

# Cynthia Coto, Union County Manager

My interview was with Cynthia Coto, Union County Manager, and Christina Allison, Ms. Coto's Executive Assistant. Ms. Coto has been working for county governments for 41 years. She started working at the Volusia County Personnel Office. Later she relocated to Seminole County and worked at the Seminole County Personnel Office. She was promoted to various positions within Seminole County such as Deputy Director of Environmental Services, Director of Central Services and Deputy County Manager. Today, she is the County Manager of Union County. She was hired by the county commissioners and has a 2 year contract with Union County. She will be in office until December 2017.

Ms. Coto has a difficult and important job. Her job is the equivalent of a CEO of a corporation. Her work day begins at 7:30 a.m. and may end at 5:30 p.m. On board nights, she continues to work till after 9:00 p.m. According to her contract, she works at the pleasure of the county commissioners; she gathers all the information on issues pertaining to the county from the division directors and other county employees; and she informs the county commissioners of her findings. She helps commissioners facilitate special meetings and works hard to give a fair and balanced view of the information to the county commissioners. Ms. Coto oversees 1,000 county employees with the exception of employees with the Sheriff's Department and Register of Deeds who can hire and fire their own employees. With every county contract and personal action form regarding the county and county employees, she reviews and signs herself, unlike some managers who ask their assistant to stamp their signature on it.

One of her jobs is to manage the county's budget. The employees and she start working on the budget in July and the process ends on June 30th of the following year, and then they start working on the next year's budget. She will spend months working on the budgets, having meetings with

division directors, analyzing and reviewing reports. They also do a projection report for the next 5 years for revenues and expenses. There are 12 divisions and each submits a budget request for their division. Union County has a \$0 based budget which means everyone starts out with nothing and each year the directors decide what their division needs. After meeting with Ms. Coto, directors will have a meeting with the finance director to justify each line item of their budgets.

The challenge is to manage the gaps between expenses and revenues. Once the gap has been reduced to a reasonable level, the budget is submitted to the county commissioners for a vote. Ms. Coto works with the finance staff, division directors, the board of county commissioners and others.

Ms. Coto has won a number of rewards for her efforts. One of these is a reward recognizing her for 23 years of Outstanding Service to Seminole County. In 2005, she was appointed Honorary Deputy Sheriff by Volusia County Sheriff's Office. Last year she has been named one of the 50 most influential women in the region by the Mecklenburg Times.

In my interview with Ms. Allison, she says, "Ms. Coto is well educated, has a great memory, and is approachable, thorough, and fiscally responsible. She lives by the motto, 'Don't spend other people's money frivolously'." The people of Union County are very fortunate to have Ms. Coto as a county manager.

#### Sources:

Coto, Cynthia. Personal Interview. 7 August 2015.

Allison, Christina. Personal Interview. 4 September 2015.