

COVID-19: The Year in Review

March 2021 marks one year that Pinellas County Government and its employees have been in a declared emergency (COVID-19) activation mode. So much has happened. So much has changed. People have taken on much more than they had ever thought. And not just more but unlike what they've done before.

The Pen, with the help of Emergency Management, reached out to our contacts with Appointing Authorities and departments to ask them to share highlights of what their areas have done during this past year concerning COVID-19.

“COVID times created a lot of stress often highlighting the negative. But I think there are some good things we’ve learned, such as the relationships built across departments. We’re stronger putting all our skills and experience together toward a common goal.” Season Groves, Logistics Chief, Emergency Management Coordinator 2

While we couldn't highlight and receive feedback from every County department, we hope these features provide you with an overall theme: We came together to work toward a common goal.

We begin with those departments having primary responsibility for the COVID-19 response and then listed other departments alphabetically.

By the Numbers

as of publication date

1,975 Pinellas County employees have logged over **112,200** COVID-related hours,

4,700+ resource requests processed and over 7.5 million PPE items delivered, including:

- **3.2 million** gloves
- **2.2+ million** face and N95 masks
- **500,000** gowns
- **240,000** units of hand sanitizer

4,714 missions delivered **Personal Protective Equipment items** to medical facilities across the County

Nearly 10,000 COVID-related calls answered at the County Information Center (CIC)

131K+ COVID-19 tests conducted

220K+ COVID-19 vaccines and counting

3.5+ million page views of the public COVID-19 website

Over \$170 million total Pinellas CARES funds committed to date

\$55.6 million in **local business grants** supporting 5,000+ impacted businesses

\$24.6 million in **rent, mortgage and utility bill assistance** supporting 8,000+ households (applications managed by 211 Tampa Bay Cares)

\$7.4 million in **grants to support 530 childcare providers**

Emergency Management

By Spencer Shaw

“Emergency management” is a broad phrase that can be difficult to explain. Often, it’s primarily associated with hurricanes and evacuations rather than encompassing all types of threats and hazards. Over the past year, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic response and recovery has helped shed some more light on what “emergency management” truly entails.

Pinellas County Emergency Management, a team of 14 staff members, began monitoring the progress of COVID-19 in February 2020 as the virus spread through other parts of the United States. By mid-March 2020, our team worked alongside numerous partners to coordinate the unprecedented response. Just as many others have experienced, our staff have pivoted and stepped into a variety of roles to support critical operations – and just when things started to settle, another pivot was necessary as the situation evolved.

Whether in the Emergency Operations Center or out in the field at a donation site, testing site, vaccine site, warehouse, or a number of other places, our staff have been able to work with many members of our community to support the response.

In addition to COVID-19, there have been many other challenges over the past year that have demanded unique and creative strategies to address. From hurricane and tornado threats to supporting elections and community events, our team worked behind the scenes and in the field to help the community. We’ve been able to see countless heroic efforts and extraordinary feats, proving our community is stronger and more resilient than any emergency.

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Color of the day: Wristbands for passing the morning health screening at EOC.



Logistics Group Picture

\$17.9 million to 60+ **local nonprofit organizations** (applications managed by Pinellas Community Foundation)

\$3.7 million in grants to support **50 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations**

Over 400 facilities received supplies from the County Staging Area, delivered by Sheriff's Deputies

Over 3 million meals and over **260,000 bags of groceries** through **180 sites** delivered by partners and the Community Feeding Group

Nearly 55,000 donated items were collected from the community to distribute to medical facilities

230+ employees signed up as **poll workers** due to the Supervisor of Elections COVID-19-related staffing shortage

Working groups and sub-groups:

The County formed 13 Working Groups to address concerns within the community and challenged them to come up with creative solutions. The leads for these groups ran with their areas, brought many partners to the table and identified additional sub-groups as we navigated through the pandemic response. The networks are lasting and the work continues.

Behavioral Health Working Group led by Human Services, the Juvenile Welfare Board and Central Florida Behavioral Health Network to increase awareness of mental health services available

- **Acute Care Subcommittee** formed to establish a coordinated approach to patients entering non-hospital based units.

Community Well-being Working Group led by the Juvenile Welfare Board and Human Services

- Included sub groups Latino Outreach, Asian Outreach, Faith-based, Aging Work Group

Business Working Group led by Economic Development. Alternate **PPE Working Group** brought in and worked with local vendors who could produce or provide support. Several local companies began to make and sell face shields, cloth masks, gowns and surgical masks. Local breweries created hand sanitizer that was made available widely across the community. They are currently working with local companies, hospitals and universities that may have ultra-cold and cold storage for vaccines.

Data Management Working Group led by County Administration and Emergency Management

While COVID-19 has brought new meaning to the phrase “emergency management”, it also given our team even more appreciation for and pride in our motto – “Semper Paramus Ut Servemus ... Always Preparing In Order to Protect”.

The road ahead of us remains a long and challenging one. It will demand the continued perseverance, creativity, flexibility, and resiliency of the whole community, just as it has for over a year. As was recognized by many of us early on, this emergency continues to be a marathon, not a sprint. Nevertheless, our team remains ready to continue fighting COVID-19 alongside all our partners and the community as we work together to ensure the public health, safety, and welfare of our residents.

Human Services

By Jane Muhrlin

Human Services staff is proud to provide ongoing support to the COVID-19 response efforts. From the beginning, Human Services led several Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Working Groups including:

- Community Well-being
- Feeding
- Homeless
- Mental Health

The working groups included community leaders to help lead a coordinated effort of response. Staff also participated on numerous local and state strategy meetings. Throughout the response effort, Human Services continues to work with community partners and agencies. There are a number of continuing support efforts with other County departments.

Face coverings: Several employees volunteered their time and materials to make face coverings for those who needed them, including donating to several homeless service agencies.

County Information Center (CIC): Three team members provided support answering citizens calls about the pandemic.

Supply deliveries: Facilitated regular deliveries to Directions for Living in support of homeless quarantine needs with our key partners, St. Pete Free Clinic and Tampa Bay Network to End Hunger.

COVID-19 testing site: Eight team members provided support at the Mahaffey Theater test site. Jim Clark with Consumer Protection said:

“I appreciate being able to give back to our community by volunteering to work at the COVID-19 test site. It is rewarding to know that we played a part in offering citizens the opportunity to be tested for the coronavirus and that so many people were able to take advantage of the testing free of charge.”



Pinellas County CARES Team group picture at Belcher Commons

CARES funding: More than 50 staff from Human Services and other departments supported 211 Tampa Bay Care on intake calls, processing applications, approving requests for financial assistance, requesting payments and payment reconciliation. Quote from a Cares Fund recipient:

“I know that you work very hard doing this and I’m sure it’s very hectic right now especially given the uptick in cases again. I am so grateful for you and what you do and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I literally had tears because I was so worried we were going to lose our house that we worked so hard for. I’ve never used any kind of assistance in my life and I couldn’t be more grateful for it being available to us. I hope you know how many peoples’ lives you changed.” 211 client

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EMS/Fire Working Group led by Emergency Medical Services and the Medical Director, to coordinate response, modify protocols, communicate with each other and facilities such as hospitals and long term care facilities.

Fatality Management Working Group led by Medical Examiner's Office and Emergency Management, monitored storage capacity, standards, and reporting.

Community Feeding Working Group led by Tampa Bay Network to End Hunger and Emergency Management to support and help expand community feeding efforts.

Worked with multiple community agencies including the Pinellas County Schools, the Rotary Club, Department of Children and Families, Religious Community Services, Salvation Army and many more. Worked to provide food to at-risk groups, and to obtain additional resources.

Finance Working Group led by the Office of Management and Budget – assisted external agencies and internal departments.

Homeless Working Group led by Homeless Leadership Alliance and Human Services, addressed needs of homeless population such as standardizing operations at homeless shelters and providing PPE.

Hospital Working Group led by the Department of Health, Emergency Management and Emergency Medical Services to coordinate and support response, transport, treatment and transfers.

- **Testing Working Group** evolved to establish and support the operations of testing and trends.

Nursing Home/ALF/Health Care Working Group led by Emergency Management coordinating with Department of Health and the Agency for Health Care Administration addressing the acute and longer term needs of service providers.

Public Information Working Group led by Marketing and Communications – to create consistent and real time messaging amongst regional partners.

Social Distancing Working Group led by County Administration and Parks and Conservation Resources with the Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management and all municipal partners addressing policies, messaging, signage, and tracking.

Departments supporting these areas:

CARES funding:

- County Attorney
- Economic Development
- Human Resources

COVID-19 transport flow process: Developed homeless isolation plan (first in the state to be approved) and provided on-call support for community providers (Homeless Leadership Alliance, Directions for Living, Department of Health) to **provide safe isolation for homeless**. Wrap around services such as **feeding and medical support** are also coordinated through this process.

Staff also provides **on-call support for essential workers and first responders**. Approximately 20 Human Services team members provide support. This effort continues currently and includes 3 weekly calls with agencies to monitor the program and address any issues.

COVID-19 Vaccine Site: Worked with community partners to facilitate operations at five sites. Seven Human Services team members provide support. Human Services staff has also been coordinating County staffing at all locations.

CARES Non-Profit Assistance Fund with Pinellas Community Foundation: Awarded 56 programs, close to \$17.9M for critical food insecurity, behavioral health, and housing instability needs. There were seven staff from Human Services, three from the Clerk's Office and one from the Office of Management and Budget.

CARES health agreements for increased testing and contact tracing with Community Health Centers and DOH for \$3.75M are supported by two Human Services staff.

Planning/Housing and Community Development

By Alan Shellhorn

On March 14, 2020, the Planning Department was activated as part of the **Logistics Section** staff at the Emergency Operations Center in support of the COVID-19 response and worked through the local lockdown as essential workers working days, nights, and weekends.

Logistics was responsible for **receiving and processing emergency resource requests for PPE from over 400 facilities** including hospitals, assisted living, group homes, nursing homes, adult day care, rehabilitation facilities, and home health workers.

Logistics would also receive many calls from facilities and would help direct and reassure the health facilities as many eventually had a number of positive COVID cases.

We received reports from the local fire departments that were visiting health facilities and determining their PPE needs which we would follow up with a call to the facilities to order what they were in need of.

The latest Logistics resource request received and processed was **#4,705 and that accounted for millions of pieces of critical PPE delivered throughout the County**. Initially in March it would take 26.91 days to fulfill some orders because we did not have many supplies on hand, but as of August, the average time to complete a resource request was just .38 days. As Adam Pedzich the Deputy Logistics Chief would say, "Beat that Amazon!"

During the COVID activation the Planning Department would change its name to Housing and Community Development and get a new Director, Carol Stricklin.

The department to this day supports both the COVID testing and COVID inoculation sites.



Adam Pedzich

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- Human Services
- Office of Management and Budget
- Planning/Housing & Community Development
- Utilities

County Information Center:

- Human Services
- EMS/Radio & Technology

County Staging Area:

- Parks and Conservation Resources
- Planning/Housing Community Development
- Sheriff's Department

Donations/Supplies (outgoing transport):

- Human Services
- Sheriff's Department

Elections:

- Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
- Parks and Conservation Resources
- Utilities

Grants/Funding:

- Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

Sites (testing sites/vaccine sites):

- County Attorney
- Human Services
- Parks and Conservation Resources
- Public Works
- Utilities

Supplies:

- Administrative Services/Procure to Pay
- Administrative Services/Purchasing
- Clerk's Office (Finance)

Supplies, locally made:

- Economic Development
- Planning/Housing & Community Development

Supporting Fire, Police and Regional 911:

- Animal Services
- Human Services
- Planning/Housing & Community Development
- Radio & Technology

Unique Ways of Dealing with COVID-19

Animal Services told us, "While we have been surrounded by positivity at Animal Services, we understand other departments have taken on additional stress, such as the employees of the Regional 911 Call Center. **We were happy to partner with this Center to offer pet therapy as**

we visited the office with shelter dogs and the occasional kitten 3-4 times per week."

Call Center and Sheriff's Office employees were able to take turns visiting the shelter

pets as a short respite from the reality of increasing pandemic-related calls.



A **County Staging Area** was established with the help of the Sheriff to receive supplies from vendors and the Florida Division of Emergency Management team. Sheriff's Deputies securely delivered the much-needed supplies to **over 400 facilities**. The Parks Department and Planning staff operated, stocked, inventoried, and compiled receipts at the staging area to keep vital supplies tracked and moving.

The County Purchasing and the Procure to Pay Services team worked dauntlessly to locate and procure lifesaving PPE supplies when the worldwide demand for PPE had simply dried up the supply. They also helped vet supplies through the many unscrupulous dealers and bogus products to ensure our citizens received the quality supplies they needed.

Our Community Development section not only worked the Logistics Section processing requests for PPE supplies but also volunteered to staff with other County volunteers the 211 center for the Pinellas CARES grants (from CARES act funding) to provide citizens and businesses the critical financial assistance for overdue mortgage and rent assistance. Within 5.5 hours of the program opening they had received over 982 applications for the CARES grants. Total Pinellas CARES funds committed to date are **\$170.1 million**. When the Pinellas CARES funding had all been distributed, the staff would go on to further **coordinate individual and family assistance** working the State CARES Program from home. In a short 3½ months, 325 files were processed totaling \$772,000 in funding to our residents, with partnerships from our Human Services Department and our Clerk Finance Department.



Densie Whisennant, Tiffany Panier and Marliana Satcher working the Logistics section.

We also received **locally made PPE supplies** from vendors who notified us they had changed up their production to meet the demand for medical supplies. Citizens also stepped up in the County's time of need and in one instance a group of citizens with 3D printers came together to volunteer to produce and donate face mask and face shield frames to hospitals.

Emergency Medical Services

By Season Groves

As one can imagine, EMS/Fire has been at the center of the COVID-19 response effort,

- responding to increased calls while heightening their level of PPE,
- acting as subject matter experts to the EOC Logistics Section in procuring non-counterfeit PPE,
- leveraging relationships with suppliers, and
- educating healthcare facilities on proper use of PPE and sanitation practices.

David Hudak spent countless hours training EOC Logistics Chiefs Season Groves and Alan Shellhorn and Deputy Chief Adam Pedzich how to identify counterfeit PPE and other tricks of the trade – a monumental task he made look easy.

Fast forward to the release of the vaccine and EMS/Fire stood at the forefront of the effort to vaccinate as many of Pinellas's nearly one million residents as want to be vaccinated. EMS/Fire has **performed the majority of the over 220,000 vaccines currently given**.

Administrative Services/Facilities

By Keith Royster

The Facilities staff answered the call by providing protective screens, social distancing decals and signage, a variety of PPE products, and enhanced cleaning services for County facilities and the workforce.

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The **Property Appraiser's Office** shared, "We know that all staff members have spent physical and mental time preparing for this massive change. To do so required a great deal of resiliency, adaptability, and communication. Staff check-ins became more regular as did updates from our Appointing Authority Mike Twitty. Our weekly *Work From Home Entertainment Series* offered staff members the opportunity to listen to a live desktop performance from any of our musically-inclined staff members while sharing a smile."

Silver Linings

Administrative Services/Risk Management

This year the County insurance program was impacted by larger than usual rate increases. As a result, an extraordinary number of meetings were conducted to review these costs and to work out solutions. It would have been a challenge to hold all these meetings in a timely fashion without the Teams platform.

Risk ended up completing the entire process much quicker than in prior years. Many participants were able to respond from their own external virtual environments. This made scheduling much easier. The addition of the Teams platform has and will continue to be a benefit to Risk during the insurance renewal process.

Property Appraiser's Office

With the full PAO staff now equipped for remote working, we can envision new modalities for serving the public as well as eliminating inefficient practices and procedures.

Tax Collector's Office

As our offices slowly began to reopen, we decided to keep some of the changes and adjustments we'd made to cope with the pandemic while providing service to the citizens, since they helped improve the overall customer and employee experience. These improvements were our silver lining.

Utilities

The Engineering and Technical Services section improved its online services, enabling customers to submit plans and conduct business online with limited in-person interaction necessary. This is a significant improvement for our customers, even in a post-pandemic environment.

Administrative Services/Procure to Pay

By Erin Dowie

About a year ago, the Procure to Pay Section was activated to serve on the COVID-19 Logistics team. I have four team members I would like to recognize for their valuable contributions:

- Heather Fawley and Janie Gardner have processed all of the COVID-related requisitions for PPE for aid to other organizations and the County's 120-day PPE stockpile and procurement for testing and vaccination site agreements, rentals, and operating supply needs.
- Heather Fawley has processed **88 requisitions in the amount of \$3,979,065.54**
- Janie Gardner has processed **14 requisitions in the amount of \$757,578.40** (she jumped in to assist in August 2020)
- Susan Burrell sourced and vetted all of the PPE purchases (excluding some of the EMS contracts we leveraged). This requires a lot of research, coordination on involving and receiving and patience. Susan has done an excellent job building and strengthening relationships with new and existing suppliers.
- Daniel Nunez volunteered to be temporarily reassigned to work at the Vaccination Site. He maintains an amazingly positive attitude and servant heart.

Administrative Services/Purchasing and Risk Management

By Amanda Richardson

I would love to recognize Jeanne Armstrong and Bryant Williams as well as the entire Purchasing team for all of their contributions in procuring PPE and all other requested services to get through COVID-19. The Purchasing team has gone through extraordinary efforts in procuring goods and services for COVID-19 and Jeanne Armstrong and Bryant Williams have been leading the initiatives ensuring the County has its needs met.

Administrative Services/Purchasing and Risk Management

By Rich Kahler

The Risk division performs annual meetings in the summer with all County Departments to review insurance coverages and exposures prior to the County's renewal period on March 1. Prior to COVID-19, we utilized face-to-face meetings and telephone conferences to accomplish this task which extended the process.

With the advent of COVID-19, Risk utilized Microsoft Teams this past year to conduct these meetings. We experienced many positive responses to using the virtual Teams format. The ability to share screens and documents aided in the discussion.

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Airport

By Michele Routh

As an essential business, St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) never closed to the public, but quickly adapted to the conditions. Our first flight was canceled on March 17th and in April we faced a decline of 98% in passenger traffic.

Rallying together with our airlines, concessionaires, and the Transportation Security Administration, we developed



Rise to Shine Signage

PIE's COVID-19 Action Plan. We increased cleaning and sanitizing, set up social distancing and protective barriers, and put out free masks at every entrance to the airport.

Partnering with Visit St. Pete/Clearwater when it was clear these measures needed to stay, we brightened the look of the airport with the *Rise to Shine* campaign to stay safe and visit responsibly.

PIE is fortunate to have maintained non-stop service from over 55 cities and combined with our award-winning beach destination, travelers returned at higher rates than the national airport average. Our recovery continues and we are pleased to be hosting a job fair one year after it all began. Safety is always our top priority, followed by customer service. Our motto, *Tampa Bay The Easy Way*, guides us to create a safe and friendly experience for visitors and employees.

Animal Services

By Jennifer Renner

At Animal Services, we can count on one hand the number of times we heard the words, "Adoptions is empty!" However, since the pandemic began, at any given time, the cat and/or dog adoptions area was empty or nearly empty at least a dozen times. It seems the pandemic reset people's priorities with many families redefining what's important. Apparently, COVID's far reaching effects of isolation, along with feelings of increased anxiety created "job opportunities" for our shelter pets as they happily filled the position of Emotional Support Animals across the globe.

While we have been surrounded by positivity at Animal Services, we understand other departments have taken on additional stress, such as the employees of the Regional 911 Call Center. We were happy to partner with this Center to offer pet therapy as we visited the office with shelter dogs and the occasional kitten 3-4 times per week. Call Center and Sheriff's Department employees were able to take turns visiting the shelter pets as a short respite from the reality of increasing pandemic-related calls.

Community outreach has also moved to the forefront at the shelter as we witnessed the pandemic's impact on our neighbors. With our Pinellas families struggling with unemployment, health issues, and the devastation of losing loved ones, connecting to the community never seemed more important. The shelter continues to

offer a free pet food pantry as well as vouchers to assist low income families with the cost of annual vaccines, microchips, and sterilization procedures. Our weekly low-cost rabies clinic continues to operate albeit slightly modified as a drive-through operation to maintain current safety guidelines. Staff members have also visited homes to literally assist with mending fences as a means of keeping pets safely in their homes. These are just a few examples of the shelter's mission to preserve the human-animal bond within the community.

Business Technology Services

By Lynda Morrill

With the onset of the pandemic, Business Technology Services (BTS) had to quickly respond to the high demand of office workers transitioning from the office to remote work locations. BTS needed a way to deliver work-from-home content quickly. We used our SharePoint site capabilities and the Remote Work site was up and running. We quickly created and delivered "How-To" instructions on a variety of topics such as MicroSoft Teams, When to Use the VPN, How to Find Your Network Files, and provided information about phone and calling options, all while staying safe during the pandemic.

Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

By Karen Lamb

As an essential business, the Clerk's office has remained open to the public throughout the pandemic to ensure citizen's access to the court system and necessary essential services. Clerk employees have remained dedicated to providing those services while also offering alternatives to protect both our citizens and employees. To reduce foot traffic to the office, a significant effort was made to direct citizens in need of Clerk services to use our online services, drop boxes for payments, calling our Customer Information Center, and virtual meetings.



CCC at SOE

To balance workloads throughout the office, Clerk employees graciously accepted temporary reassignment within the Clerk's office as well as to other agencies. **Sixty employees were temporarily reassigned to the Supervisor of Elections office to help with the primary and general election.**

Clerk employees also played a huge role in the **processing of CARES Grant Program applications and assistance payments for local businesses and individuals** impacted by the pandemic. To expedite assistance, checks were issued daily to businesses, childcare facilities and non-profit organizations. The Clerk's office issued **11,000 checks totaling \$67.4 million and reviewed an additional 22,000 payments made by community partners amounting to \$33.3 million.**

Employees from the Clerk's office are known for their

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kind and giving hearts, which the pandemic did not change. When it was determined that face masks could help to reduce the spread of the virus, **employees (and family members) made face masks to provide to their coworkers.** While changes had to be made and precautions put in place, it did not stop us from holding our annual fundraising efforts – Domestic Violence Awareness Month, holiday gift collections for local charities, and food donations to local shelters.

County Attorney's Office

By Sue Estrada

As with so many agencies, the County Attorney's Office had to adapt quickly and nimbly to living and working within the global COVID-19 pandemic. This was most strongly felt through the necessary creation of many new processes, which the County Attorney developed (and continues to develop) in coordination with other County departments and clients. These vary greatly and include:

- Creating and implementing virtual public meeting processes;
- Quickly setting up programs and agreements for providing financial support to various elements of the community funded by the federal government (CARES and Emergency Rental Assistance);
- Monitoring and advising on the rapidly developing and changing federal requirements relating to emergency leave and changes to employee benefits;
- Providing mechanisms to allow **testing and vaccinations** to be administered in coordination with the local office of the state health department;
- Coordinating streamlined processes to accommodate remote work and social distancing within the office, and for employees who came into the office to complete in-office tasks for those working remotely;
- Accepting service of process of lawsuits and subpoenas for clients we would not normally accept service for, but whose offices were temporarily closed; and
- Developing processes to interview, onboard, and train several new employees while the majority of the office was working remotely.

Above all, the need for the immediate analysis of new, ever-evolving — and often unclear or even conflicting — laws (such as Federal and State Emergency Orders, Administrative Orders, legislative acts, federal funding requirements, and local acts), required staff to be agile and balance quick response times with deliberate and careful review. The sheer volume of work handled by staff was immense, but all rose to the challenge, and worked as a team to share the burden.

We'd also like to thank Elaine Bucklin, who has since retired, for her hours of sewing hundreds of masks, which she provided not only to her fellow County Attorney employees, but for many employees within the County, as well as many organizations outside our own.

Human Resources

When COVID-19 impacted Pinellas County, just like all the departments in the Unified Personnel System

(UPS), Human Resources made changes to keep County employees safe. In the beginning, all HR employees transitioned to working remotely and increased the use of online platforms such as Teams and Zoom to continue providing important services. Over time, some staff returned to the office in order to provide critical services by appointment.

The **COVID-19 Cross Functional Team** was formed with representatives from all Appointing Authorities to support consistent information flow, examine key issues impacting the workforce and communicate important reminders. Among other things, they helped to unify policies and practices across Appointing Authorities and departments.

Human Resources provided critical and up-to-date information for employees.

- Created and continuously updated a **COVID-19 web page for employees** including COVID-19 documents such as FAQs and supervisor resources, totaling over 90,000 views
- Created the **Employee Blog** to provide another space for employees to connect and find resources
- Sent over 30 blast emails (in 2020) to employees and supervisors to help them stay up-to-date and to provide guidance and links to needed resources
- Provided an online Supervisor Tool Kit/Resource Guide and flow charts and Volunteer Site Coordinator Tool Kits to offer help for supervisors' unique needs in managing during a stressful time

Our team worked to **customize our services.**

- Initiated a **critical incident support program** which allowed employees to interact with a counselor during work hours to help manage stress and build resilience. This was later expanded and offered to all departments in the Unified Personnel System (UPS).
- Produced five **COVID-19-related webinars** on coping, testing, the flu and fatigue during the holidays.
- Improved access to help employees apply for Emergency Family Medical Leave (EFMLA) by developing an online form.
- Administered changes to the deferred compensation plans to allow a Coronavirus-Related Distribution and increased loan limit for families experiencing financial hardship, in accordance with the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
- Due to COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of all employees, the biometric screening requirement (lab work) was waived in 2020.

The pandemic did not alter the County's need to fill positions but it did alter the way the County could interview and onboard the 424 new hires in 2020.

- Created **Remote Interviewing Options** for hiring managers and assisted in remote interviews.
- Enhanced the **New Employee Orientation** and hosted on the virtual Zoom platform and added a new employee welcome web page to help integrate our new employees into Pinellas County and its culture.

Also, in-person classes were **transitioned to virtual learning opportunities** to provide continuous development to employees.

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Marketing and Communications

By David Connor

As the COVID-19 pandemic blossomed in the early months of 2020, our Marketing and Communications department was already adapting to meet the emerging needs of our residents. We implemented a remote working strategy to maintain the stream of accurate, timely, and relevant information to all of our audiences in three languages. We brainstormed and implemented updates to the public meeting process to enable critical leadership decisions informed by a remotely empowered populace. We created and solidified key partnerships with partner organizations and community leaders to distribute the latest information on safety protocols, COVID testing, economic relief, mental health, and vaccines. Those engagements also enabled us to identify and correct confusion, misinformation, and fear. Pinellas remains one of the most resilient, protected counties of its density in the state, despite having a significant percentage of at-risk residents.

At the center of our efforts was the completely new, standalone COVID website. Accessible to blind and low-vision residents and available in Spanish, this site provided up-to-the-minute breaking news to more than one million visitors, gathering hundreds of thousands of impressions on topics like vaccine availability, test site hours, and financial assistance.

Never content to wait for residents to come to us, we projected our presence into the community via regularly scheduled Facebook live updates, Alert Pinellas messages, outreach to community groups, and even mobile digital billboards on trucks and boats. Hundreds of thousands of residents were guided in safe practices by our pandemic safety signs at area beaches, park, government buildings, and businesses.

Pandemic life changed not only what Marketing & Communications did externally, but also what they did internally. Staff began offering a remote Zoom interview workshop. Five departments have already taken the training, and 99% of those surveyed said they would recommend the workshop to a coworker.

More than a year into the local state of emergency, your Marketing & Communications staff continues to innovate and exceed expectations supporting county departments, the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County, and, most importantly, the residents of Pinellas County.

Office of Management and Budget

By Fredricka Collins

In order to maximize cost recovery efforts, the Office of Management & Budget formed the **Finance Working Group** in partnership with Emergency Management and Procure-to-Pay. The Finance Working Group works together to assist internal departments and external agencies with tracking expenditures by providing guidance on navigating through available resources, ways to utilize existing technology for reporting, required forms, and best practices for FEMA Public Assistance reimbursement. The Finance Working Group meets weekly to review current guidance, assess fiscal impacts, develop internal processes, and strategize ways to better support partners with cost recovery.

Parks and Conservation Resources

By Elizabeth Snyder

PCR staff are always ready to help their community. Whether it's:

- staffing a **County Staging Area (CSA) or Point of Distribution/Dispensary (POD)** to provide much needed medical supplies and PPE to our hospitals or assisted living facilities,
- handling reverse PODS,
- **sanitizing** playgrounds and restrooms to provide a safer environment,
- volunteering to be a **poll worker** when regular poll volunteers aren't available,
- assisting with **traffic control** at a testing site,
- making sure visitors social distance on our beaches, or meeting someone outside the office doors to help them with diagnosing a horticultural problem,
- handling the many boat/beach passes.



PCR staff have not been afraid to step up and help wherever possible, all while our parks were still open with a heavy increase in park attendance.

On top of that, PCR staff performed their job duties realizing that our parks, preserves and trails may be many people's only respite from the stress the pandemic has caused them.

Property Appraiser's Office

By John Van Heest

2020 was an unprecedented year and to ensure the health and safety of our staff and the public, we needed to make unprecedented operational changes ... at light speed. In just under 20 days in March 2020, we mobilized our entire workforce to a remote environment while continuing to serve the public via telephone and email. This meant that 130 Property Appraiser staff members needed to be equipped with new computers, phones, software, and security to continue their statutory duties. As a result of the ingenuity, dedication, and hard work of the PAO IT Team, each staff member was able to continue their work without any disruption to customer service.

We were even able to expand our virtual offerings; with the use of Teams, we developed a **Virtual Appointment** system for customers looking to conduct face-to-face interactions with area property appraisers.

When we reopened our doors to the public once again in summer 2020 (including a brand-new customer service center in St. Petersburg), we made sure all of our spaces were equipped with necessary protective measures, including minimizing the need for in-office staff. With the full PAO staff now equipped for remote working, we can envision new modalities for serving the public as well as eliminate inefficient practices and procedures.

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While our IT team spent countless hours preparing physical technology and software, we know that all staff members have spent physical and mental time preparing for this massive change. To do so required a great deal of resiliency, adaptability, and communication. Staff check-ins became more regular as did updates from our Appointing Authority, Mike Twitty. Our weekly *Work From Home Entertainment Series* offered staff members the opportunity to listen to a live desktop performance from any of our musically-inclined staff members while sharing a smile.

Safer-at-Home ordinances kept us physically apart, but the PAO connected more than ever in a spirit of collaboration, adaptability, and public service.

Public Works

By Season Groves

Public Works is full of unsung heroes during each and every emergency our County faces. This last year was no different as they stepped up time and again to fill the gaps for COVID-19 operations. One call and someone was there supporting operations from the lockdown to testing sites to vaccination sites – Public Works had a hand in nearly every aspect of the response effort.

Starting the year off, Public Works employees Sean Hannigan and Sean Tipton immediately sprang into action deploying their teams and themselves for extended hours while supporting Sheriff operations on the beaches and moving PPE throughout the County.

As testing sites opened, their teams again stepped up to the challenge setting up, staffing and breaking down testing sites at the Mahaffey Theatre, Tropicana Field and Ruth Eckerd Hall.

As vaccinations became a reality, these teams pivoted to support EMS/Fire at five sites across the County.

A special thanks to DJ McDuffy and his team for the miraculous turnaround on all the sign support needed for these multiple operations. DJ and his team worked magic expediting turnaround times.

Regardless of the long hours, the blistering heat, or the freezing cold, these Public Works teams always showed up with positive attitudes and found a way to make the impossible possible.

Radio and Technology

By Jackie Weinreich

Radio staff:

- Programmed portable radios to support remote radio dispatch functions, so dispatchers could monitor primary dispatch and talk on their assigned/working channel.
- Managed these radio assets, cleaned/disinfected upon return and prepared them for reuse.

Programming/technical staff:

- Implemented CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) configuration changes to allow for remote CAD functionality (this provided the same notifications of waiting incidents, messages, etc. as if they were sitting in the 9-1-1 Center).

- Implemented automatic notification to first responders of **potential COVID exposures** upon dispatch.
- Created a COVID-19 testing and results tracking tab on 911Web (updated daily).
- Color coded incident numbers to identify COVID/Pandemic calls on 911Web to assist fire department command staff in planning/staffing/relocating apparatus.
- Provided remote network access and sim cards (broadband connectivity) in support of COVID strike teams staffed by Fire Department personnel.

Lori Collins was asked to activate the County Information Center (CIC). She scheduled staff and managed the CIC for 6.5 months (answered 11,000 calls from the public).

Morgan Pyle performed remote radio dispatch functions for over 100 hours to **supplement Regional 9-1-1** Center staffing.

Alvin Roach coordinated delivery and pick up of remote dispatch kits all over Pinellas County and into Pasco County. He also cleaned and disinfected the equipment to prepare it for reuse.

Rick Cody used ESRI tools to run analyses for North County Fire Departments for **special COVID response units**, so they performed within coverage, time and response guidelines.

Tax Collector's Office

By Amber Bradley

The Tax Collector's team (PCTC) had to act fast to come up with a plan that would ensure the safety of our employees and customers while also continuing to provide much-needed services to Pinellas County. When businesses began to shut down around the County, we followed suit. Although our offices were closed to the public, PCTC employees continued to show up and work diligently behind the scenes processing transactions to the best of their ability.

A virtual team was established and tasked with coming up with an alternative operational plan. Within this plan, several new processes and guidelines were launched:

- An **appointment-only system** to ensure social distancing
- Protective **glass barriers** installed at all workstations
- Day porters posted at each office location
- Security guards screening customers and monitoring **capacity limitations**
- Face mask requirement implemented
- Temporary **live chat feature** on our website
- New virtual ways to serve our customers
- Select departments transitioned to remote positions
- Transitioned meeting and training classes to **virtual platforms**

As our offices slowly began to reopen, we decided to keep some of these changes and adjustments as they helped improve the overall customer and employee experience. These improvements were our silver lining.

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Although it was a stressful time as the world faced countless unknowns, the PCTC team came together to find innovative ways to serve Pinellas residents while protecting everyone's health and safety. We showed our agility and resilience in the face of uncertainty. A year later, we are stronger as a team and as individuals. We held our 2021 In-Service Day event virtually for the first time and this year's theme was "Better Together" because, well ... it's true. The PCTC team faced the challenges 2020 presented head-on and **thrived because we had each other.**

The County's many medical offices, colleges, and citizens came together and donated much needed PPE supplies to critical facilities in short supply and we are ever so grateful to them all!

The COVID response was a definite team effort of many different County agencies, citizens and partners that all came together to help save and protect lives in our community.

Utilities

By Patsy Heiss

Pinellas County Utilities (PCU) experienced significant upheaval during the past year, but we made sure our residents did not experience an impact to their service, even though our operations were considerably changed. The same day the County announced remote working as means of reducing exposure, the Customer Care Center seamlessly transitioned from the office to working remotely, as all staff were equipped with laptops, computer-based softphones, and online reference resources.

Already on track to upgrade and implement a new SAP system integration in record time, the Customer Services Section of our Business & Customer Services Division completed the first-ever 100% remote go-live launch with a new SAP S/4 HANA integration, marking PCU as a national pacesetter and innovator.

Our Maintenance Division managed to keep socially distant and meet CDC guidelines while working on job sites, limiting the number of people in work vehicles, wearing PPE, and sanitizing all vehicles between shifts.

Water Quality worked with Operations to make PCU the only public utility in the Tampa Bay area to **conduct sampling of wastewater to identify COVID-19 hotspots** in the County.

The Engineering and Technical Services section improved its online services, enabling customers to submit plans and conduct business online with limited in-person interaction necessary. This is a significant improvement for our customers, even in a post-pandemic environment.

Finally, numerous PCU staff volunteered to assist with the many calls for assistance from the **Supervisor of Elections** for the Presidential Preference Primary and the General Election, Economic Development for the **COVID CARES business application** processing, and the Health Department's need for **staffing the vaccination centers.**



Business & Customer Services' Finance section works with representatives of the Vertex consulting team during remote Go-Live SAP S/4 HANA integration event. Pictured clockwise from left, Cheryl Skantze, Tom Moran, DeeAnna Schultz, Vertex rep, Shenita Cooper, Anila Muharemi, and supervisor Debbie Fulton, center.

People who helped make this special edition happen – thank you.

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Rich Kahler, Administrative Services/
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Ashley Miles, Tax Collector's Office
Lynda Morrill, Business Technology Services
Jane Muhrlin, Human Services
Cathie Perkins, Emergency Management
Jennifer Renner, Animal Services
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