



By Bill Parsons Vice Chairman, Seven Oaks CDD

# SEVEN OAKS HANDLES DEBBY

**T**ropical Storm Debby did not reach hurricane strength, but it did a lot of damage and caused disruption for the people in the Tampa Bay area to include Pasco County. Most of us saw pictures and video of how Debby closed Bay Shore Blvd to traffic, and how the only people using it were in boats. Due to the high winds that accompanied Debby, it also closed the Sunshine Skyway Bridge which over 52,000 people use every day. It was closed from 4:00 p.m. on June 24th to 3 a.m. on June 27th. This was the longest it has been closed since it opened on April 20th, 1987. The only other time it had been closed was for 8 hours in September 2001 during Hurricane Gabrielle. The storm also closed portions of the Courtney Campbell Causeway Bridge and all eight lanes of the Howard Frankland Bridge. The Gandy Bridge was almost closed.

In Pasco County, two people drowned, several communities that included about 7,000 homes were under mandatory evacuation, a tornado took off the roof of the Elfers Post Office, and thousands were without power. Quail Hollow, a community just north of Seven Oaks, experienced water backwashing into their houses when traffic would go down their streets.

As for Seven Oaks, there was very little damage, but it was not due to luck. It had more to do with how well the community

was planned. When our family looked at Seven Oaks in 2002, we were very impressed with the ponds along Ancient Oaks Blvd. When we saw the pond in The Laurels, we thought the developer had done a great job of creating a pond that provided homeowners with a scenic view and an opportunity to observe wildlife. Our sales associate might have called it a "retention pond", but to us, it was just a pond. Little did we know at the time that the 100 plus ponds had little to do with providing scenic views but were primarily there to handle storm water and were a critical part of the stormwater management system at Seven Oaks. It did not take us long to realize the value of these ponds.

In 2004 when Florida was hit with four major hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, we realized why they were called retention ponds. We escaped

a disaster when Charley, which was on a path to go directly over Seven Oaks, turned a few hours early and came ashore at Captiva Island near Ft. Myers. About three weeks later Frances passed over Seven Oaks. Ivan came across Florida to our south. And then, three weeks after Frances, Jeanne passed over Seven Oaks. Just as the Seven Oaks stormwater system handled all this rain, it did a great job of handling the steady rain during Tropical Storm Debby.

The picture below is the pond at the entrance to The Laurels. On the day prior to Tropical Storm Debby, it was completely dry. Four days later after Debby had dumped over 10 inches of rain, it was full. As for the ponds that were already full prior to Debby, they drained into other areas designed to handle their overflow. After Debby, once again I am reminded of the importance of

having retention ponds that have been strategically placed to take care of the stormwater.

Now why did Seven Oaks not have a flooding problem like so many other communities? When Seven Oaks was being developed, it was designed to handle stormwater runoff based on historical data of either the "50 year rain event" or "100 year rain event". The engineers worked closely with Pasco County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District for the design and ultimate approval of the system. All of the ponds within Seven Oaks are strategically planned to handle the runoff and many, but not all, allow the water to ultimately discharge into the surrounding wetlands. As the water levels in the ponds rise, the water exits through the outfall structures of the selected ponds to discharge into the wetlands. Most of the ponds that discharge into



One of the over 100 retention ponds at Seven Oaks designed to handle water created by storms such as Tropical Storm Debby



the wetlands also have littoral shelves, which are planted with beneficial plants to filter the water before it reaches the wetlands.

At Seven Oaks, Tropical Storm Debby's wind did take out a few trees. One of the largest trees was an oak tree pictured above in The Laurels park. To keep cleanup cost to a minimum, our CDD staff removed a few small understory trees. Our maintenance staff found some additional trees that an arborist will need to investigate to see whether they need to be removed or if they can be re-staked. The CDD contacted Joe's Tree Service to



remove 20 down trees and re-stake 6 others for a total of \$6,625.

In central Florida, sinkholes are a way of life. For example, just prior to Tropical Storm Debby part of a house collapsed into a 40 ft wide, 20 ft deep sinkhole in Hudson. Seven Oaks has had just a couple of minor sinkholes.

The large park in Amberside did get a 6 ft wide and 3 ft deep sinkhole as a result of Tropical Storm Debby (see picture at left). To determine the extent of the depression and the underlying condition of the limestone, the CDD has paid \$3,000 to run ground penetrating radar and other tests. Rizzetta, our district manager, has received a bid for \$16,000 to repair the sinkhole. ♦