

Town official raring to stay

Walkertown's new manager is eager to know community

By Wesley Young
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WALKERTOWN

Ronald Bell found the coffeepot and the restroom Monday and started settling into his office.

He is ready for what he hopes will be a long and productive stay as the town manager of Walkertown.

"I know the life expectancy of a town manager in North Carolina is 3 1/2 years," Bell said on his first day on the job.

Bell wasn't referring to physical death, but the kind of political death that can put a town manager on the street if he falls out with his governing board. But Bell said he can beat the odds by learning what his community wants and delivering on that.

"You come in and try to do the right thing the right way," Bell said. "I want to try to gain a sense of the community and help it go in that direction."

Walkertown's previous town manager, Toby Linville, stayed a little more than two years. Linville left in May 2005 to take a county-government job in Henderson County.

The Walkertown Town Council chose Bell in a closed session May 15. The town will pay him \$42,000 a year. Linville, the former town manager, was making \$44,000 when he left.

Council Member Sarah Welch said that the council narrowed a long list of applicants to three and then decided on Bell.

"I think he will be a real good man," she said. "If he doesn't know the answers, he will know where to find them."

Welch said that code enforcement experience and grant-writing abilities were among the top qualifications the council was looking for in a town manager.

Bell, 58, was born and raised in Winston-Salem. He graduated from Reynolds High School and earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering at N.C. State University. Bell received a master's degree in business administration from Wake Forest University.

After an initial career with Sara Lee Corp. that lasted about 15 years, Bell became the department head for waste management in Davidson County in 1993.

He returned to the private sector in 1997, becoming a branch manager for Kingswell Financial Services, a mortgage banking company in Winston-Salem. He then worked briefly as chief finance officer for A & N Lumber Co.

In 2000, Bell became town manager of Walnut Cove, a position he held until he was fired in January 2004. The firing came after a municipal election, Bell said, in which a majority of the Walnut Cove Board of Commissioners that had hired and backed him was replaced by a board majority that opposed him.

For the past two years, Bell has worked as executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Stokes County.

Bell said he thinks that his experience won him the job and that he can help the town.

"They wanted somebody that had some experience and could guide them and help direct them and achieve what they wanted to do with the town," Bell said. "Hopefully, it will be a long and fruitful relationship."

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