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Madison County 4-Her

County Government: On the Outside Looking In

As citizens of North Carolina, we are all part of a county community and government. However, despite the role each of us plays in our communities as citizens, we lack knowledge and insight of the inner-workings of our county governments and the duties of the local officials working for the betterment of all individuals. I, myself, have wondered what my county employees do in their everyday work and what has sparked their interest in local government. When the opportunity arose to meet with and interview Steve Garrison, my County Manager, I was excited and eager to increase my understanding of his duties and role in county operations. Needless to say, I did just that.

As County Manager, Mr. Garrison has many responsibilities, none of which are simple or easy. He says it is his job (and rewarding at that) to partner with people and organizations within the county to work to improve life for citizens. He works with different county departments on the management of their programs and emphasizes economic development and the promotion of local business. He collaborates with County Commissioners on projects and works to manage and define procedure within departments and organizations. Additionally, Mr. Garrison works with the County Finance Director, County Commissioners, and local department heads to formulate a realistic county budget, and serves on more than thirty boards and committees. Of all his duties, however, Mr. Garrison says that managing a county during a recession and with limited resources is probably the most challenging. Economic development is a difficult task in a rural county as companies typically look for existing facilities and specific worker skill sets.

But, even with all of its challenges, Mr. Garrison's job is very rewarding. He says this job has afforded him an opportunity to see how the inner-mechanics work within a county and its government, and has given him a better realization of what goes on behind the scenes to develop and carry out collaborative community efforts. He states that it is gratifying to see the large number of people working to make positive change in the community and fulfilling to partner with them to make it happen. Also, he says it is pleasing to work with the NCACC, who works to advocate for all one hundred counties.

By no means have I learned everything there is to know about Steve Garrison's job and county operations, but I have definitely expanded my prior knowledge of county government. I thank Mr. Garrison for his generosity and time, as it was very rewarding for me. I plan to continue my quest for a better understanding of my county's work around me, and hope to have an opportunity like this again in the future.