



Alachua County Board of County Commissioners

Lee Pinkoson, *Chair*
Paula M. DeLaney, *Vice Chair*
Rodney J. Long
Mike Byerly
Susan Baird

Administration
Randall H. Reid
County Manager

County Commission Retirement Remarks

I would like to thank each of you for joining me here today in the county commission chambers, also for the viewers via channel 12 on Cox Cable and streaming video on the world wide web.

Many of you have asked me about my political plans for the future over the past year. You've asked whether or not I will seek a fourth term on the county commission or run for another political office. After much prayer with my family, confidants, supporters and friends, I have decided that I will not seek re-election in November of 2012 to the county commission or no other public office. After nearly thirty-two years of civic, community and public office, I'm retiring.

Today, I would like to share with you my experiences over the past 32 years, my future professional plans and how I plan to serve this community as I began to transition back to the private sector.

My community involvement began in 1978 as a twenty-one year old disc jockey and business partner with Music Express of Gainesville, Inc. a mobile music company that evolved into several other business ventures including night entertainment and the owner of a cable radio station called WONE. My business partners Wayne Fields and William "Wild Bill" Feinberg are here today. Never in my wildest dreams, did I think this relationship would lead to a 32 year career of civic, community and public office. I want to thank my former partners for providing me with an opportunity that opened the door for me in civic, community and public service.

My first community project in 1978 was to plan an event for our company to celebrate UF's homecoming following the annual parade. I called the event, 'A Musical Affair'. This event showcased local talent, civic and political leaders and UF dignitaries including Albert the Alligator. At the time, Albert was not married to Alberta. The event drew thousands on the Downtown Plaza and became an annual event for many years. Other community projects were the 'Annual Sport-A-thon' for elementary, middle and high school students at Lincoln Middle School. I planned other projects including a summer program called project 'Heat wave' with the City of Gainesville designed for the youth and many more.

As a student at UF in the early 80's, I coordinated the first Martin Luther King, Jr., Commemorative March from UF's Plaza of Americas to the Downtown Community Plaza. This was the genesis of Gainesville's involvement in celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1984, this led to the creation of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Fund Inc., and later the Martin Luther King, Jr., Commission of Florida where I have served as founder and president. The Commission to date has completed the Martin Luther King Memorial Gardens in Downtown Gainesville, 'King Celebration' a week-long celebration in honor of Dr. King, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Hall of Fame that recognizes the contributions of local individuals who have demonstrated those principles of non-violent social change demonstrated by Dr. King, the Edna M. Hart Keeper of the Dream Award to High School Seniors, through which nearly a hundred thousand dollars has been awarded, the naming of Highway 441 as Martin Luther King, Jr. Highway in Alachua County, and the naming of the Martin Luther King, Multi-Purpose Center.

The eighties also allowed me to continue my community involvement by serving on numerous advisory boards for the City of Gainesville and other government and civic organizations. From 1983-1988, I served as Executive Secretary of the Alachua County Branch of the NAACP. This

appointment provided me with a perspective of the many injustices that were occurring in our nation, state, and community. In 1985, as Executive Secretary of the NAACP, I initiated before the City Commission of Gainesville a petition and requested that they change their voting system from an at-large voting system to a single member district system that would allow minority representation access for a portion of our community. The City Commission to its credit and urging from the NAACP, appointed a charter review commission to look at a charter amendment that would include a single member districts and at-large voters. In 1986, the voters overwhelmingly approved the new form of electing commissioners in March of 1988 and the City of Gainesville also elected its first African American female commissioner, my colleague Cynthia Moore Chestnut.

In the summer of 1987, I was beginning to receive numerous requests from residents in the newly created District 1 Seat area to consider running for public office. At the time, I was happy with community activism and my business involvement and was not inclined to run for office. Besides, knowing my checkered past and where I came from, it wouldn't qualify me to be elected anyway.

Also, during this time, I was in the process of transitioning from a bachelor to married man after four years of dating the woman of my

dreams, Carole Martin, and fathering my first born son Steven. After my marriage in November 1987, the pressure from leaders in the community grew stronger to run for the District 1 seat. After much prayer, consultation with friends and confidants, I entered the District 1 City Commission race in January of 1988. On February 20, 1988, my world was rocked when I lost my mother to a sudden illness. Needless, to say my most trusted confidant and supporter was gone. I considered dropping out of the race, but my wife, supporters and friends encouraged me to stay in the race and to honor my mother by making a difference in our community. On March 8, 1988, I received 50.14 % of the vote in a three way race becoming Gainesville's first Single Member District Commissioner.

Ok, I'm elected to office, now what? What should I do first? I remembered all these promises I made to people, to fix the potholes, provide sidewalks, fix drainage problems, provide jobs, fight for civil and equal rights, and to be accessible. Well the first order of business for me was to make sure that my constituents knew when I was in the office. They didn't need an appointment, just stop by when you see my car parked in the parking lot. After discovering that the parking lot was behind City Hall underneath an overhang, I asked myself, how will my constituents know when I'm in the office To solve this problem, I requested a reserve parking

spot in front of City Hall, so that people will know that I'm in for business and that they can just drop on in. What a controversy this created. Boy were people sensitive about me reserving a parking space out front. I received my first round of negative publicity and outcry from the public. I said to myself, "well you wanted to be a trailblazer, so blaze the trail." I used this experience to create what President Ronald Reagan said was needed in politics, a Teflon coating. Of course I had no idea of what that really meant but, it sounded good.

This controversy prepared me for the criticism that I was about to receive as I began to address the agenda for a constituency that has literally lived the saying of 'taxation without representation'. Fast forward for just for a few minutes, to 2011, I was right about being a trailblazer in parking in front of city hall, today, all the city commissioners and staff park in front of city hall.

Since there was no blueprint in the charter or guidance of how to serve as a District Commissioner, I had to make it up as I went. I used this along with my ignorance of the rules and procedures to say and do things that of course today, you wouldn't say. I needed an edge to achieve such an ambitious agenda. Because I was a visionary, I had to use ignorance, midnight strategic planning and the old strategy of embarrassing your

colleagues to do what's right for the poor people who have been left behind. This strategy actually worked. During my tenure I was able to get the first Cops Teams in my District to fight against the growing drug epidemic, infrastructure improvements in the Sugar Hill and other neighborhoods, housing rehabilitation for people who had been on waiting list for years, recreation and after school programs for at-risk kids in our recreation centers. I convinced the city to purchase the Cedar Grove II property from United Gainesville for a future Cedar Grove II housing development, (by the way, many of my colleagues at the time thought that I was out of my mind). I began planning for commercial development on Waldo Road to compliment the Cedar Grove II Development. I was instrumental in getting grant dollars for the access road from Waldo Road to Cedar Grove II and was able to convince my good friend Roy Camp to purchase the adjacent land to his property to have site control that would allow for future commercial development to compliment Cedar Grove II.

Today, Wal-Mart Super Center is on this site. I laid the ground work for federal funding for the Martin Luther King, Jr., Multi-Purpose Center, we built the new and Mickle Pool to replace the old Lincoln Pool, I led the charge for the County to donate the old Bridge house site for the future site of the Porter's Rec. Center. I convinced my colleagues to fund the Porter's

Recreation Center from Block Grant Funding.

We created a partnership with United Gainesville for the development of Porters Oak's I and II. I was able to convince United Gainesville to sell the City the Old train depot for a dollar for an educational partnership with Sante Fe College for a Downtown Center Branch. Today, there are three sites downtown.

We created the Fifth Avenue and Pleasant Street Community Redevelopment District, began plans for the transformation of Downtown Gainesville which was in my district, through the CRA and public private partnerships. I led the charge to purchase the Old Gainesville Gas Company by exercising a buy-out clause. My goal was to provide a safer form of heating and cooking in the older neighborhoods in my District.

Things were going just fine until after my re-election in 1991 and the question of whether or not a District Commissioner should serve as mayor remained unanswered. For those of you who remember this far back, you may recall it was a potentially divisive issue in our community. My colleagues were under such pressure because it was my turn to serve since I was mayor pro-tem. Several of my colleagues suggested that I was not mature enough to serve as mayor and that I was not a team player. There was outcry from the community, particular from my constituents in

District 1 who believed that I had paid my dues and should serve in this capacity. The debate turned racial and ugly. At a Monday meeting before the swearing in and selection of the new mayor, I made a speech that many called the road to my becoming statesmen (whatever that meant). I remarked that; "It did not matter to me whether or not I was selected Mayor-Commissioner and that I did not believe any of my colleagues were racist and that I would serve on the team and support whomever they chose as Mayor". Within minutes, I was imminently qualified, mature and of course a statesmen. As you know, I was chosen Gainesville first Single Member District Commissioner. As with all things in life, we find ourselves going through peaks and valleys, highs and lows, ups and downs, and good and bad.

On August 11, 1993, one of the darkest days in my life occurred when I was indicted by a federal grand jury on drug conspiracy charge for things that happened in my life prior to being elected. I was suspended from office without pay, my bail bonds license was suspended, and I was embarrassed, humiliated, ostracized by friends, peers, leaders and left alone.

The only persons I had left was my family, a few close friends and a new found friend in Jesus Christ. Well my critics had already given me my

prison number, they had written me off, and City Hall was in shambles. I had been in valleys before, but never like this. One day while praying, I remembered an old childhood, Psalms that we all quoted and remembered from Sunday school. The 23rd Psalm where it states, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me besides the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." I found comfort in these scriptures and God began to take control of my life and situation. He sent into my life a read headed stranger named Gloria Fletcher a local attorney and another F. Lee Bailey like attorney named Gil Schaffnit to team up with the Holy Ghost to beat this Goalith called the Feds. I am not saying that I did not do wrong during my wild years, but, after all the good that I had done in this community, I believed in the scriptures, that God had forgiven me an thrown my transgression in the sea of forgetfulness. There was only one problem with this belief, man never forgets your past and he wants to always remind you of it. Well after two federal trials and six figures later, I was acquitted on February 11, 1994. I was reinstated an served out the remainder of my term and left public office to return to the private sector.

The process of re-tooling my life from financial ruin, public humiliation and some small since of vindication, the road to recovery would be long and difficult, but, I was confident that I would return and receive double for my troubles especially since I had established this relationship with my newfound friend Jesus Christ.

From 1994-2000, my re-building years, I returned back to the business sector and to community and civic service. I began to spend more time with my family and children. I began to coach and sponsor youth athletics including Pop Warner Football, Basketball, Track and Field, soccer and high school football. I began serving again civically and as needed on special committees and task forces for the City of Gainesville. One item of unfinished business from my prior service on the City Commission that I was unable to accomplish was the creation of a charter officer for equal opportunity.

This was an initiative that I had campaigned on and presented to the City Commission during my tenure but found little support. The concept of a charter officer for Equal Opportunity reporting to the City Commission would address equal rights and human rights in the City of Gainesville. In the spring of 1999, I wanted to see if I still had any friends left at City Hall, and to see if there was any appetite for this issue.

I approached the City Commission and requested that they create a Blue Ribbon Committee to study a charter change that would create a charter officer for equal opportunity and other ways to improve equity in the city's workforce. After several meetings, and providing documentation as to why it was needed, a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Equal Opportunity was created and I was selected the chairman. This was my first major civic commitment since my return to the private sector. Also during this period of time, I was approached by Charles Chestnut, III and Tom Coward two of my mentors about running for the county commission in November of 2000 for his seat. Not really ready for a return to public office, I told them that I would get back with them no later than the spring of 2000 as to whether or not I would consider it. Of course Mrs. Long was not all that thrilled with sharing me with the public again. My boys weren't that excited either, because they were more focused on sports and you know, girls, so it really did not matter to them.

In the spring of 2000, I announced my candidacy for the candidacy for the District 5 County Commission Seat for the retiring Charles Chestnut, III. Tom and Charles did not tell me exactly what I was getting myself into. I quickly learned of the many constituent that makes up a countywide race. I quickly learned of the growth versus no growth, partisan politics, forming

coalitions, networking, shaking hands and kissing babies, rural concerns, and the who's who in politics on Alachua County. After the primary election in August, run-off election and general election, I was elected to serve on the county commission.

After the first meeting two weeks later, I asked myself, what I have gotten myself into. The issues were enormous. Trying to catch up to speed was only a cliché and trying to understand your new colleagues was challenging. County Manager Randy Reid and Attorney Dave Wagner were helpful in bringing me up to speed and to explain all the nuances of county government. My issues of poverty reduction, economic development and growth management seemed years away. Then Chairman Robert Hutchinson tried to educate me as to what to expect. The towering Dave Newport would always tell me, don't burn yourself out -- it's a marathon. Penny Wheat was the iconic figure on the commission, and was always the most prepared. And Commissioner Byerly was greener than me, no pun intended. I decided that I needed to model my work ethic after Penny and to be better prepared than each of them before I open my mouth and to learn the rules of engagement. After two years of the learning curve, I settled in.

The elections of November 2002 brought about a change in the

commission with the arrival of my old colleague from the City of Gainesville Cynthia Chestnut, and some guy named Lee Pinkoson. The dynamics of the commission changed somewhat. The issue of the day was the Comp Plan, and that we had gone too far. I was trusted into the chairman's position and was given the opportunity to test the rules of engagement that I had learned. During my early years, I became very involved on the Florida Association of Counties to learn my role as a county commissioner and receive the training and skill sets needed to do my job. My involvement in FAC lead to my election as second vice president in 2004. Back at home, I began implementing my agenda of poverty reduction. In 2003, I recommended to the Board that we become more involved with the homeless issues in this community and that we should partner with the City of Gainesville and create a Ten Year Plan to end Homelessness. The city and county held a Summit and then Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan and I served as co-chairs of this initiative. In 2005 the City and County adopted the Ten-Year Plan To End Homelessness and we began to implement it. We created the City County Office on Homelessness with a partnership with the Alachua County Housing Authority. Our center piece of the Ten Year Plan is to construct a One Stop Center that will house all the services needed to assist our homeless community. Plans are underway with the

City taking the lead to construct the facility that would hopefully be open next year.

Another of my poverty reduction initiatives was a Food Security Summit to address the growing need of hunger in our community. This initiative has led to the Hunger Abatement Plan (HAP) to address the growing need of hunger. I have initiated the County's Annual "Strike Out Hunger Food Drive" held each November in recognition of National Hunger Month to raise much needed food for our citizens during the winter months. I am currently focused on ensuring that we find alternative means to incarcerating inmates at the jail through court alternatives with an emphasis on diverting the mentally ill from the jail. We are working on initiatives that would create a path back to society for ex-offenders. It is our hope to ensure through our No Wrong Door Program that ex-felons who are returning to our community will have the tools needed to become contributing members of society. I have worked to ensure that our Community Agencies Partners Program (CAPP) funding has increased to nearly one percent of our general revenue budget. This will allow these groups through public-private partnerships to address many of our community needs. I am honored to have championed the prescription discount card from the National Association of Counties that has saved our

citizens \$1.3 million dollars.

I am most proud of championing the Plan East Gainesville -- the blue print adopted by both the City and County in their comprehensive plans for the future development of East Gainesville and Downtown Gainesville. I look forward to the development of the Commerce Center at the current Fairgrounds with a Hotel and other much needed commercial and residential development along the Waldo Road Corridor. Having served two terms as Chair of the County Commission, two terms as President of the Florida Association of Counties, serving as chairman of several committees at the National Association of Counties and recently being invited to the White House by President Obama to discuss issues of importance to county officials, it's time to leave while I'm at the top of my game. I leave with no regrets, no axes to grind and a continued commitment to serve.

As I look to future, I am excited about the many professional opportunities that are in front of me. As I leave public life, I plan to return to the private sector and for the second time re-tool and grow my businesses to become debt free and to once again give not only my time to those causes that I believe in but resources as well. I will work through public-private partnerships to continue implementing many of the programs and initiatives that I've been involved with during my tenure in office. I look

forward to assisting from the private sector to implement the goals of Plan East Gainesville by finding investors and developers to invest in the community. I will work to create job opportunities for our young people and ex-felons. I will work through my foundation to continue my work with my charitable causes of poverty reduction, including homelessness, hunger, ex-felon re-entry, a charter school with an emphasis on at-risk kids and entrepreneurship, food security, equal rights and civil rights, writing my memoirs and community empowerment. Equally as important, I will spend time on my spiritual development so that I will know what God has in store for me next.

Most importantly, I will spend time with my family. I look forward to teaching my grandchildren how to swim, play sports, and fish. I look forward spending time with my children all of whom are grown. Many of you remember seeing them everywhere I went and they grew up as political babies. I look forward to spending time with the apple of my eye, my best friend, my lover and children's mother, Carole. She has stood by me all of these years and I hope to devote the rest of my years to her.

I have spent my entire adult life serving this community. I have given my best years to this community. There are those who will try and define my career by the valleys and not my peaks, my failures and not successes,

those things that happened in my personal life. To my critics and enemies, I want to say thank you. It was because of you that I learned the power of prayer. It was because of you that I learned the true meaning of the scriptures that say we should pray for our enemies. To all of the wonderful staff of the county, I salute you for your dedication and service to the citizens of this county. You are the greatest. To my colleagues on the commission, constitutional officers, charter officers, thanks for being there. As I close the chapter on my political career, it is my hope to serve out the remainder of my term. However, I am leaving my retirement date open. There will be no more retirement speeches from me. I have shared with you in my own words my legacy. I don't leave public office with streets, buildings or parks named after me. But, you know I've been here. Serving the citizens of this county has been one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences in my life. I don't regret any of it.

As I leave you, I leave you with the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., which has been my guiding light during my years of service: ".....Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You

don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, and a soul generated by love to serve.”

As always, I am

Willing to serve,

Honorable Rodney J. Long

Alachua County Commissioner

June 15, 2011