Candidate waits for job of a lifetime

Last man standing in Oconee County boss search says residents deserve 'competitive process'

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — If Oconee's search for a new administrator had been a sporting event, Oconee County Council should have raised William Mark Watson's arm in victory for being the last man standing.

Council members recently raved about Watson's qualifications, his people skills and how he stood out from the competition among a pool of more than 120 applicants.

"He's the only one that shines," said Councilman Wayne McCall, who raised many eyebrows when he called the pool of candidates a bucket of "bad apples."

It turns out McCall did not have Watson in mind when he belittled the pool.

"He was so far ahead of the field that he left them in the dust," McCall said this week.

Chairman Reg Dexter and the rest of council apparently share that sentiment.

Yet, council is not ready to declare Watson champion.

Instead, as we now know, all he won in the first round was the opportunity to compete against a new group of challengers. Council is expected to pick from five professional search firms that will sift through another batch of candidates to make Oconee's search for a county boss more competitive.

"Ideally, we should have five candidates that you just don't know whom to choose," McCall said.

In a telephone interview Friday with The Journal, Watson said he does not feel cheated by having to go into extra innings.

"The people of Oconee need a fair and competitive process," said Watson, who has held the position of personnel director at Union County in Monroe, N.C. for the past 15 years. "They deserve the best man for the job. The council is doing due diligence. I see this as just part of the process."



Watson

Watson is willing to wait for the opportunity to return to his roots.

As a young boy, he attended Pine Street Elementary School in Walhalla. It is the same school that was renovated and converted into the Oconee County Government Administrative Building.

It boggles Watson's mind to think he has the opportunity to be the administrator in the very place where he remembers running on the playground, having piano recitals and sixth-grade band practices.

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> Oconee County Councilman

"It brings back a lot of memories," said Watson, who also attended Walhalla Junior High School where the Civic Auditorium now stands.

It's always homecoming when the Watson family travels back to visit his father's farm in Walhalla.

On those occasions when he's visiting, Watson said he sometimes sits in the audience to see County Council conduct the people's business.

"I go to see how meetings are run in Oconee versus how things are done in Union," he said. "I like comparing and taking notes to see what I could pick up."

Watson said he has not been to any council meetings since he applied for the job.

Aside from his visits, Watson said he also keeps track of what's going on in Oconee by following the news.

Watson said he knows of the political turmoil and frequent turnover at the job he seeks. If selected, one of his goals is to lend to the stability and continuity of government in Oconee.

Critics have questioned whether someone who has headed human resources for 15 years could step into the role of administrator.

Watson fends off the criticism as a misperception by some that think the job of a personnel director is to receive and process applications.

"I manage every day," he said. "Human resources touches all sides of the organization. My responsibilities go into every aspect of the organization."

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 882-2375