



The Perfect Caper

Charlotte Harbor's Big Comeback

Six years ago, Hurricane Charley tried to wash away this community. Today, **it's back and better** than ever.

BY ANNETTE THOMPSON

On August 13, 2004, Hurricane Charley's 140-mph winds flattened Charlotte Harbor, the community halfway between Naples and Tampa. When the sun returned, the rebuilding began, especially in Punta Gorda, the heart of Charlotte Harbor. New buildings sprang up, and small businesses flourished. Here are our don't-miss favorite spots.

- **Wyvern Hotel:** This new 63-room boutique hotel features a party-perfect rooftop pool and bar with views of the river and city. Anchoring the riverfront, the Wyvern is the best sunset spot in town.
- **The Murals:** Prior to 2004, more than 90 murals depicted Charlotte Harbor's history on buildings in Punta Gorda. Charley destroyed 10 of those buildings, and 23 murals have since been painted anew.
- **The Perfect Caper:** James and Jeanie Roland's acclaimed restaurant was tucked into a tiny place before the storm. Now expanded in a historic building downtown, it features a two-course prix fixe dinner for \$20 (\$30 with wine). The Rolands serve wild-caught fish, free-range pork and beef, and organic vegetables.
- **Muscle Car City:** Rick Treworgy snatched up a wind-damaged Walmart and transformed it into a sleek new auto museum with a collection of 250 vintage U.S. cars.
- **Charlotte Sports Park:** The storm spurred the community to rebuild its existing stadium. Now, Charlotte Sports Park is home to the minor league Charlotte Stone Crabs baseball team. The family-friendly park also includes a playground and affordable seating with great views.
- **Laishley Park:** Punta Gorda's riverfront gathering spot, Laishley Park offers a marina with 85 slips and a waterside restaurant, Laishley Crab House. The park also features *The Spirit of Punta Gorda*, a sculpture depicting two palm trees—one upright and the other bent to the wind—that illustrate the strength and flexibility of this community. *



Wyvern Hotel



Charlotte Sports Park



Muscle Car City