

Celebrating a Career of 'Unfailing Commitment' to Workforce and Community

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, Communications Manager, CareerSource CLM



It happened so quietly and, as it turned out, far more quickly than anyone could have imagined.

Kathleen Woodring, CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion's executive vice president, has retired. After nearly a quarter of a century with what is now CareerSource, and after several years traveling back and forth with her husband Mac to their condo in North Carolina, Kathleen has decided now is the time to bid farewell.

Of course, back when she announced it, we thought there would be plenty of time. But Covid put the kibosh on lingering, to say nothing of in-person, good-byes. I didn't even realize that the last time I saw her would be the last time I'd see her.

Don't get me wrong. While there is much to lament with her leaving, there is much to celebrate in our new EVP, Dale French, who has also been a long-time, integral part of CareerSource CLM.

Personally, I have adored working for Kathleen. We had three things in common: we both had strong ties to Pennsylvania, where I was born, and where she worked as an Equal Opportunity officer and compliance monitor.

We both shared Midwestern sensibility and grit - she hailed from Park Rapids, MN., I lived for a decade in the Black Hills of South Dakota. We bonded over the knowledge that potlucks were referred to as a "hotdish," dontcha know. We also shared a deep and abiding understanding of just how wonderful and simultaneously miserable those long, cold winters could be.

And in looks and temperament, our mixed terriers - her Bubba and my Jackson - appear to have been separated at birth.

Kathleen moved to our region in 1995 and went to work as a placement coordinator for the former Withlacoochee Workforce Development Authority. She joined CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, then known as Workforce Connection, in 1997 and in 2005 became our Chief Operating Officer,

managing program implementation and programming for the Citrus, Levy, and Marion counties region. Along the way, at the age of 50, she also earned her master's degree in Management from Webster University, graduating with honors - something she joked would "totally shock" her old high school guidance counselor.

In 2016, Kathleen became Executive Vice President, overseeing Operations and Administration and support functions such as Communications, Information Technology, Finance, Human Resources, Compliance and Reporting, and overall system effectiveness.

For three consecutive years, starting in 2015, Kathleen chaired the statewide planning effort for the annual Workforce Professional Development Summit, providing annual system-wide training for more than 800 workforce professionals. She didn't just serve as a figurehead, either. Kathleen was a roll-up-your-sleeves and get-the-job-done kind of leader; many times, I'd find her in her office, bent over sheets depicting the layout of the summit banquet room, meticulously penciling in table assignments for nearly a thousand attendees.

Kathleen chaired the Florida Chief Operating Officer's group, providing system-wide feedback and improvement to the Florida workforce system. She was also instrumental in launching the nationally recognized Phoenix Rising YouthBuild program, which serves Citrus and Marion counties and has been involved in myriad civic and community organizations, including everything from the chamber of commerce and transportation board to the homeless council and Early Learning Coalition to United Way committees and board of directors.

Three years ago, she was named the Toni Jennings Workforce Development Professional of the Year by the Florida Economic Development Council. She was recognized for "setting a new standard for excellence in managing relationships with community organizations and partners ... helping create a path to prosperity for thousands of at-risk Citrus, Levy, and Marion county residents. Her impact on these communities will be felt for decades to come."

Kathy Judkins of SECO, who served as our board chair at the time, lauded Kathleen for her "unfailing commitment to the workforce mission."

Dale French, our new EVP, also has an unfailing commitment to the workforce mission. Coincidentally, he also hails from the Midwest - Upper Michigan, actually. He has been with CareerSource CLM for many years, serving as programs manager, operations director, and other roles. He is already doing an amazing job; I'll introduce you to him at greater length at a later time.

For now, I'd like Kathleen to have the last word. More than a decade ago, in an interview of prominent businesswomen in the Ocala Star-Banner, she spoke of feeling "blessed" to have a career that allowed her to partner with "so many awesome individuals and to be a part of the solution."

"It is great to be able to do things that end up helping people," she said. "The learning never stops, and it is never boring. This career has put me smack in the middle of the community that I call home."

While Kathleen may have set down new roots in North Carolina, do I hope she still considers this area home?

You betcha.

Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is accredited in public relations, a certified public relations counselor, and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. Please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.



Kathleen Woodring, Executive Vice President CareerSource CLM



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