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Borough names new manager

BY ANDREW WELLNER

PALMER, ALASKA — Exhausted by the process, John Moosey said he's nevertheless excited to be picked for the Mat-Su Borough's top job.

Moosey, 50, was selected Saturday as the borough's new manager. The borough has been without a permanent leader since late June 2010. Moosey spoke Monday by phone from Minnesota, having just gotten off a flight from Alaska.

"I'm excited. I'm kind of worn out from the week. On Saturday, I had eight different individual interviews and then I had an interview with the assembly," Moosey said. "It's nice to just relax and let my wife tell me about what I'm supposed to be doing now."

He is currently county administrator of Chisago County, Minn., and lives in North Branch. He has been North Branch's city administrator, village administrator in Brewster, Ohio, city administrator of Defiance, Ohio, village administrator of Middlefield, Ohio, and borough manager of Clarion, Penn.

He said he has promised the county he would stay on for 60 days after accepting a new position. So his start date in Palmer will be sometime in May. Exactly when, he said, will depend on his method of moving here. He'll need more time if he decides to drive rather than fly, he said.

Prior to applying for the job in the Valley, Moosey said he'd been considering moving on, but had been thinking about someplace warmer than Minnesota.

"The guy who does a lot of work in Florida sent me the information on Mat-Su Borough," Moosey said, referencing the executive search firm **Colin Baenziger and Associates** that the assembly hired for \$24,000 to help find a new manager. "It kind of caught my eye, I was kind of curious about what's happening here."

He said he saw Mat-Su as a place rife with challenges and opportunities. His county in Minnesota, he said, has seen significant growth. The population doubled during the time he was there. But that all changed recently.

"Then the foreclosures hit and we're pretty much at a standstill the past four years," he said.

That Mat-Su is still growing, he said, is a big attraction.

"For a manager to see things built, to see things done, that's exciting for us," Moosey said. "I'm not the type of person that likes to sit down and count the beans and make sure everything stays the same."

He said that period of growth during his time in Chisago provided him with experience that will serve him well in Mat-Su. The borough, he said, is facing something of a timeless question when it comes to how to develop an area without jeopardizing the environment and the wildlife.

“It was probably debated well before I got there and it will be debated many years after I’m dead,” he said.

Though the job was attractive, Moosey said he was still kind of on the fence until he traveled here and met the people he would be working with.

“Meeting the staff and meeting the assembly, that kind of sealed the deal,” he said.

Moosey will move here with his wife, a special education teacher. He has two kids, but both will likely stay in Minnesota. His daughter is 24 and is also a special education teacher. He said his son is 21 and is in college at Mankato State, but might yet decide to come north.

“I don’t know what he’s going to do. As long as he keeps his nose to the grindstone and gets a degree we’re happy,” Moosey said.

The assembly has been engaged in the process of finding a manager since before former longtime manager John Duffy worked his last day.

The search proceeded in fits and starts. One set of applicants was whittled down to a list of finalists, one of which apparently was offered the job but who decided instead to stay put. **The assembly then decided to pretty much start over and brought in the consultant [Colin Baenziger & Associates was hired on December 21, 2010].** The whole thing culminated Saturday [February 26, 2011] with eight hours of interviews.

If the assembly had been seeking a firm that thoroughly vetted applicants, to hear Moosey tell it, the body got its money’s worth.

“They called my different (county) board members, they called my staff, they called the chamber of commerce, they called the newspapers, they called anyone that might not have liked me,” Moosey said. “I did not prefer that, but I knew that anyone that was competing against me went through that same thing.”

He likened the process to going to the dentist. “You have to do it, but it’s not fun,” he said.