

## *City Manager* *Coral Gables, Florida*

Coral Gables is one of the nation's premier communities and is seeking only the crème de la crème to be its next City Manager. If you are one of that very small group, read on.

### **The City's History**

Until the early 1900's, Coral Gables was wilderness. Its "first family" was the Merricks, who arrived in 1898 headed by Solomon, a Congregational minister. The family became active in agriculture and began to sell lots to retired clergy. George Merrick, Solomon's son, expanded the idea into a planned community, one of the first in the country, and conceived "The City Beautiful." The major elements were wide, tree-lined boulevards, emerald parks, monumental buildings, winding roadways and dazzling civic areas that still exist today. Low rise multi-family zoning provided land use buffers separating elegant single family homes from the bustling commercial districts. The City's principal architecture then and now is Mediterranean Revival. Land sales began in earnest in 1921 and within a few years, the sales force consisted of about 3,000 persons. During its peak year, 1925, Merrick's sales team sold \$100 million in property. By then Merrick had spent \$100 million on improvements to the community and his dream city of Coral Gables was incorporated. Also in 1925, the University of Miami broke ground on its 240 acre campus. At the time, Merrick predicted that Coral Gables would serve as a "gateway to Latin America."

If 1925 was a very good year, 1926 was quite the opposite. While the Biltmore Hotel was completed and classes at the University of Miami had begun, the area's economy experienced a bust not unlike other areas and a major hurricane devastated the community. In 1929 Coral Gables actually went bankrupt and did not recover until World War II. At that time, thousands of soldiers came for training and the Biltmore Hotel became an army hospital. Prosperity continued after the war with rapid population growth, residential development, and the emergence of the Miracle Mile as the City's showpiece central shopping district as veterans attended the University of Miami aided by the GI Bill.

Originally viewed as a desirable bedroom community to the rough and tumble of ol' Miami, Coral Gables emerged also as a commercial hub in the 1960s and it has continued to flourish.

## **Coral Gables Today**

Located on Biscayne Bay just west of Miami and four miles south of Miami International Airport, Coral Gables has become one of the nation's premiere communities of its size and often referred to as mini-urban, nestled in the middle of Miami-Dade County with a population in excess of 2.5 million people. Coral Gables is a diverse, cosmopolitan, international city both in scope and reputation. Its outstanding quality of life has made it a sought-after location to live, work and play. Over 200 multinationals (with over 6,000 employees) have made the City their Latin American or regional headquarters. While Latin America is the focus, fulfilling Merrick's prophesy, many of these offices are global in reach and over 100 countries are served from corporate addresses in the City Beautiful. A sampling of the multinationals include: American Airlines, Apple Computer, the British Broadcasting Corporation, ChevronTexaco Caribbean/Central America, HBO Latin America, IBM, and Walt Disney Television International Latin America. The top five employers in the City are: the University of Miami (4,000 FTE at its main campus), the City of Coral Gable (865), the Biltmore Hotel (800), Doctor's Hospital Baptist Health (700) and Dade County Public Schools (540).

Coral Gables is known as a dining mecca with over 100 restaurants and there are over 1000 hotel rooms within the city limits. 25 countries have official representation in the City and the total assessed value for all commercial and residential property in 2008 is \$13.5 billion. The business community takes pride in and is supportive of the City. Overall, the City covers 14.3 square miles and is approximately 12 miles from north to south.

Unlike much of Florida, the City's population is balanced in terms of age and is not influenced by seasonal shifts. It has almost 43,000 residents with a daytime population approaching 80,000. Demographically, the City is 92% white, approximately half of which are non-Hispanic. Approximately 50% of the households are married couples and 25% have children under 18. The population spread by age is relatively even. 17% are under 18, 14% are between 18 and 24, 29% from 25 to 44, 24% from 45 to 64 and 16% are over 65. The population is highly educated. Over 50% have college degrees and 25% have a graduate or professional degree. The average household income was \$179,420 in 2008 compared to an average of \$62,377 county-wide.

While Coral Gables is currently focused on mixed use, housing options vary considerably (single family, town homes, condos, etc.). While home prices are not inexpensive, properties hold their values well in difficult times and appreciate very well in good times. The average assessed value for a residence is \$553,000. The recent decline in the real estate values has been felt in Coral Gables but it has had much less of an impact than in many other communities. A nice 2,000 to 2,500 square foot home may now sell for \$600,000, indicating some deals are available in this high end community. The area's elementary and middle schools are excellent. In fact Carver Middle School has been rated as the best in the state for the past two years.

Overall, the City's residents love their community and are very pleased with the quality of the services they receive. They expect and are satisfied with only the best. As a result, the City goes out of its way to take care of its residents and does an extremely good job of providing the essential services. For example, trash is still picked up from the backyard. And it would not be wise to suggest that money could be saved by moving to curbside pick-up or by contracting out

the service for single family homes. (The City has, however, contracted with Waste Management for multi-family waste pick-up.) A recent survey of 540 randomly selected residents found that historic preservation was their number one issue. The other items, those more typically found near the top of the list in surveys of other communities, such as crime, were deemed to be less important.

## **The Government**

The City utilizes the Commission - Manager form of government with a City Commission composed of five members, including the Mayor, who serve staggered four-year terms and are elected at-large (non-partisan). The elections are held on the second Tuesday in April of odd numbered years and two incumbent commissioners are expected to run for re-election in 2009. The Commission is stable – three of its members were first elected in 2001, one in 1995 and the other in 1991. The City Manager's Office is stable as well. The last two managers have served terms of seven (7) and thirteen (13) years. The Commissioners are long time city residents and most have known each other for years. Overall, they work well together and, while debates can be spirited, they generally operate in a collegial manner. Politics have been a bit more contentious in the past 18 months, in part due to some controversy involving the recently departed City Manager. The Commissioners have high regard for the City's staff and are quite pleased with the work and quality of the service it provides.

Coral Gables is a full service city with, as noted above, well over 800 employees and a total budget of \$144 million. The capital improvements budget is approximately \$4 million and the City has outstanding debt of \$62 million. Approximately 70% of the budget is personnel cost. As of fiscal year ending 2007, the City had a combined fund balance of \$15 million. Services include building and zoning, police, fire/EMS, a fully accredited parks and recreation, public works, trolley service (which is highly successful), historic resources (preservation and museum), two golf courses and a city-owned country club. It should be noted that the Fire Department is a Class 1 and the Police Department and Parks & Recreation Department are both fully accredited. The City has also been recognized nationally for its Emergency Management programs. Utilities are, for the most part, provided through the County.

The staff is talented, dedicated and long tenured. It takes pride in what it does and has very high expectations for itself. Some in the community have said that if awards were given in local government for the best supporting actor, this staff would win hands down. The City has three bargaining units: police (FOP), fire (IFFA) and general employees (which recently joined the Teamsters). The contracts for all three groups expired on September 30, 2008, and negotiations are on-going.

The City has also been unusually active and creative in the realm of public-private partnerships. For example, the City owns the Biltmore Hotel and contracts with a private contractor to operate it. In return, it receives 3.5% of the gross. Another example is the Gables Grand. In that case, the City owned the land and leased it to the developer for 99 years. The result was 200 market rate rental housing units on top of a developer financed public parking garage with 550 spaces

and ground floor retail. The City also has a 20 acre public private mixed-use development anchored by Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom approximately 1 mile south of the downtown.

### **The Challenges**

Coral Gables, while in excellent condition overall, is not without challenges. The previously mentioned expired union contracts need to be resolved. The current pension system is extremely costly – the City has invested \$20 million in each of the past two years – and in need of reform. Many of the senior staff will be retiring in the next three to five years and, while succession planning has been undertaken in some departments, no heir apparent exists in others. Public infrastructure is aging and historic civic landmarks are slowly being restored but the process is time-consuming and costly. While the City is proud of its strict codes, many suggest the permit process needs to be streamlined. Commercial tenants are struggling with significant increases in property tax pass-thrus while base rents continue to increase as the downtown grows vertically (thus requiring a new form of service delivery). A further decline in the economy could present some serious issues that the City would need to deal with. In addition, a development agreement with the University of Miami needs to be completed. All of the University's property is currently tax exempt and yet it is a fairly heavy user of city services. Both parties recognize a need for some compensation to the City for the services rendered. It is a matter now of agreeing on a formula and finalizing the agreement. The local newspaper has been quite critical of the City, particularly in terms of the prior manager, and some image rebuilding is needed.

### **The Ideal Candidate**

As noted, Coral Gables expects its next manager to be truly exceptional. He/she will be an outstanding strategic, global and forward thinker. The individual will be a leader and manager who believes strongly in the Commission – Manager form of government and in accountability and transparency. Not only will he/she understand the internal workings of local government but will also be able to anticipate the effects that changes in the external environment will have on the community and the government. The next manager will have top-notch people skills and be an extraordinary communicator, someone who is equally comfortable talking to Fortune 500 CEOs, residents (young and old), the press and field staff. The Commission is looking for a role model – someone who will lead by example and possess the highest degree of professionalism, integrity, honesty and morality, and will expect the same from his/her staff. By the same token, the individual will be human, accessible, approachable, open and have a sense of humor. He/she will be highly visible – involved in the community, out walking the streets and attending community meetings

The next manager will be the kind of person who can quickly win the respect of the community, staff and elected officials. The individual will be a strong manager, tough when appropriate, and an expert in reading the tea leaves about where the Commission is heading. If it appears that it is leaning towards an unwise decision in a public meeting, he/she will, with diplomacy, present the facts and the rationale for selecting a better option. However, once the Commission makes a decision and the discussion is over, the new manager will do his/her very best to implement that decision. He/she will be politically savvy but not politically involved. The individual will know that counting to five is the right thing to do and that counting to three is not an option. The ability to anticipate the future, understand where the landmines are and then to chart the optimal course will be critical. The departure of the last manager was somewhat controversial and the next manager will need to help heal the City. Consequently, strong skills in consensus and team building are essential. Patience will also be a virtue in Coral Gables. Change often needs to be carefully charted and often takes a long time.

The next manager will have an outstanding track record of achievement and success. Finely-honed financial skills are expected and experience with unions is a must. The individual will understand the City's resources, how to assess the unions' needs and how to respond in an appropriate manner. The ideal candidate will also recognize the important role this community can, and should play, on regional and state issues. He/she will also have a firm grasp of information technology and its applications and will be able to anticipate issues and opportunities and inspire his/her staff to be proactive and resourceful. Experience in a community of at least 50,000 in an urban setting with its own thriving downtown, in a community with a university, and an understanding of, and the ability to operate in, a culturally and politically diverse environment like Miami-Dade County are all also important. A command of planning, zoning and building processes is a strong plus. A bachelors degree is required and a masters degree is preferred. The ideal candidate will have at least ten years experience as a high level manager, preferably in government, and will be an ICMA credentialed manager.

In addition, the individual must recognize the importance of history and tradition while being able to weave in state-of-the-art and cutting-edge processes into the municipal work program to enhance service delivery and operations. He/she must also understand the importance of celebrating the City's many successes publicly and be versed in the art of honest and effective communication. Furthering the City's outstanding image and maintaining the City's impeccable reputation will be critical to the next manager's success.

### **Compensation**

The target for the starting salary is up to \$225,000 and will depend on qualifications. As noted, the City is looking for only the best and will provide compensation commensurate with ability and experience. City benefits are excellent.

### **Internal Candidates**

There are no internal candidates. Rather the staff is yearning for a dynamic, focused and creative leader that exudes professionalism and integrity. It is, thus, committed to assisting this search in every way possible. They truly want the best person to lead and guide what they believe can become the best city in America. In other words, they also want the best there is.

### **Residency**

Residency in the City is preferred but not required.

### **How to Apply**

Email your resume to **Recruit29@cb-asso.com** by December 19, 2008. Faxed or mailed resumes will not be accepted. Questions should be directed to Colin Baenziger at 561-707-3537.

### **The Process**

Candidates will be screened between December 20<sup>th</sup> and February 4<sup>th</sup>. Interviews are anticipated to be on February 20<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> with a selection made on February 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Other Important Information**

Under the Florida Public Records Act, all applications are subject to public disclosure. The City is an Equal Opportunity Employer and minorities are encouraged to apply. A Veterans' Preference will be awarded if applicable and per Florida Statute.