

By Lori M. Quiller, Director of Public Relations

get to know KEN JOINER

After 38 years, a fixture in county government is set to retire.

Calhoun County Administrator Ken Joiner is getting ready to embark upon a new adventure...retirement.

And, he's sure there won't be a shortage of hobbies and "honey-do's" for him to tackle after the first of the year.

Calhoun County Administrator Ken Joiner, CCA, will soon retire from his job of nearly four decades, but the legacy he will leave behind has touched many lives over the years...and they have equally left an impression on him.

Born and raised in Shelby County, Joiner received his Bachelor's degree from Jacksonville State University in microeconomics and business administration, but a professional life in the government sector wasn't exactly what he had in mind when he graduated.

"President Nixon passed a revenue sharing program, and Calhoun County needed someone to handle that money and some grant money, too," Joiner said. "I gradually got into county business that way. There were two ladies working in the administrative position at that time. One retired, and the other one didn't want the responsibility, so I thought I'd give it a try. It wasn't something that I had set out to do as my career, but I think I've done my job well over the years, given back to my community the best I can."

Giving back to his community, the county that he loves so much, is

something that he does...*quietly*. He often receives recognition for his accomplishments for his civic duties outside the courthouse, which he easily shakes off as just something he does on the side.

Earlier this year, Joiner and four other Calhoun County employees were honored by the Anniston Kiwanis International Club as part of the organization's Fifth Annual Public Servants Day.

And in August, he received ACCA's Outstanding Contribution to County Government Award for the second time. His first trip down the aisle to receive this award was in 1989.

In fact, Joiner's accomplishments are many. He currently serves on the National Association of Counties' Public Safety Steering Committee. He's been a member of the Calhoun County Economic Development Council since 1990. He's a past president of the Association of County Administrators of Alabama, as well as a past affiliate representative to the Association of County Commissions of Alabama's Board of Directors. He continues to guest

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lecture at Association events and classes when needed. Joiner was the first chairman of the Association's Self Insurance Liability Board of Directors. He chaired a committee in the early 1980s that worked with the State Examiners of Public Accounts to create the state's first County Finance Manual, and also chaired a Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government that brought about ethical reform in county government with a Code of Ethical Conduct for County Commissions, making ACCA the first statewide organization of elected officials to adopt such a creed.

The list goes on and on, and it's perfectly okay with Joiner if his accomplishments are not so well known among his peers.

That's because Joiner is famous for one thing – for his philosophy concerning work and his profession.

"I do my job, and I stay below the radar," Joiner said with a sly smile. "Yes, everything does run very smoothly in our office, but you can't credit me necessarily for that. I just do my job. It's the people that I've hired over the years. When you hire good people that you don't have to micromanage what they're doing every day when you're trying to do your own job, you have a successful staff."

Joiner admits that the Calhoun County Commission office doesn't necessarily have the feel of a typical "office." Sure, the phones ring consistently with a sing-song melody, there's the hustle-and-bustle associated

with the busywork of payroll, mail shuffles about, there's the familiar buzz of the copier and fax machine, and plenty of paperwork to go around. But, at the end of the day, the building isn't filled with employees as much as family.

In those 38 years, Joiner has worked with 20 county commissioners and countless number of staff members that have come and gone as the seasons change. He remembers each one, some fondly, some not so much. Each one has a story, and each one has left an impression on this soft-spoken man.

Joiner certainly made an impression on a young ACCA executive some 20 years ago, one that's never been forgotten.

"The first county administrator I met was Ken Joiner more than 20 years ago," said **ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield**. "I stood in his office with the ACCA president at that time, and we talked about making county government better. There's no question that he has focused his efforts on that goal every day. Ken has left a unique mark in Calhoun County and across Alabama. He has never refused to respond to the Association's call for his service. He's offered his insight and advice, and he's been a constant participant in all of our education programs."

But, for Joiner, it has all been part of doing his job.

"December will start my 39th year here in Calhoun, and I've definitely seen this county grow up. I get very emotional when I think about it," Joiner said softly. "The best part is that there is never a day that I come to work where there's not something new, something I haven't done before,

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something that’s not repetitious, and it’s always a challenge. Right now, I’m working with five county commissioners with five very different personalities. Sure it can be frustrating sometimes, but it’s always a challenge...and we are all like family here. Over the years, I’ve worked with some good people, and some that weren’t so good, but you get through those days one day at a time. It’s the employees that get you through those bad times. We have our ups and downs, but we are like family – one day at a time. When you work together as a team, everyone sticks together, and you can get through just about anything.”

Joiner has the advantage of watching, and partaking in, the office camaraderie. While there is always work to be done, there’s never a case of “not-my-job” attitude between departments. No, in order for things to run as smoothly as they do in Calhoun County, as he is so quickly to point out, everyone has to pitch in and often do when the waters get a bit rough.

The “can-do” attitude, according to many of the staffers and commissioners, stems from the Big Guy at the center of most things...even though he continues to work “below the radar.”

“Everyone here is completely devoted to their work and to this commission. People like **Janice Howard** are truly the backbone of this commission. They know the right way to do things, and they are truly good people,” Joiner explained. “We have great chemistry here, and I think that goes back to how we’ve hired people. It’s not just what’s on paper. You spend more time with the people that you work with than the people you have at home. You need to know if the person you are about to hire is a giving person, willing to pitch in to help out when someone needs help – even if it’s not their job. You have to be able to laugh together, cry together, be there for each other through the good times and the problems, too.

“I’ve promised the commissioners that they won’t miss me when I retire,” Joiner said. “There are too many other qualified people here to do this job. It’s a tough job, a very tough job. I’ve had to tell commissioners ‘No.’ a lot of times, and they probably didn’t want to hear that as an answer to their

question. But, every time I’ve had to say it was because the law told me to, not because Ken Joiner wanted to. Being able to do that has helped me earn respect over the years from the officials I’ve worked with. You can’t do this job if you don’t have the respect of the officials you’re working with.”

When Joiner talks about his “work family,” he becomes a bit emotional that his tenure is about to come to an end. However, he’s very proud of the accomplishments of his team and has every confidence in the fact that his team will continue on in his absence.

“There’s something about working for the public that’s not like working a ‘regular job.’ You’re much more scrutinized, especially in a position like mine as county administrator. You don’t want to screw up. You come to work. You work hard, and you hope that what you do is the right thing for the people in your county that you are serving. I’ve told the commissioners that I’m retiring, not quitting. If there’s a need for me to come back, I’ll be happy to come back and help out...no pay,” he laughed. “That’s just how I feel about what I’m supposed to do.”

For someone whose responsibilities have spanned nearly four decades, has earned the respect and admiration of the local elected officials he has worked with for so long, one wonders just what is going to happen on those final days prior to his retirement? How will his tenure be celebrated?

“Well, I’m hoping to slip out the door unnoticed,” Joiner laughed! “That may not happen, but one can hope, right? There have been numerous attempts to put my name on some buildings, but I hate that kind

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of stuff, you know? I get a check every two weeks for what I do. I don't deserve anything more, certainly not a building! I do what I'm supposed to do every day, and I carry on under the radar as much as possible. The trick is to do your job and then step back. Knowing that you've done your job to the best of your ability should be enough for you. Your time will come for whatever credit you do get. People who know you already know what kind of job you do and what you are capable of doing. No, I don't need any buildings named after me," he laughed again.

To sit in Joiner's office visitors are stared down by a duck and a deer, so it's an easy leap to assume exactly what he'll be doing on his first day of retirement. You'd be wrong.

"I've never duck hunted a day in my life," he laughed. "A friend of mine gave that to me, and I liked the little guy, so I put him on the wall. I used to hunt all the time. I'd hunt quail down in Dothan and Geneva with my brother-in-law. The secret to quail hunting is to have a good dog because your target is so small. But, I gave all that up a few years ago. I decided it was much

more comfortable to lay in bed on those mornings when it was 20 or 30 degrees outside than it is to get outside and freeze to death. I decided it was much more fun to stay at home with my wife."

While he said there may be a few items on his wife Diane's "honey-do" list, Joiner said he has a few tasks he wants to accomplish as well. And, his tasks involve POWER TOOLS!



Calhoun County Commission Chairman J.D. Hess and Joiner review some details prior to a recent county commission meeting.

When he was growing up, Joiner's father was in the home construction business, and it's a trade that he worked hard to pass along to his young son. At the time, however, his son was a strapping young lineman on the high school football team. Like most football players who tackle the gridiron on Friday nights, Joiner expected to be able to recuperate from the prior evening's activities. His father had other ideas.

"I love finished carpentry and woodworking," Joiner said. "But, it wasn't always that way. When I was younger and playing football, all I wanted to do on Saturdays and after practice was to come home and sleep! My father was pretty tough on me, and he'd get me up early to go to work with him. The home building business was a tough business back then, pretty much like it is now in our economy. But, I gained a real appreciation for what he did, and I grew to love it myself. After college, I had every intent of going into business with my father, but things rarely work out the way you plan them when you're that young. Now I have my homebuilders' license, and I've built several spec homes here in Calhoun County, on the side.

"I'm sure I'll be doing a lot of that when I retire. It'll be hard work, but it'll be different. I have a lot of tools and equipment...toys," he laughed, "to do jobs. The work will be challenging, but nothing as challenging as what I'm doing right now. I know there will be times that I'll miss this work and this place...but I claim visitation rights."

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