

**Ponte Verda Recorder**  
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## **County chooses final five, plus one, for administrator**

**By Megan Seery**

Wooing is about to occur on both sides now that interview candidates have been selected for the position of county administrator.

At this past Tuesday's county commission meeting, five finalists and one alternate were selected to interview for the county's top management post.

But Gene DeMarie, senior vice president for the search firm **Colin Baenziger & Associates**, emphasized that the finalists are not the only ones who need to make a good impression.

"The decision to be a candidate is a really important decision," he said, noting that the finalists are in high demand in their field. "They will be deciding whether or not to uproot their families, whether they want to leave a job in which they probably are well-liked and well-compensated."

Originally, there were 11 semi-finalists, though the commissioners had to choose five candidates from a pool of nine names submitted by DeMarie.

"One [candidate] withdrew after accepting another position," DeMarie said, "and with another there was a problem with the background check."

Before commissioners voted, DeMarie also noted that two of the candidates he recruited declined to participate in the search because St. Johns County does not have a charter government format.

"Two indicated that they were not familiar with and did not want to work in a general law county," he said, adding that, even if the proposed charter went through, those candidates might not find the position acceptable because it still would not allow as much authority as they believe a county administrator needs for the job.

There were several blank spaces on the voting forms, including the spaces where DeMarie had removed the names of the two semi-finalists who left the search.

Commissioner Jim Bryant, saying he thought the spaces were meant for write-in candidates, filled in the name of Joseph Cone as one of his interview picks.

When told that the blanks were actually just empty spaces and not for write-in candidates, Bryant declined to vote for a different finalist.

Of the nine contenders, two did not receive any votes at all—Michael Dyal and Marsha Segal-George.

Garland Chadwell, Frank Clifton, Patrick Salerno, Michael Wanchick and Michael Wright were the five finalists, and Robert Bartolotta was the alternate.

"It is not uncommon for someone to get a job offer before they interview here," DeMarie said, encouraging commissioners not to dismiss an alternate candidate. "The position of the alternate is not as insignificant as it might seem."

The finalists will attend a county-led tour of the area and meet senior staff members the afternoon of Thursday, May 17. That evening, they will attend a reception, open to the public, at the World Golf Hall of

Fame with their spouses.

The county will spend money on the actual reception, but is using the Hall of Fame's facility for free, said interim county administrator Wally Kropacek.

On Friday, May 18, the candidates will participate in one-on-one and full board interviews with the commissioners.

Then, on Tuesday, May 22, DeMarie will return for a special commission meeting, when board members will determine which candidate will receive a job offer.

Information about each candidate is available for public review in the human resources office at the county administrative complex.

In the meantime, DeMarie urged commissioners to think about their comments during the interviews, and focus on why they prefer certain candidates instead of openly contrasting one finalist with another.

"Put the county in a good light," he said, noting interview rounds in other counties have left "some commissioners looking petty."

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### **Who are the finalists?**

Here's a quick snapshot of the candidates for county administrator:

- **Robert Bartolotta**, an alternate, has a bachelor's degree in political science from California State University, a master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California and has completed a graduate program at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

His last position was as the town manager in Jupiter, a position he left to care for his terminally ill wife in Savannah, Ga. In Jupiter, Bartolotta was executive director of the Town Community Redevelopment Agency. In Savannah, he has served as vice chair on the Chatham County Board of Tax Assessors and is an elected member of the board of Riverview Health and Rehabilitation Center.

- **Garland Chadwell** has a bachelor's degree in political science and mass communication from Morehouse College and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Toledo.

He is the deputy county manager for community services in Fulton County, Ga., and previously was the chief operating officer for the department of human services for the government of the District of Columbia.

- **Frank Clifton Jr.** has a bachelor's degree in management and finance from the University of South Florida and a master's degree in city management from East Tennessee State University. He also completed a manager program with the the International City/County Management Association.

Clifton has worked as the county manager in Onslow County, N.C., since June 2005. The county, located on the Carolina coast, has more than 1,200 employees and a \$145 million budget exclusive of major capital improvement projects.

- **Patrick Salerno** has a bachelor's degree in politics and public affairs from the University of Miami and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma. He has served as city manager in Sunrise since 1990. Sunrise has roughly 1,300 employees and an annual budget of \$380 million.

• **Michael Wanchick** has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of South Florida and master's degrees in political science and management from the University of South Florida. He also has received certification in basic mediation from the state of Texas.

He currently manages six departments of local government as the assistant city manager for development services in Richardson, Texas.

• **Michael Wright** has a bachelor's degree in criminology and a master's degree in public administration from Florida State University.

He has served as the assistant city manager for development and transportation in Tallahassee since 1999. He is responsible for the daily operation of seven departments, the city's 2,000-fleet vehicle maintenance and replacement program and Equity and Workforce Development.