

NEW DIRECTIONS

In less than a year, **Welton Cadwell** has accomplished much in steering the **Central Florida Expressway Authority** on a course to the future.

by **MICHAEL CANDELARIA**



WELTON CADWELL

When Lake County Commissioner Welton Cadwell was tapped as chairman of the new Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX) in July 2014, he was lauded for his regional approach, no-nonsense style and understanding of what the traveling public wants — the freedom to get where they want, when they want and how they want more efficiently.

One month earlier, Gov. Rick Scott had signed Senate Bill 230 to create CFX, superseding the existing Orlando-Orange County Authority and broadening its scope. The agency's board was increased from five to nine members; jurisdictions were expanded to also include Lake, Osceola and Seminole counties; and multi-modal responsibilities were added.

Cadwell, a Lake County Commissioner since 1992, is charged with charting a new course for the agency. At the top of the list is rebuilding public trust. Cadwell talks about progress and purpose since that time:

FORWARD FLORIDA: YOU ARE COMING UP ON YOUR ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY SERVING AS CHAIR OF THE CENTRAL FLORIDA AUTHORITY. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS MOST NOTABLE ABOUT THIS NEW BOARD?

WELTON CADWELL: Outside of me, there are real smart people [chuckle]. Seriously, something momentous is happening at CFX, and I believe it's because of the leadership and make-up of this board. First, the state Legislature was smart in mandating that an elected official serve from each of the four counties — Lake, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole — and the City of Orlando, alongside three governor appointees.

This is good not only for public accountability, but also it forces us to look at issues from a regional, not a county, lens. Think about it. Our future project decisions now cover an area larger than the state of Delaware and impacts more than 2.2 million residents. The scale alone forces us to think regionally and really plan ahead. We're not talking about what is needed this year or even what is needed this decade. This is about what the region needs to stay competitive and be mobile for the next 20 or 40

years.

Second, I have been around long enough to have worked or served with each of these elected folks on other boards or committees. Let's say there wasn't a courting period. We jumped in starting day one and got down to business.

The last thing I would say is that this board cares. Caring, it turns out, takes effort. It's raising the bar to the point where we really got to stretch. Some days it's uncomfortable, but we all agree it's worth it.

FF: FDOT'S CONSTRUCTION ON THE \$2.3 BILLION I-4 ULTIMATE PROJECT IS GEARING UP. SIX YEARS OF CONSTRUCTION WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PEOPLE WHO NEED THEIR CARS TO COMMUTE TO WORK. DOES CFX HAVE PLANS TO EASE THE COMMUTERS' BURDEN?

WC: It was Seminole County Commissioner Brenda Carey and Governor Appointee Michael Scheeringa who asked the same questions months ago, especially since many Seminole residents take I-4 to work. And, what

the board talked about is if there is a perception out there that 'I can't afford to use the Expressway.' So we wanted to do everything we can to do help them out.

CFX staff got to work and presented several options that were in line with our bond covenants. We pushed for discounting tolls for volume drivers during the construction period and dropping the minimum opening balance on E-PASS accounts. The board approved it. And, starting July 1, 2015, those drivers taking S.R. 414, S.R. 429 from Apopka to Disney and S.R. 417 from University Boulevard to International Drive will see relief — both in time and money.

FF: CFX RECENTLY SECURED A \$194 MILLION LOAN AT A 1.23 PERCENT RATE FROM THE FEDS — A TIFIA LOAN. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CFX AND THE REGION?

WC: It's significant. ... Any time you go out and issue a bond, it's a pretty arduous process, but getting a loan from the feds tops it.

So it was only a few months ago, CFX



With all that in mind, it boils down to figuring out ways we can enhance the partnerships we already have and create new ones. If you look at areas throughout the country that have been successful, even in the downturn, the constant is people can get to places easy. That's because the DOTs, transit, rail, expressways, planning agencies and even trail folks all worked together with the same purpose in mind. And, ultimately we're going to try to do that here.

FF: VISIONING AHEAD 25 YEARS IS A LITTLE DAUNTING. WHAT COULD WE BE SEEING?

WC: People in Florida are used to having their cars and that's great, but I expect in 25 years there will be other options. By doing this visioning work today, I'm confident we're going to be a player in those options tomorrow.

And, taking into account the footprint of Central Florida continues to grow, even in a downturn, if the transportation network is not there, then it's all for naught. I've seen it in the 23 years I've been on the Lake County Commission. Even when you have the greatest project in the world, if people can't get there and get back, it doesn't work.

FF: YOUR 2040 MASTER PLAN HAS BEGUN. HOW DOES THAT PLAN MESH WITH THE CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY'S BROADER POWERS THAT NOW ALSO ENCOMPASS MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION?

WC: Our 2040 Master Plan is going to be created with community input across Central Florida — much further beyond traditional planning councils, transportation planning MPOs and chambers. Not only will we involve more people in the process, but also the scope will be larger because the legislature added multimodal to CFX's mission.

The timing coincidentally couldn't have been better. Look around you. All the talk in transportation circles centers on greater connectivity. Look no further than SunRail expansion, All Aboard Florida, OIA (Orlando International Airport) connections, LYNX's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and the list goes on and on. Multimodal conversation is nothing new to this community. But what is new is that the region's local tolling authority, CFX, now has a seat at the table. What that looks like? That's for our customers, the community and the board to work out.

FF: THE END OF THE FORMER ORLANDO-ORANGE COUNTY EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY WASN'T PRETTY, WITH ALL THE QUESTIONS ABOUT ETHICS. HOW DO YOU MAKE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS GO AWAY AND HAVE PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE NEW CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY?

WC: I would say that only in the last maybe 60 days news stories and TV stories haven't started with "scandal." ... We thought it might take a little longer. We even talked about it. You just have to suck it up and realize that every article might start with the past. This is a new board and new agency as it relates to our mission and how we do things. Fortunately we have inherited a solid organization and staff. I think we're getting to a better place quicker, and I think hopefully with the work we're doing and with the customer outreach we're doing, we can show people that we care, that we're truly engaged. I am looking forward to what the future holds for us.

EDITOR'S NOTE: JUST PRIOR TO PRESS TIME, THE CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY NAMED LAURA KELLEY AS ITS FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. PREVIOUSLY, KELLEY WAS DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION FOR CFX.