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Q&A with Fort Myers' first permanent city manager:



Mitchell

>>FW: Where are you from?

>>WM: I moved down here from Newport News, Virginia, where I'd been for 22 years. The time was right. And I've always envisioned myself a Florida resident, so it makes a lifetime dream come true. We've seen all these images of Florida being this place where the sun always shines, where you find beautiful beaches. It has a certain mystique and romanticism.

>>FW: Have you faced any immediate challenges in your first three days on the job?

>>WM: I've been meeting a lot of new staff and trying to learn who they are and let them become familiar to me. The staff has a good command of the process. I have to become oriented to it and interject my ideas and identify areas that are not totally clear to me, and ask that they be clarified and suggest where changes might be made on items under consideration. The pace has been very rapid. It'll be that way for the next three weeks or so. Once I've met everyone and figured out the emphasis and priorities, the pace will slow down.

>>FW: What are some long-term challenges you'll need to address as City Manager?

>>WM: How to maintain the current level of public services. A city deals with finite financial resources. It's a balancing act between revenues and what expenditures take priority. That's a challenge for every local government, really. It's not unique to Fort Myers or the state of Florida. The priorities are public safety and ensuring that basic services are provided to people. And of course there are cultural and recreational needs. The community wants to be attractive and appealing to the eye — local government has a part to play in that.

>>FW: What is your job description, in a nutshell?

>>WM: I'm a person who has spent his whole life in public service and I'm a professional government administrator and I'm helping an organization provide high quality public services to its residents and citizens.

>>FW: You just got into town on Aug. 29. What have you done since then?

>>WM: I've traveled throughout the city and I'm learning the main thoroughfares. I've been to the grocery store, and to Wal-Mart. I found a dry-cleaner yesterday. I no longer get lost between City Hall and home.

>>FW: Where is home?

>>WM: Home is currently on 1st Street in the Beau Rivage.

>>FW: What do you hope to achieve as City Manager?

>>WM: If and when I leave Fort Myers, if people can say I made things somewhat better, made the community a little more attractive than it is now, I'll have a modicum of success.

>>Some facts gleaned from Mitchell's resume: A Bachelor of Science degree from Tennessee State University; a masters in public administration from the University of Virginia; Assistant City Manager in Newport News, Va., 1985-2007; Assistant to City Manager in Chesapeake, Va., 1980-1985; Administrative Assistant to City Manager, Charlottesville, Va., 1972-1980. His master's thesis: "Resources and Reform Budgeting in Municipal Government." His continuing education includes management training in Boston, Mass. and a course at the well-known Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kan. called "Toward Understanding Human Behavior and Motivation." He has served on various boards: the Peninsula Fine Arts Commission, The Hampton-Newport News Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Board of Directors (Chairman 1991-92) and the Metropolitan YMCA, among others.



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