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## Flagler County administrator hits ground running

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BUNNELL -- With Flagler County facing major issues such as supplying drinking water to its residents and dealing with impending budget cuts, new County Administrator Craig Coffey, 41, has a great deal of work ahead of him in 2008.

Coffey, who started on Dec. 4, agreed this week to sit down for a candid conversation. Here are some of his thoughts.

**Q:** Was your first week hectic with hot-button issues on the table, like the \$1.8 million purchase of the Bull Creek Fish Camp?

**A:** Yes. It's been nonstop. A lot of times I equate my job to the opening of the stock market. I've got a great staff and the commissioners have worked hard to make me feel welcome, so it hasn't been near as bad as it could have been.

**Q:** How do you plan to deal with future budget cuts?

**A:** In a whole variety of ways. Consolidation of services may be a part of that. We're going to review from the bottom up, everything we do, and hopefully operate more efficiently -- operate more like a business.

**Q:** Are you up to date on the drinking water issues Flagler County will face in the future?

**A:** As far as future supply goes, we're going to have to get creative in how we meet the demands. In DeSoto County, we were involved in a four-county regional water authority. Did everything work perfectly? No. Did we get to where we needed to? Yes.

**Q:** How do you plan to deal with conflicts or disagreement among commissioners?

**A:** I'm going to try and do my best to build upon the things we have in common and workshop through the things we can't agree on. Hopefully we'll bring about a resolution to problems one way or another.

**Q:** Why are you worth \$140,000, which makes you the highest-paid Flagler County employee?

**A:** If you want someone that's creative and has expertise and knowledge, you pay for that talent. And I think I have some talent and skills to bring to Flagler County to do a great job.

**Q:** How did it feel to come into your new job on a 3-2 vote with Commissioners Milissa Holland and Jim O'Connell voting against you?

**A:** I don't think that's atypical. I think it's just part of the process. The reality is I'm here now and we're going to work together as a team and we'll make it work. We all have the same interest in mind -- the citizens of Flagler County.

**Q:** You had some first impressions of commissioners during the interview process . Specifically, you called Milissa Holland a "high-maintenance" commissioner. Have those impressions stuck with you or have they changed?

**A:** That may have hurt me with her, and maybe the vote, but it wasn't meant as anything negative. Commissioners get involved (in the process) at different levels -- as little or as much as they want to be involved. I just heard she gets involved in a lot of issues. She cares. I thought that was a positive thing.

**Q:** What is your experience in dealing with community emergencies, like the wildfires that evacuated the entire county in 1998?

**A:** I've had experience in the aftermath of a devastating hurricane, Charley, in DeSoto County. We had to rebuild all of the county facilities. My background in the military and working as military police has given me additional insight into emergency operations.

**Q:** Are you worried about how the long hours in your position might affect your family?

**A:** It comes with the territory. After 15 years, my wife, Ginger, (37), has gotten used to it. But when I get home, it's hard to think about county business as much as I'd like. My kids (three boys, ages 4, 7, and 10 ) don't care about commissioners or problems at work. They just care if they can get me into a headlock for a noogie.