

# City lauded for tree preservation

By **BRENDA BARBOSA**  
STAFF WRITER

PUNTA GORDA — There are 30,000 cities in the United States, and 3,144 counties, but only 283 cities have been awarded the Sterling Tree City USA award, a prestigious recognition bestowed by the National Arbor Foundation to communities with exemplary tree programs.

Of the 410 municipalities in Florida, only 18 have received this award. This year, the city of Punta Gorda became part of that elite group.

“To understand the Sterling award, first (a community) has to be a Tree City USA. There are four core things you have to do, and Punta Gorda has

been doing that for quite a while,” said Ed Flowers of the Florida Urban Forestry Council. “Once you get that, then you go to the Growth awards, which mean you have to do something more, above and beyond the core requirements. And then to get to the Sterling, you have to do that 10 years in a row.

“It’s hard to do, so I commend you on a great program,” Flowers told members of the City Council Wednesday during the presentation of the award.

Last year marked the city’s 19th consecutive year as a Tree City USA. Punta Gorda also has been awarded the prestigious Tree City Growth Award for its community forestry program

in the areas of education and public relations, continual education of forestry staff, community partnership, and land-use planning coordination.

City officials were excited to earn the recognition.

“It is a great way for us to begin to celebrate the 20th Arbor Day celebration,” city planner Joan LeBeau said.

This year the city will commemorate Arbor Day on April 25 at Lashley Park. The theme this year is “Trees Are Terrific.” The city is playing host to a poster contest for grade school children from Sallie Jones, East and Neil Armstrong elementary schools.

In addition to presenting the city

**TREE | 12**

## TREE

FROM PAGE 1



with the Sterling award, the Florida Urban Forestry Council also recognized the members of the Punta Gorda Isles Green Thumbs — a non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to enhance the green spaces of our community — for their outstanding work in tree preservation.

The group was commended for its superior gardening at the park near the corner of Bal

Harbor Boulevard and Aqui Esta Drive, where dozens of volunteers work each Friday morning.

“The time that they have spent has given us a park we can really be proud of,” LeBeau said.

Richard Polk of the PGI Green Thumbs thanked officials for the recognition.

“We get out there every week and do our work because we love it,” Polk said. “But it’s great when someone else thinks you’re doing something well.”

Email: [bbarbosa@sun-herald.com](mailto:bbarbosa@sun-herald.com)