

Alexander Bannister Union County

I had the privilege of meeting with the county manager of Union County. Before meeting Ms. Cynthia Coto, I chose a list of questions to ask her. The entire interview was a great success, not only because of the meeting with Ms. Coto, but also because I was able to tour the entire Union County government building.

Ms. Cynthia Coto said that there were two major elements to her role as county manager. The first element included managing day to day operations, and the second consisted of deciding who would be employed. She told me that when she got into office for Union County, there was a thirteen million dollar deficit. She said that it was difficult choosing which department(s) would be cut. Ms. Coto said that this was probably the hardest decision she had ever made as a county manager.

Ms. Coto informed me that each month she and the county commissioners would have at least two formal meetings. Ms. Coto said that they may also have workshops pertaining to current subjects of importance. She told me that she recently had to attend eight workshops pertaining to the budget. She works closely with county commissioners, board of directors, and department directors when drafting a budget proposal. Ms. Coto said that she works with department directors—tax administrations, park and recreations, library, public works, sheriff, clerk of courts, district attorney—are just a few.

Ms. Coto also explained to me how the annual budget works. She said that the development of the budget begins in August. Throughout August, the county manager and her staff work together to create projections for the upcoming year. They will project how much revenue they will bring in, and how much they will have to spend on the

county's departments. In November, the county manager and her staff start with a zero based budget. This is where they start from zero dollars and work their way up. They begin with the most important departments, which will get more funding. They continue this through May. By June 1st of each year the county manager must have the budget to the county commissioners. The county commissioners must then work on the budget and make any modifications. The changes must be approved by the county manager, and the proposed budget must be enacted by June 30th of each year.

Getting a tour of the government building was fascinating. I met several department directors of tax administrations, public works, park and recreations, and clerk of courts. The meeting with Ms. Cynthia Coto and the tour of the government building all amounted to more than I could have asked for. I loved meeting with my county manager and department directors. During this interview, I learned so much about the county and those who run it.