

North Carolina Association of County Commissioner's  
Youth Summit Interview

Subject: Rick French, Alexander County Manager

June 7, 2013

When I was considering questions for this interview I tried to cover all the bases; what the job entailed, what education was required, etc. I wanted to show what the job required on a daily basis. This is a verbatim account of the interview.

Why did you want to start working in county government?

RF: That's a very good question. I went to Appalachian (State University), and there was a master's program for people who work in city and county government; I actually started with cities. There is a difference, a big difference, between city and county government. I started in cities, and my last city job was in Newton. I was city manager. And, um, I have always been interested in county government. They're different because they provide different services; like the sheriff department and all that. I've just found it real interesting.

What is an average day like with your job?

RF: Well, there probably is not an average day. That's what I like about it. I get to deal with a lot of different things. Some days will be 14 hours long, and some days are not. We have utilities and personnel problems and budget problems, and I get involved in every bit of that stuff. There really is not a typical day. But usually, a somewhat typical day, I try to get here by seven thirty and I try to go through emails and that type of stuff and usually have meetings with different departments. Umm, currently I'm working on the budget, so that takes a lot of time. And talk to the departments about the questions I have about different things and items in their budget. Umm and then people will call you and write letters so I usually work till 5:30. That's a sort of typical sort of easy day.

What part of your job would surprise most people?

RF: Uhh, surprise most people? I don't know if this would surprise most people or not, but, probably how much hands-on you actually end up doing. So, and how much time you actually spend. Umm, it, you know, I don't know if I have ever had a week where I have had 40 hours. You know, it's, a lot of people associate that you come in to drink coffee and put your feet up and take it kind of easy. In a small county I think you have to be more engaged with the public work and the community, so you do a little bit of everything. So, somebody needs you to go over and talk to somebody in the community I do it. That's the best way to make that contact. Because, you'd be surprised at how many people don't understand. Um, I would say that is what it would be.

What level of education is required to do your job?

RF: Umm, well I think today at least a masters level is required. I know managers who don't have their masters, but for the most part I think all the new people who have gotten involved in it have gotten a masters.

Is your job elected or appointed?

RF: Appointed.

How many people does our county employ?

RF: Around 250 full time people and probably more than 500 part time people.

Who's your boss?

RF: The Commissioners.

What do you love about your job?

RF: Dealing with people.

If you could change something about the county what would it be?

RF: I would, probably, the communication, how, in Alexander County it's hard to communicate to the public. And it's, we have a newspaper that's more or less confined to Taylorsville and it only comes out once a week. We have a radio station, and that's all good but it's such a small area. Bethlehem, has the Bethlehem star but it's really hard to get news out. So I would say be able to communicate better. One thing we've done that helps some is, have you ever seen our PEG channel on TV? (Me: yeah) Um, PEG stands for Public Education and Government channel. And we video tape our meetings and I think that helps, but it's hard to communicate and that's what I would like to change the most, communications.

I discovered a lot about this job that I did not previously know. For instance, I did not know that you needed a Master's degree for this job. This interview cleared up several things and has allowed me to have a better understanding of how our county is run.

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