

Great Florida  
Burgers p. 10



Icon: Astronaut  
Edgar Mitchell p. 18



# Florida Trend

September 2009

THE MAGAZINE OF FLORIDA BUSINESS

## Capitol Gains & Losses

Most Florida elected officials  
have seen their fortunes  
shrink in the downturn.  
How much are they  
worth now? p. 46

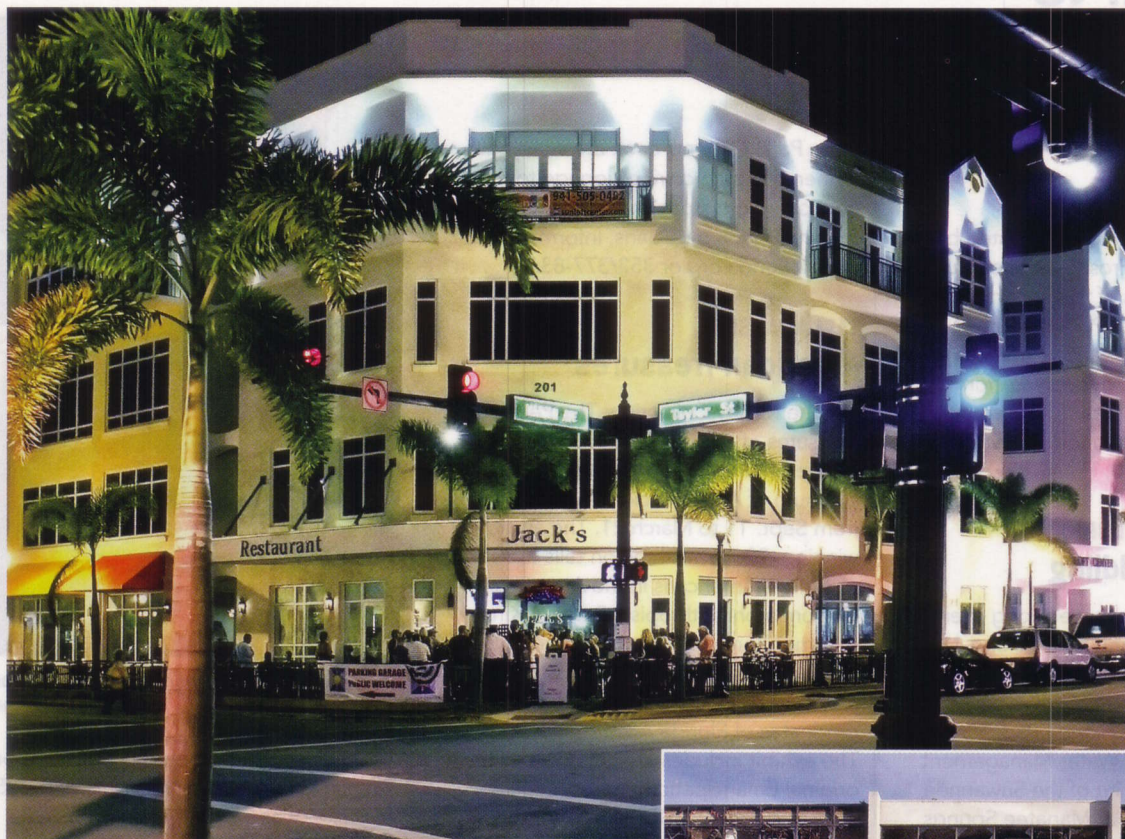
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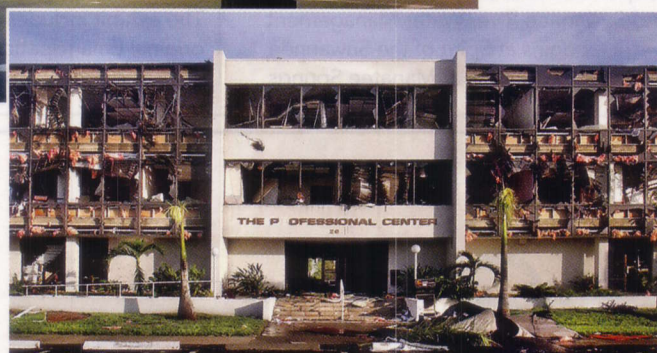
Including:

Charlie Crist  
Alex Sink  
Bill McCollum  
Jeff Kottkamp  
Bill Nelson  
Connie Mack  
Vern Buchanan





The Sunloft Center, a mixed-use development in downtown Punta Gorda, replaced the Professional Center, a large dark-glass office building damaged by Charley.



## Getaways

By Chris Sherman

# Punta Gorda's 'Xtreme Makeover'

The view north from the rooftop pool bar of the Wyvern Hotel is impressive and familiar: The broad Peace River is as serene as its name — not as it was in August 2004, when Hurricane Charley turned the Peace into a brutal warrior. It hurled wind and water down Charlotte Harbor to explode into thousands of homes and businesses. It left seven dead and \$3 billion in damage across Charlotte County.

The town that Charley beat up so badly has come back stronger than ever, with a grin as wide as Marion Avenue, new energy and fresh style. Punta Gorda

is now a smart getaway with gourmet urban pleasures as well as great flats fishing, birding and island-hopping in the purest Old Florida waters and wilds. A weekend visit reveals an encouraging model for any community hit by disaster — and a standard of progressiveness for most of the Gulf Coast.

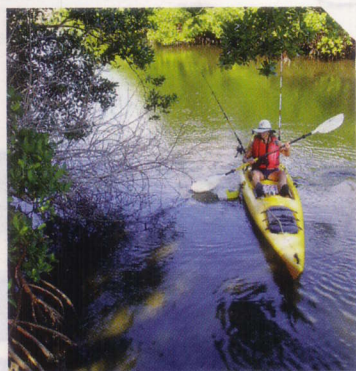
Hopscotch over a few still-vacant lots, and main drag Marion Avenue is full, including both the 1900s-era brick commercial blocks and sprightly new areas like the thoroughly modern Sunloft Center, with lofts, condos and restaurants, including Jack's, which has an outdoor

counter where someone's always grabbing an espresso or beer on the corner of Tamiami Trail.

The street is lined with independent restaurateurs who set a full table of global cooking and keep eclectic cellars of wines from Mollydooker to Sassicaia, with oceans of Rhones and Spanish. The star is chef Jeanie Roland at Perfect Caper, with Florida's crispiest duck confit, worldly udon noodle salads and lusciously clever foie gras with huckleberries. The neighbors can be sophisticated, too: Jack's turned out bronzed scallops and a beggar's purse of lamb for lunch; River City Grill musters a lush prime rib of pork loin with mushrooms risotto.

There's Veuve Clicquot by the glass at Bin 82, a vast wine bar where the wine list is anything racked on the brick walls, a Mediterranean terrace with hookahs,





## Out and About

**Boating:** Unspoiled Charlotte Harbor is Florida's second-biggest estuary and gives cruisers, sailors and kayakers access to the islands of Boca Grande, Useppa, Cayo Costa and Captiva.

**Rambling:** Take a hiking path into the country or a swamp ride through the Babcock wilderness, where herons and sandhill cranes fly and Cracker cattle and alligators roam.

**Fishing:** Saltwater, fresh and in-between teem with world-class tarpon, redfish, snook and cobia.

**Attractions:** Cheer the Tampa Bay Rays in spring training and Cal Ripken's Stone Crabs minor leaguers at Charlotte Sports Park or let your imagination burn rubber in Muscle Car City's 200 vintage vehicles.

an Irish pub and in the distance still more ale, stout and pub grub in the old Ice House from the 1890s.

While new trees sprout, community spirit stands tall. Thousands filled the view from the Wyvern last month on the fifth anniversary of Charley to celebrate the town's "w." They had fireworks and music, ate at the new 500-seat Laishley Crab House, shared memories, good and bad, and toured some 70 buildings erected or reconstructed since the storm. They include a rebuilt Punta Gorda Airport and two new hotels, a Sheraton and the Wyvern.

The left bank of the Peace is a special place. "If you looked at pictures of the town before Charley, the morning after it hit and now, they are three different communities," says Cindee Murphy, who runs Pies & Plates. **FI**



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**AMP: ART, MUSIC, POETRY**  
**OPEN MIC NIGHT@THE STUDIO**  
September 28

The Studio@620 is supported by its members, individuals and businesses throughout the community. This project is funded in part with the support of the Pinellas County Cultural Affairs Department, the Cultural Council, and the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners.



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