

Cooper Street Rec Update

Cooper Street Recreation Center “The Rec”

Cooper Street Recreation Center is a multi-generational center located in the Punta Gorda Historic District and serving Charlotte County. It has been at the center of community life for five decades. Our mission is to build relationships that support, celebrate, and strengthen the community through providing social, cultural, historical, and education opportunities to community members of all ages.

“The Rec”, as it is known to community members has been the center of civic life, community, and personal development over the decades. Cooper Street Recreation Center strategic partnerships allow “The Rec” to provide intergenerational programming for the community.

Our new home page provides a gallery of photos showcasing the center's rich history. Cooper Street Recreation Center is a **historic site** recognized by the Florida African American Heritage Preservation Network, a consortium of museums dedicated to preserving the history of African American contributions to the State of Florida and our nation as a whole.

These partnerships include:

Blanchard House Museum: Blanchard House Museum Research Library & Creative Writing Center

YMCA of Southwest Florida: Before- and Afterschool Enrichment Programs

Small Business Development Center @ Florida Gulf Coast University: Expansion of the Education & Career Outreach Library to Include Resources for Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners

Port Charlotte Library: Support for our Youth Programs

Intergenerational Community Activities have been a hallmark for Cooper Street Recreation Center. “The Rec” hosts intergenerational community dinners and a variety of other community activities fostering connections between different age groups.

Cooper Street Recreation Center also offers workshops to the community in areas such as personal development, professional skills, small business support and more.

Community News

Blanchard House Museum Library

For over 10 years, Cooper Street Recreation Center and the Blanchard House Museum have partnered to create the Blanchard House Museum Research Library. The books used to research each year’s new museum exhibits are donated to the Library at the close of the season. The Blanchard House Museum Research Library now also serves as a Creative Writing Center overseen by former principal, Ms. Eunice Wiley. The Creative Writing Center was created to

cultivate the creative writing skills of youth, allowing them to confidently communicate their thoughts and feeling through the written word.

Ms. Wiley will be providing writing classes to teens to have them develop their creative writing skills and write their college application essays. We also have a retired librarian who will be helping us re-catalog all the books in the research library.

YMCA Before & After-school Program

Port Charlotte Library has partnered with Cooper Street Recreation Center to provide enrichment classes to children in the Afterschool Program. Port Charlotte Library's Youth Librarian comes in once-a-month to provide art enrichment classes to children during the afternoon program with the YMCA.

Education & Career Resource Center

The Education & Career Resource Library will be re-opening next month. We have been updating information on colleges and universities, art schools, culinary schools, and trade schools for the 2023 - 2024 entrance cycle; as well as financial aid application information in both English and Spanish; college entrance exams preparation materials; professional exam preparation materials, such as for the nursing, CMA, CDL, pharmacy tech, and finance/insurance career exams. The updated career and educational outreach materials are being organized at this time. We have plans to work with the Port Charlotte Library to provide college prep and financial aid workshops for teens and their families in the future. We also have a group of volunteers to provide career guidance and mentoring for teens.

To expand the resource and training offerings provided by Cooper Street Recreation Center's Education & Career Outreach Center, Cooper Street Recreation Center has partnered with the **Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Florida Gulf Coast University** to promote entrepreneurship among our residents and to assist area small business clients to assist them with development, planning, growth, marketing, capital-access needs, and more. Pre-COVID it was recognized that in offering our youth (and their families) information on education and career options, that we were lacking resources for those who were more geared to entrepreneurship. The partnership with the SBDC allows us to be a full-service Education & Career resource center for the community. There are two staff members on-hand to provide business counseling and training to assist small businesses and entrepreneurs in the community.

Small business is the foundation of our economy. It allows people to utilize their strengths and turn them into financial security for their families. According to the United Way's 2020 ALICE study, in Charlotte County **30%** of households (approximately 29,964 households) fall into the category of ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), while another **10%** of Charlotte County households live at Federal Poverty Level, meaning that close to half (**40%**) are struggling to meet basic needs. Living paycheck to paycheck, the only way that they will be able to achieve financial security is with having more income. For these working families, owning a small business in the side can provide them with more financial freedom. SBDC at Cooper Street

Recreation Center is here to assist our community in creating more financial freedom and intergeneration wealth. SBCD's services **are free of charge** to all residents.

Additionally, this also serves as valuable resource for our retirees. AARP has found that entrepreneurs 55 years and older have a 70%+ success rate in entrepreneurship. The income from a small business can provide financial security for our retirees well into the future.

Upcoming Programming

Blanchard House Museum Library

The Blanchard House Museum is currently updating the African American Research Library located at Cooper Street Recreation Center. Upcoming programs at the Library are:

1. **Blanchard House Museum Story Hour for children**

2. **“Discover the Ruby Within” Book Club and Workshop**, an intergenerational program for females of all ages. Participants will answer three questions; “Who am I?”; “What are my gifts and talents?”; “What greater thing (s) am I to express in my life?”

For more details: contact@cooperstreetrec.org

Education & Career Resource Center

SBDC @ Cooper Street Recreation Center will be offering the following workshop on Tuesday, July 18th from 11am to 12:30pm. This is a “brown bag lunch”: Bring your own lunch.

Using ChatGPT to Improve Your Business, July 18th , 11:00am - 12:30pm

Discover the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and learn how to transform your small business! In our cutting-edge class, learn what AI truly is and how it can revolutionize your operations. Gain valuable insights into leveraging AI to boost productivity and gain marketplace exposure. Don't miss this opportunity to harness AI's potential and stay ahead of the competition. Join us now and empower your business with the future of technology!

For more details: pguerzo@fgcu.edu