews).



Promptly at 7:00 p.m., with the auditorium at full capacity, Spagnolo introduced dignitaries including Punta Gorda Mayor Lynne Matthews and city council member, City Manager Greg Murray and staff, Police Chief Pamela Davis, Sheriff Bill Prummell, Charlotte County Economic Development Manager Dave Gammon, school board members, and several current and former community leaders. Spagnolo provided a glimpse of what the guest speaker would present and then introduced-CEO Nancy Johnson who is celebrating ten years at the helm of TEAM. *(Pictured left: Outreach Committee members Lisa Colgan, Corinne Carlson, Janet Jarr, Tiffany Jung, Chair Gina Silvidi-Cairns, Lori Asher. Not pictured: Betsy Spagnolo, Merry Horner, Ruth DiBene, Jan Holm, Larry Cairns, Larry Jaegar).*



Johnson presented an engaging slide show which highlighted the triumphs and tragedies faced by our community during 2022. She touched on the exciting return of Pedal & Play in Paradise, the continued success of TEAM's Free Bicycle Loaner Program, the rewarding Paint Your Heart Out projects, Community Gardens, and recognition for "Best City" from the America in Bloom organization (AIB). The day the "Best City" award was presented to TEAM's Punta Gorda in Bloom, ironically Hurricane Ian was tearing through the city, destroying the beautiful flowers so meticulously installed by volunteers.



(Pictured above right: Kevin Hogan, Bike Loaner Program, Darcy Hanley, Deb Hoyt and Bob Bechtold, Pedal & Play.)



The challenges faced after Hurricane Ian were significant. Johnson discussed TEAM's participation in the Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) response to the storm, the inspiring work of volunteers in the monumental clean up and the successful coordination of relief efforts between government and non-profits.

Johnson touched on several of TEAM's ongoing projects and initiatives. Flowers have been replanted in City Center, the fully subscribed seventh season of the organic

history park is underway, and an abandoned community garden near the Blanchard House Museum has been reclaimed by volunteers including students from the Charlotte High Naval Junior Reserve Officer Corps (NJROTC). *(Pictured above left: PG in Bloom volunteers Joyce Laubach, Elaine LaWell, Helen Cavanaugh, Co-Chair Richard Polk, and Tom Cavanaugh).*

Johnson discussed TEAM's facilitation of the new "Clean Water" project, the objective of which is to quantify current efforts to improve water quality in Charlotte Harbor and to develop new projects involving the community. TEAM has also been involved in convening historic preservation groups and community leaders to discuss the future of the historic Freeman House.



Immediately following the conclusion of Johnson's remarks, Vice President Spagnolo and Board President Dressler presented Johnson with a bouquet of flowers in recognition of her ten years of selfless service to TEAM and the community as its CEO. This drew an enthusiastic standing ovation from the audience. *(Pictured above: Vice President Betsy Spagnolo, CEO Nancy Johnson, and board President Sandy Dressler).*



Spagnolo then introduced featured speaker Micah Richins who provided insight into the soon to be completed Sunseeker hotel, suites, and convention center on Charlotte Harbor. Richins indicated the Sunseeker logo on the side of the building was lighted for the occasion. Using a visual presentation as a backdrop, Richin's remarks were engaging, enlightening, and candid. Below are some highlights. *(Left: TEAM Vice President Betsy Spagnolo, board President Sandy Dressler, Sunseeker President/COO Micah Richins, and CEO Nancy Johnson.)*

Richins stressed that there are no plans for a casino, despite apparent speculation to the contrary in the Charlotte Sun and in letters to the editor. Richins told attendees that after thirty years in the hotel/casino business in Las Vegas, prior to joining the Allegiant Travel group, he has absolutely no desire to be associated with the casino business. He indicated on several occasions that the objective of Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor is to attract convention and hotel guests who will appreciate the quality and abundance of upscale amenities, so they return.



Traffic going to and from Sunseeker Resort will be one of the property's biggest challenges. "I won't lie to you," he said regarding the seriousness of the traffic issues. Sunseeker is working with state and local officials, as well as well-known traffic experts, to mitigate the problem. Richins said that the plan may eventually include a traffic light at the entrance to the complex, at Sunseeker expense. Sunseeker intends to provide its own transportation for guests. The circuit will run from the Punta Gorda airport to the resort and to Kingsway Golf Course. Richins,

however, reminded the audience that Sunseeker cannot dictate how a guest will arrive. "Some may rent a car, take an Uber, or come in their own vehicle," he said.

Richins said the resort plans to employ 1,300 people. At present there are nearly 60 full time employees working on the project; they already live nearby, contributing to the current traffic flow. Richins expects most employees to come from a radius of 50 miles. When asked by an audience member if Sunseeker would pay a "living wage" the answer was an unequivocal "yes." One thousand full-time employees will receive "the same valuable health insurance I have



for my own family," said Richins. In addition, full timers will travel for free on Allegiant Air. That remark drew a collective murmur of appreciation from the audience. Learn more at www.sunseekeresorts.com/careers. (Pictured above right: ACM Chair Betsy Spagnolo, Deidre Villeneuve, Paul Barry and Annette Bales from the Sunseeker team.)

Parking for hotel guests, employees and the public coming to restaurant venues has been well planned, according to Richins. There will be valet parking available for hotel guests, public parking for restaurant/shops, and remote parking for employees. He indicated that if more parking is required, it will be created.

There will be one reception portico for the hotel and another for the SunSuites, full apartments under Sunseeker's brand. Suites guests will be met at the entrance and escorted to their rooms. Originally marketed prior to construction as condos, these units are now fully integrated into the hotel/convention business plan.

Bridal suites are extensively designed to cater to every need of the bridal party with direct access to spa and salon. The hotel rooms and suites were created in real time in a Las Vegas warehouse to iron out all the possible problems prior to being recreated on site. The exterior work on the structure is nearing completion and the work on the interior will begin in earnest with a projected October 2023 opening. There will be no leased facilities at the Resort. Sunseeker will own everything including all the food and beverage offerings.

Sustainability is a hallmark of Sunseeker Charlotte Harbor's construction and operations. Richins remarked that if guests did not love the area, including Charlotte Harbor itself, they

would likely not plan a repeat visit. To learn how Sunseeker's sustainability plan is unfolding visit www.sunseeker.com.



Their online message reads:

"We seek to operate and grow sustainably, reducing our consumption of natural resources and promoting sustainable tourism throughout Florida's Suncoast through various socially responsible practices. Our dedication extends through sustainable practices in the design and construction phase of our resort and by educating guests and staff on eco-friendly practices to ultimately reduce our ecological footprint on the local environment." (Pictured above left: City Council

members Melissa Lockhart, Donna Peterman, Mayor Lynne Matthews and Bill Dryburgh listen to the Sunseeker story.)

Restaurants and shops will welcome the public. The pools, spa and fitness center and Kingsway Golf will be for guests only. Bicycles will not be allowed on the public walkway that surrounds the resort. There are no immediate plans for tennis/pickleball courts.

Plans for the marina, for a possible ferry, riverboat or plane operation are in very early discussions with the understanding that dredging the area will be required. There are no set plans for the undeveloped acreage to the north of the existing resort site. Two parcels on the west side of the street across from the resort have been recently purchased with no specific plans. (Pictured right: Capacity audience at the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Center hears the Sunseeker story.)



Richins encouraged the audience to visit www.sunseekerresorts.com and sign up for future emails on the resort's progress. It was mentioned that the resort will be doing "soft openings" and use their mailing list for selected "invites."

Richins remarks were well received by attendees, and he candidly answered every question posed from the audience.