

David Harden

By David Harden

You may remember that when I finished high school I went to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia where I was a chemistry major as an undergraduate. My senior year I got burned out on chemistry. I went through a lot of soul searching, aptitude testing and prayer. The idea of going into city management came to me, based in part on my experiences in Delta Tau Delta fraternity where I served as treasurer, and the things in the fraternity I found to be gratifying, such as organizing people to accomplish a task. But, I thought my disenchantment might be temporary, so I accepted an assistantship and started on a chemistry master's program at Florida State in the fall of 1964. After two months there I found that I could not make myself do chemistry anymore, so I dropped out of graduate school and began to pursue a path toward a career in city management.

I had enjoyed my four years in Atlanta very much, so I explored returning to Emory and getting a masters degree in public administration. But I would have had to take a lot of undergraduate courses to get into graduate school there, so they recommended that I consider seeking a master's degree in City Planning from Georgia Tech, which at that time had a heavy emphasis on administration. In the meantime I returned to Okeechobee where I worked for Okeechobee Abstract for about three months until the second semester of the school year. Then I taught high school math for that semester and worked as a bookkeeper for Attaway Lumber Company during the summer. I applied to Georgia Tech and was fortunate enough to be awarded a fellowship. In the fall of 1965 I entered Georgia Tech where I went for the next two years.

I finished my thesis on *The Location of Solid Waste Disposal Facilities in Urban Communities* in August of 1967. At that point I was single and finished with college, so I could wait and expect to be drafted into the army rather quickly, or I could join some branch of the armed forces. One of my classmates in graduate school and I went together and volunteered for the Navy. I joined the Supply Corps, which are the Navy's business managers, while my classmate who had an undergraduate engineering degree joined the Civil Engineering Corps.

First, I went to Officer Candidate School in Newport, RI. After that came Supply Corps School in Athens, GA. I finished 11th in my class so I could have pretty much any assignment I wanted. My mother had died in May of 1967 and my father was not in the best of health, so I did not want three years of sea duty. I applied for arduous duty, which was a one year tour with your choice of assignments afterwards. I expected to be sent in country Viet Nam as supply officer to a swift boat squadron or something similar, but I was ordered to an LSMR (Landing Ship Medium Rocket) home ported in Yokosuka, Japan. I was on the ship from November of 1968 until December of 1969. During that time we spent eight months on the firing line off the coast of Viet Nam providing inshore fire support. Our ship was 35 feet wide and about 140 feet long with a crew of 135 enlisted men and seven officers. It carried a five inch gun, eight twin tube five inch spin stabilized rocket launchers, forty millimeter guns on the bow and stern, 50 caliber machine guns on the bow and 30 caliber machine guns on the bridge. We had a flat bottom and a maximum draft of nine feet, so we spent a lot of time in the Mekong River Delta area

because we could get closer to the coast than any other ship. The rockets were not terribly accurate, but if you fired all eight launchers at the same time you could fire 240 rounds per minute with a range of up to five miles.

For us, it was a relatively antiseptic war. Because we carried a load of 4,000 rockets above the water line with no armor plating, they never sent us into areas where we were in great danger of being fired upon. We went into DaNang twice in the day time. We usually loaded rockets in Cam Rahn Bay which was relatively secure, but we had to high tail it out of there one night when the base came under attack. We thought we might have been fired on one time, but we were not sure. We usually could not see who we were shooting at. Our fire was directed by an observer in a spotter plane. Once we did take under fire some people on the beach near Vung Tau a half mile or so away from us. The only battle casualty we had was when we had some defective ammo and a rocket motor separated from the rocket and fell back into the handling room. Understand that a rocket motor is simply solid fuel like a Fourth of July rocket, so it was burning fiercely. One of the sailors panicked and tried to run through a waterproof door. He broke his nose.

It was a good tour as I spent time in Japan where I went snow skiing at Mt. Zao national park (the four of us were the only Caucasians we saw the whole weekend), a month in the Philippines, and two one week R& R trips to Hong Kong. Afterwards I went to Cecil Field near Jacksonville, FL. I got off active duty in March of 1971 after serving as Control Division Officer and Assistant Supply Officer at Cecil Field. I stayed in the drilling reserves until 1989 when I went into the retired reserve as a Captain. While in the reserves they sent me to Oakland, CA three times to the Transportation Management School and to Naples, Italy three times with my unit to operate the air cargo terminal. Andrea went with me once to Oakland and once to Naples. The retirement pay which started at age 60 is nice.

Jacksonville is where I met my wife to be, Andrea Koleda. I met her at church, but I did not date her because she was still in high school. The next year she went to the University of Central Florida (then FTU) and I ended up taking a job with the Orange County Planning Department in Orlando. We started dating and were married on June 25, 1972. While with Orange County I did a lot of land use and transportation planning all around Disney World, which opened in the fall of 1971.

In 1974 I took a job as Planning Director of the City of Winter Park. Since they had the council-manager form of government, I thought there might be a future opportunity to move into the City Manager's position there. Sure enough, when the manager left in 1977, I was made acting manager and six months later was given the full position. I served there as City Manager for the next twelve years. Perhaps our most notable achievement during my tenure was purchase of the water system from General Waterworks, Inc. This purchase included service to large areas east and west of the city, which is a source of extra revenue.

After Andrea and I got married we lived in Apopka, where Andrea's grandparents and three sets of aunts and uncles also lived. Andrea was anxious to have a family, so we adopted our oldest son in 1975. Then, as often happens, Andrea became pregnant three months later and our second son was born in

1976. Then our youngest son came along in 1980. It was really beneficial for our sons to know their maternal great-grandparents, as well as growing up with a number of cousins about their age.

In 1975 we bought a house in the oldest part of Apopka and began restoring it. It was a late Victorian style house built in 1886. What was supposed to be a two year project when we bought the house ended up taking 15 years to finish. I completely rewired and replumbed the house myself. I also scraped all the paint off the house and repainted it. It was a labor of love, although at times we grew weary of it, but we enjoyed the house very much. In 1989 I was able to get it listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In my twelfth year as manager of Winter Park a mayor was elected who believed that no city should keep the same manager for more than ten years. Eventually he persuaded two other commissioners that a change was needed, so I worked out a severance agreement and resigned. I figured with six months' severance pay we could live for nine months if we were frugal. It was 15 months before I started the job in Delray Beach, but God provided for us and we actually had less debt at the end of 15 months than when I resigned.

In May of 1990 I started my job as City Manager of Delray Beach. When we meet for our reunion I will have just completed 20 years here, which is unusual as the average tenure for city managers is about five years. I believe this is where I was intended to be manager at this time. It has been very gratifying to see the changes in the city since 1990. We have been twice recognizes as an All America City, the only city in Florida so far to achieve that twice. Whereas many people were once ashamed to admit they had a Delray Beach address, it is now sought after. When I came here there was a lot of envy toward Boca Raton. Now we have people leaving Boca Raton to move here.

When we moved here and started looking for a house we found that we had really been bitten by the old house bug. After not finding something here we liked, we decided to move a 1926 Mediterranean Revival house here from West Palm Beach. That was quite an adventure, loading it on a barge and floating it down the Intracoastal Waterway, then unloading it and moving it to our lot. But we have enjoyed the house very much. It is in an older neighborhood so it fits right in.

Of course, we are empty nesters now, rattling around in our big house. Our oldest son joined the Marine Corps and when he got out he went to chef school where he met his wife. He developed a serious health problem and is now on disability. He and his wife live a few miles away from us in Boynton Beach. They have two daughters, ages nine and five, and are expecting another child in November. Our middle son got his master's degree in wildlife biology and works for the Tennessee Wildlife Agency, managing large game animals in the western half of Tennessee. He and his wife have a daughter and a son, ages seven and four. Our youngest son and his wife live in Orlando where he is a sales representative for Alcon Pharmaceuticals. He recently went back to school and in December was awarded an MBA from the University of Florida. They just had their first child, a daughter, on April 28, so we now have five grandchildren with one on the way.

Andrea and I have enjoyed traveling over the years. I took her to Europe to meet my exchange family and friends in 1973. In 1994 we went back with our three boys. Then for our thirtieth anniversary we

went to Ireland for two weeks. Two and one half years ago we took our first cruise. One of Andrea's cousins got married in Vancouver, Canada, so we took advantage of the opportunity and took an Alaska cruise. Lately there have been more reunions. Three years ago we went to Branson, MO for a ship reunion. Then last year my exchange student group had a 50th anniversary reunion in Monterey, CA, and I had a reunion in Atlanta of fraternity brothers who graduated in the 1960's.

In the mid 1970's I was ordained as a deacon by the First Baptist Church of Apopka, and I have been involved in church leadership to some degree ever since, except for a few years after we moved to Delray. I currently serve as an Elder at SonCoast Community Church in Boca Raton, just across the line from Delray. Andrea is quite active also as she very much enjoys teaching children.

I have also been involved in the Boy Scouts over the years. All of our boys were in Scouting, and our youngest son worked as a District Executive for several years before going with Alcon Pharmaceuticals. I served as a District Chairman for eight years here in Palm Beach County, and now for another eight years or so I have been the Vice-president for Administration for the Gulf Stream Council. In addition to church and Boy Scouts, I remain active in my professional associations and the local and state League of Cities.

God has greatly blessed us over the years, and we are very thankful. At some point in the next few years I look forward to retiring from city management and doing something different for a while.

David T. Harden

David Harden has worked for both city and county government as well as serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy Supply Corps, the Navy's business managers.

David spent over 40 years working for local governments in Florida. He retired in January of 2013 from the City of Delray Beach after serving as City Manager there for over 22 years. During his tenure Delray Beach became the only city in Florida to be twice recognized as an All America City. In 1995 it was written up in *Florida Trend* as the "Best Run Town in Florida." The city has received numerous other awards including a 2011 Florida Municipal Achievement Award from the Florida League of Cities, the 2012 Member City of the Year from the Palm Beach County League, and two national recognitions from the Alliance for Innovation for innovative projects in providing services. Recently Standard and Poor's upgraded the city's G.O. bond rating from AA to AAA based on the city's financial performance over the last five years.

Downtown Delray Beach was transformed from a run down, ugly commercial strip to a regional destination. Altogether David oversaw more than \$200 million in capital projects, including numerous public buildings, streets and water and sewer facilities. He worked closely with the School District to relocate the high school serving the city, to build one new elementary school and to replace the buildings for two other elementary schools. He also developed interlocal agreements with two smaller adjacent municipalities to provide them with water service, sewage treatment, police dispatch, and fire and EMS services.

Before coming to Delray, David served Winter Park, Florida, as City Manager for 12 years. In that position he negotiated purchase from General Waterworks of the water system serving the city as well as suburban areas to the east and west. He initiated legislation which enabled the city to be a Central Florida pioneer in producing reclaimed water for irrigation. He began a program to reverse the deteriorating water quality in the city's lakes.

Prior to becoming the City Manager David worked as the City Planner for Winter Park and as a Planner for Orange County, Florida, starting there just before Disney World opened in the county. In Winter Park he prepared and implemented the city's first Comprehensive Plan. He also obtained a Small Cities Community Development Block Grant and successfully implemented the first housing rehabilitation program in Central Florida. At Orange County he revised the county's subdivision regulations, prepared development plans for portions of the county and developed road construction priorities for inclusion in the State's five year road construction program.

During his Navy active duty David was the head of the Supply Department while on board a ship, where he also was the Disbursing Officer. He completed his active service as the assistant head of the Supply Department at a Naval Air Station. He has also served as the commanding officer of two different Navy Reserve units.

In his professional career David has been a Credentialed Manager and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. He served for many years on the Florida League of Cities Urban Administration Legislative Subcommittee and on the Board of the Palm Beach County League of Cities where he chaired the Transportation Committee. He also served as Chairmen of the Orlando Urban Area Transportation Study Technical Committee. In 2010 the Florida City and County Management

Association awarded David the Award for Career Excellence for exceptional service in municipal government and the President's Award for outstanding professional team building and support of Managers in Transition. He holds a Bachelors degree in chemistry from Emory University and a Masters of City Planning from Georgia Institute of Technology.