

Mayor Bill Dewrell

BY BOBBIE CHRISTMAS

Bill Dewrell, mayor of Woodstock, Ga., leaves his warm bed early on an October Tuesday morning for a 7:30 a.m. Rotary Club meeting. When I meet Dewrell in the entryway of his Woodstock City Hall office at 9 a.m., two people already await his presence, but before he meets with them, he first stops to welcome a newly hired policeman.

Dewrell looks younger than I expected. He's 36 with a full head of hair, apple cheeks and plenty of energy. He'll need it.

Inside the mayor's office, Terry Anderman and Craig Jones of Ivan Allen Workspace show Dewrell their solution for the rapid building of energy-efficient schools. Cabling for power, voice and data systems are run under panels in the floor, making repairs and upgrades simple. Dewrell asks questions and offers names of business owners who might also be interested in the Workspace concept.

While the men speak, Dewrell's office phone rings, his beeper buzzes and his cell phone goes off. He checks his caller ID each time, but he does not interrupt the meeting. The salesmen leave, and Dewrell strolls through City Hall, answering and returning calls on his cell and stopping at the desk of each employee for updates or to say hello. He finally reaches the employee lounge where caffeine beckons, but two more business discussions take place face-to-face in the break room while he pours his cup of coffee.

SMALL TOWN, SMALL BUDGET

Dewrell crams a great deal of work into one day, because Woodstock's coffers cannot afford a full-time mayor. He runs his own business Southco Construction Co. the rest of the week. Southco handles structural remodeling. "Basically we fix problems builders cause," he quips. His ever ready cell phone keeps him connected 24/7 with his constituents, clients, family, friends and both offices.

Dewrell stepped up from mayor pro tem in April 2001 after David Rogers passed away while in office. State law does not allow a person to hold one office and run for another if the terms overlap, so he had to resign from City Council and his mayoral office to run for mayor, an office he already held temporarily. "It was a leap of faith," he admits.

While he opens his mail, his phone rings. He answers, talks and sorts mail simultaneously.

Stephanie Houston, the recreation services manager for the William G. Long Senior Citizens Center, drops by while he opens envelopes. She voices concerns for her center's space. "We have 800 seniors on our mailing list," she laments. "We're bursting at the seams, plus we have no place to park." She says the new facility on Arnold Mill Road is ready for occupancy, if they can get funding for the rent.

Dewrell groans. "Seventy-five percent of the SPLOST [Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax] funds come from Woodstock and Canton, but because of the way the state apportions it, we get only 17 percent back." He spreads his hands.



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BILL DEWRELL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBIN HARRISON



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"There's nothing there!" He tells Houston if she can find someone to take over the lease on the current building, perhaps something could be worked out. He promises to visit the center that afternoon.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

By 10:30 a.m., Dewrell jumps into his truck. In light traffic, he answers cell calls.

At the water treatment plant, the largest city project in progress, the new building's looks aren't overwhelming, but the state-of-the-art membrane bio-reactor inside will double the city's water treatment capacity in less space than the current facility requires.

In her meeting at the water treatment construction office, Public Works Director Dawn Wolfe is all business, but her enthusiasm shows through: "When we finish, we'll have higher water quality and increased capacity for future development."

As we leave, Dewrell receives a call from someone who wants to know how to contact the firefighters who helped his family recently. Dewrell calls around, gets the answer, passes the answer back to the person who asked, and navigates toward his next stop. He turns to me. "What's fun is I never know what I'll be dealing with next. There's never a dull moment."

Down Hwy. 5, Dewrell pulls up to the new fire station #24 near Holly Springs, says hello to Lt. George Williams, breezes me through a prideful tour of the brand-new facility, and climbs back in his truck for a short ride to the on-site offices of KB Home in a development close by. He pulls out a boxed toy and hurries into the office, where delegates from the county, KB Home and the Marine Corps Reserve kick off the Toys for Tots campaign. Everyone smiles. Cameras click. After a hurried goodbye, he's off to have lunch with several of the KB Home developers.

While Dewrell eats, his phone and beeper continue their chimes and buzzes. He

Above: Mayor Dewrell takes a moment to talk to William Long, one of Woodstock's former mayors and a current City Counselman, about the progress the water treatment plant has made over the past year.

Right: Mayor Bill Dewrell (far right) kicks off the Cherokee County Toys For Tots Campaign with representatives from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, county council and KB Home.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOBBIE CHRISTMAS



Mayor Dewrell makes his rounds stopping by the fire station to talk to Jerry Smith, Woodstock's Fire Chief.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBIN HARRISON

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glances down to ensure each call is not an emergency, but never misses a beat in his discussion with the developers about Woodstock, its growth, and its future development in general.

POLITICS AND BEDFELLOWS

Dewrell rushes back to his office for his 1 p.m. appointment. Sen. Tom Price, campaigning for Johnny Isaacson's seat in Congress, is there to explain his platform. "I work harder than anyone else and propose solutions that work," Price tells Dewrell. They share ideas on how they may be of assistance to each other.

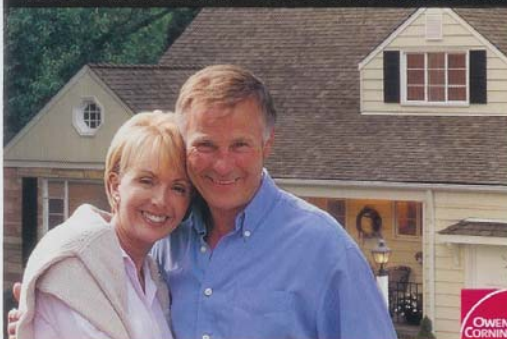
Next, Dewrell talks to Richard McLeod, Woodstock's interim director of planning and economic development, in preparation for another meeting. William Long, a member of the City Council and former mayor, joins them for a closed meeting.

Dewrell, Mayor Pro Tem Susan Jones (the city charter states that the mayor pro tem serves when the mayor is not available; with a mayor on hand only part of the time, Jones steps in to handle interim issues or make a presence at groundbreakings and other events) and I hotfoot it a few hundred yards up the hill to Main Street and the senior center later than planned. The seniors have gone home. The director continues her pleas, though. Together, the trio hashes out a strategy to approach City Council with a plan to move the senior center to its new location.

We hike back down the hill. It's 5 p.m., and I'm wilted, but Dewrell exhibits no signs of slowing. He shows me his cell phone screen. He still has 21 calls to return, despite having answered and returned messages all day. I leave him to his work, drive home for dinner, and return for the 6:30 p.m. executive session where City Council members bounce ideas around, agree and disagree, settling as many issues as possible before the public City Council meeting.

At 7 p.m., Dewrell calls the public meeting to order. In less than an hour, he covers a long agenda. Yes, the city can have its new crepe myrtles, 30 of them, at an amazing cost of only 50 cents a tree. Yes, it can award this contract and that one.

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Mayor Dewrell finds time in his busy schedule to catch up with Woodstock's Police Chief David Schofield.

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The public gets a chance to speak next. A woman approaches the podium. "I'm a card-carrying member of the senior center," she begins and reads a petition signed by many citizens who want the center moved to larger quarters. A man steps up and says that because of crowded conditions, the men can seldom play pool. The current location cannot accommodate another table, but the new location would, and someone has already offered to donate one.

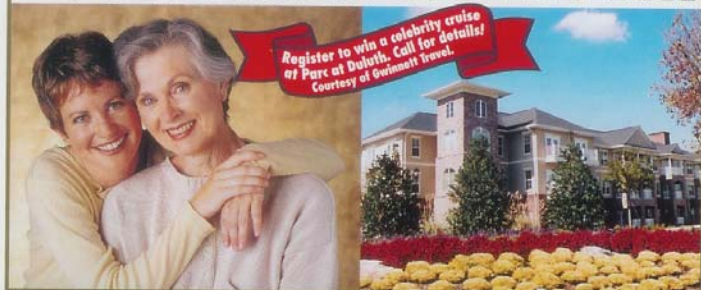
The mayor notes that the city attorneys reviewed the lease agreement on the current building, and the city has no financial obligation to the owners after Dec. 31, 2003. The council votes; the seniors will get their new center this year. Applause resounds throughout the meeting hall.

DOES THE DAY EVER END?

A motion passes to adjourn the meeting, and the Council returns to smaller quarters for another executive session. After shadowing the mayor for a 13-hour day, I bid the mayor good evening.

For those who think a politician's life is one of ease, think again. Dewrell has to rise early the next morning to replace his mayor's hat with a hardhat and run Southco. He'll be alone. I'm sleeping late. ■

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