

## *Interview with new town administrator Jesse Bane*

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**By Kathi Santora**

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Town Administrator Jesse Bane (L), shown with Director of Economic Development Trish Heidenreich, comments on his new position as well as traffic, the local water supply and other challenges.

### **What was your first thought when the Bel Air Town Commissioners approached you about the position of Interim Town Administrator?**

I was stunned. I had been a cop for 42 years. All of my education, experience and credentials are geared toward law enforcement. Once I accepted, some people asked me: "What do you know about water and sewers or about roads?"

If you are going to hold public office, be a CEO or a business owner, it is impossible to be an expert in all areas of the operation. However, principles of management are the same. I also think that running the Sheriff's office or the Town is similar to overseeing a business.

I owe my career to my wife. She has made lots of sacrifices for me to achieve my career dreams. I won't say she was happy about the result of the Sheriff's election, but she was happy to have her husband back. But if I were miserable, she wouldn't want me around the house. I wouldn't have taken this job unless she was in full support.

### **You are the Interim Town Administrator? What does that mean?**

I knew that if I took the job, I wanted to do everything to make sure that I did a good job. I wanted to make sure that both sides had the chance to look at my performance and decide if I should continue. If not, we'll shake hands and part as friends.

The employees and the citizens have given me a great welcome and this has turned out to be a dream job. I had a dream job when I was sheriff too.

### **What is the role of government in a small town like Bel Air?**

Government agencies, as well as businesses, must offer services, depend on well-trained staff and stay on budget. Each only has so much income. The challenge is how to allocate resources to do what is needed.

If revenue doesn't match need, we still have a responsibility to the public and must analyze what is going wrong and fix that. I am not advocating more taxes. Quite the opposite.

### **What were some of the things that surprised you during the first few weeks on the job?**

I knew many people on the Town staff because our paths often crossed while I worked in the Sheriff's office. Still, my preconceived notion was that this is a quiet, laid back little town.

Once I took the job, I looked at everything that goes on here and the job the staff is doing. In a way, they are busier than I was at the Sheriff's Office and I had 10, 12, 16-hour days there. There is a lot going on here.

I didn't understand all of the "behind-the-scenes" issues. For example, I always wanted to trim the trees in front of the Sheriff's Office on 45 S. Main. The town said I couldn't because they are protected. All I knew was that in the summer time I had no view. Now I understand a bit more about how much goes into seemingly small decisions.

### **What do you want the residents to know about you?**

My history with Bel Air is not just working here as sheriff. Growing up in Dublin, my family shopped downtown. I went to school here and lived in Bel Air during the first 10 years of my marriage. I plan to be out and in the streets and neighborhoods of Bel Air.

### **What are the challenges in Bel Air over the next five years?**

I think Bel Air is at a crossroads. We have to decide on the right direction with a mix that satisfies everyone. The young people moving in and setting up shops, restaurants, programs and services now will influence where we are in 10 or 20 years.

We need to look at traffic and parking issues if we want economic growth. We have people here who are both pro- and anti-business. The water issue is going to be a problem and not just in Bel Air, but everywhere. We must get a handle on the heroin and addiction problems, which will destroy the quality of life in this community quicker than anything else.

You have no problem in this country driving through towns and telling if they are vibrant or if they are dead. I want to see a town where businesses and homeowners or renters are fighting to get in. We may have that now, but let's ratchet it up a bit.

Finally, we are in the midst of an information revolution. We need to figure out how to keep people walking and driving to Bel Air rather than to do business online. A thriving economy benefits our business people and our residents.

**You've spent your previous career in local law enforcement. How does public safety figure into economic development?**

This town has a very low crime rate. It is a testimony to the police chief and officers. If you open the door to a criminal element, the good people leave.

**Would you like to add anything?**

If Bel Air is going to be a viable town in the future, we need to keep moving forward. The next decision is how we are going to move forward.