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Putnam Lodge hosts Dixie County Chamber of Commerce meeting



Dixie County Chamber of Commerce President Carol West (left) invites members and guests to stand and say the *Pledge of Allegiance* as Ed Pivacek serves as a flagpole.

Story, Photos and Video By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 11, 2016 at 4:47 p.m.

CROSS CITY (SHAMROCK) -- The Putnam Lodge – Hotel And Spa of Dixie County, And Dixie Paintball, 15487 N.W. U.S. Highway 19, hosted the monthly meeting of the Dixie County Chamber of Commerce on Thursday (Nov. 10).

This meeting rolled business, patriotism and a Thanksgiving-style meal into another outstanding get-together of people who are members of this strong Chamber of Commerce.

Dixie County Chamber of Commerce President Carol West welcomed all of the members and guests to listen to Andrew Gude park manager of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. Dixie County is among the place in Florida where the abounding natural resources are astounding, she said.

The guest speaker said he is inclined to preserve rural landscapes and cultural heritage as best as he can in Florida, having seen developers change environments to something less desirable, from his perspective, than what existed before.



Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge Park Manager Andrew Gude shares insight about the park service, the national refuge and how people can help preserve the current landscape and cultural heritage if rural Florida.

The United States Department of the Interior, which is the department over the U.S. Fish and

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Wildlife Service, which oversees the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, is no longer purchasing land to preserve it, Gude said.

Instead, it is entering into conservation easement programs with willing private landowners.

For instance, there is land in Highlands County (Sebring-Avon Park) that has been used for ranching and farming for generations. The landowners there entered into an agreement with the federal government so that even if the children of the owners do not want to continue using that land for farming and ranching, it will be preserved for that use alone.

Those deed restrictions, he said, will help improve the odds of preserving that rural Florida lifestyle on that property – rather than allowing some housing developer to make it into a massive residential complex.

As for the refuge under his care now, Gude sees the coastline from Levy County going north into the Big Bend as being “the nursery in the womb of the Gulf of Mexico.”

Gude said this part of the Gulf of Mexico is unrivaled for having the most variety and number of marine life.

In other news from the refuge, Gude said Friends of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge worked with the refuge and volunteers to collect 1,704 pounds of debris in a recent cleanup of the Suwannee River.

OTHER CHAMBER NEWS

The Our Hero Flag Project has seen a resounding success, President West said.

Terry Dembo and Andrew Rains are leaders in building and installing the flags and crosses to honor veterans.

The 151 first set of flags will remain next to the east side of U.S. Highway 19 in Cross City for one week after Veterans Day. Dembo and Rains put them up one week before.

The flags will be put up in the same place for one week on either side of Memorial Day as well.

Debbie Dembo, Chamber treasurer, was recognized for adding the task of record-keeping for the flag project with her other duties.

This program lets any American veteran, living or dead, to be honored for seven days before and after as well as the days of the annual parades in Dixie County for Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

People can buy one or as many of these memorial crosses and flags as they want. They cost \$40 each for a two-year term. They are made of sturdy wood and metal conduit. A renewal option after the two years is probable, but the first two years have not yet passed.

These flags are to be planted one foot in the ground. Branford, in Suwannee County, has a similar project and they are scores and scores of flags and crosses there for that town's parades.

These memorials are for any American veteran, not just those from Dixie County. The name of the person and the branch of service will be on the cross.

A form must be completed, in addition to the \$40 payment per memorial, per each two years. The name of the veteran and their branch of service will be noted on the form, as well as if they are alive or deceased.

To get a form or more information, contact the Dixie County Chamber of Commerce at P.O. Box 547, Cross City, FL 32628, or by email at info@dixiechamber.org.

In other news from the Chamber, there have been at least 18 new businesses opening in Dixie County recently, and many of those business owners are joining the Chamber.

There have been several ribbon-cutting ceremonies; sometimes a few in one day, recently conducted by the Chamber.

DIXIE MUSIC CENTER

Dotti Leichner announced that the 25th anniversary bash of the Dixie Music Center was a huge success.

There were 300 people coming from near and far, including from North Carolina, Tennessee, California and Colorado – coming to Dixie County and helping the economy by buying products and services here.

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She mentioned that her husband Bob Leichner has seen success in the Adopt-A-Highway program he has volunteered to oversee since 2008. There are now 11 groups who have “adopted” sections of roadways in Dixie County, helping to keep the county beautiful.



THE PUTNAM LODGE

Ed and Beverly Pivacek, owners of The Putnam Lodge, provided a Thanksgiving-style lunch for free to all of the Chamber members and guests.

Turkey, stuffing, peas, sweet potatoes, gravy, pumpkin pie and cookies were among the many offerings on the tables.

All of the food was amazingly delicious – and it was prepared by Putnam Lodge Executive Chef Jenö Koch.

People who have not visited The Putnam Lodge recently may have noticed the new great awning over the driveway at the entrance as they approached the beautiful, historic lodge.

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The new awning that stretches over the brick driveway is seen here.



To gain a perspective on how large the covered and enclosed back patio is, Ed and Bev Pivacek are seen in the distance.



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Here is a closer view of the hosts of the Dixie County Chamber meeting from Thursday (Nov. 10).

Another structural addition is the complete covering and enclosure of the giant back patio of the historic hotel.

There are fans when the outdoor temperatures are too warm and there are heaters for the cold weather. A complete, new stage provides an improved space for the musicians who perform there now.

A complete bar is ready to serve patrons on the enclosed patio now too. This is an excellent location for weddings, parties and more.

The Putnam Lodge – Hotel And Spa cordially invites everyone to the Open House Holiday Party, scheduled for Dec. 17 from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m.

For more information about The Putnam Lodge, please send an email to putnamlodge@gmail.com, or call 352-440-0414 or visit the website at <http://putnamlodge.com/>.