

Deltona manager predicts much change

By SARA KIESLER

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DELTONA -- Steve Thompson swears he has hobbies and enjoys nice restaurants. But the new city manager of Deltona just hasn't had time to enjoy fly fishing or a good Thai dinner.

With a schedule that starts at 7 a.m. and usually ends around 10 p.m., Thompson, 51, has thrown himself into his job structuring the city's vision and leading department heads.

"I don't even have lunch," he said. "It's not sad -- it's fun, energizing and exciting."

He's only been on the job since June 30, but already city officials and residents are impressed with his quick responses, humility and wealth of experience.

"I come from the private sector, and he's more responsive than any manager I've seen," Mayor Dennis Mulder said. "The expectation in government is you tend to slow down, but it's opposite with this guy."

A former assistant city manager of Virginia Beach, Va., the \$138,000 salaried manager sees Deltona as its own changing world, full of opportunities to start fresh. What he wants to see in his time are neighborhoods where Deltonans can walk, shop, eat and mingle.

"In the next 18 to 24 months, I hate to say it's going to be a dramatic difference, but there will be the presence of a tight-knit community."

Imagining the kind of change Thompson envisions would be difficult for most who live in the bedroom community. But he says filling empty lots along the city's major streets, bringing in industrial jobs, and redeveloping Deltona Boulevard are among the major efforts the city has in mind.

A lot of issues still plague Deltona, from the old utility system, to a tax base lacking in commercial properties, to department head positions that have been open for months. None can be fixed overnight, but Thompson is well on his way.

For example, two of the five open department directors have been filled by Dave Denny, and interviews are taking place for development services and parks and recreation directors.

With his wife, Chris, and his daughter, Ryan, still in Virginia Beach until the 17-year-old high school senior graduates, Thompson has done a lot of reading of old detective novels and watching "CSI" on television.

An environmental engineer, Chris Thompson reads articles about her husband closely and criticizes him on the way he words himself.

The Thompsons' other daughter, Darryl, is a junior at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va.

But his wife is just one of many people watching Thompson's every move. Political gadflies all over Deltona frequently stop in to every commission meeting and to his office to spout their agenda.

One of the regulars, Jack Hoyt, says Thompson hasn't been around long enough to make any changes, but the Deltona politics junkie is nonetheless impressed.

"He doesn't have an air about him like: 'I'm a big shot,' " Hoyt said. "And I like that he's not taking sides on all the disputes in the commission."

Thompson File

NAME: Steve Thompson

AGE: 51

JOB: City manager of Deltona.

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in political science from the College of Charleston and a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Carolina.

HOBBIES: Fly fishing, running, sailing.

FORMER JOBS: Virginia Beach, Va., city manager for past eight years; city manager of Aiken, S.C., 1992-2000.

FUN FACT: Along with detective novels, he actually reads urban planning books by Jane Jacobs for fun.

