

# Capital Outlook



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## Person of the year Part-time job set career path for County Administrator Long

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Always looking for meaningful work to help pay his way through college, Vince Long took a job as a legislative monitor for Pinellas County.

Through that job at the Capitol, Long met Parwez Alam, administrator for Leon County at the time. Long eventually became an

intern with the county and Alam mentored him in the mid 1990's.

There was hardly anything about governance and being a top administrator that Long didn't pick up along the way.

Long didn't leave the county after graduating from FSU and when Alam retired in 2011, he was an easy choice to fill the vacancy. Long is being rec-



**Vince Long**

ognized around the state for his leadership and management of Leon County today.

But he harkened back to the years he spent under Alam's guidance for what

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he is achieving now.

"It was a very rare opportunity to do the work, so when I came to my job as county administrator I had a very deep perspective of the organization and challenges that people face at their levels of the organization," Long said. "I call upon that very regularly in my work."

One of the more recent recognitions that Long received is being named one of the Capital Outlook's Persons of the Year. The other is Dr. Monique Butler.

"I'm so appreciative to receive such recognition from the Capital Outlook," Long said. "I do so on behalf of literally hundreds of employees who in addition to doing their jobs have worked almost every day for two years in response to the pandemic. I'm humble and grateful to receive such recognition."

Being in government wasn't exactly what Long had in mind when he left Inverness to attend FSU in

1989. His plan was to follow the part of other family members who work for either the FBI or the CIA.

Before coming to FSU, Long who was born in New York City, grew up in Inverness and attended Citrus High School. He'd worked several odd-jobs, mostly as an assistant with his father's moving company.

Up until he became County Administrator, Long was an adjunct professor at FSU. For 13 years he conducted classes in government administration.

Just a few years before he became an instructor, Long earned a Master of Public Administration from FSU's Askew School of Public Administration and Policy. He also is a graduate of the Harvard University, JFK School of Government Institute for Senior Executives in State and Local Government.

According to the county's website, Long is currently on the Board of Directors of the Florida Association of County Managers. A former president of the board, Long also is on the Board

of Directors for the Florida Association of Counties Institute for County Government. He is also on the Florida Trust Board of Trustees.

But Long, 52, isn't driven by accolades, said Bill Proctor, chairman of Leon County Board of Commissioners. Long has exceptional communication skills that has earned him the respect of the staff he oversees, said Proctor.

"That's the extraordinary quality that sets him apart," Proctor said. "He knows the theory and he understands the chemistry of people's human interaction. That's important to me."

"This is a big organization and he is that guy who sets that tone how. He knows a little bit about all of it in ways that he can hold them accountable."

Long took his management skills to another level during the pandemic. When he had to make the hard call to sanction employees who weren't vaccinated, he did it without hesitation.

Earlier in the pandemic, Long found himself

in-charge of getting \$132 million from the federal CARES ACT to businesses and individuals. He didn't miss a beat, crediting his staff for that. He also cited the Statewide Coronavirus Vaccination Community Education and Engagement Task Force for helping to direct the effort.

The county's success in distributing the funds earned it a No. 1 rating in the state and No. 6 nationwide.

Making the distribution plan work was deliberate, Long said.

"We took the approach that this may be the most important thing that we ever do so we needed to do it better than we did anything else," he said.

They executed it without any playbook, considering that there wasn't a precedent to follow.

"Many of us had been together for decades and we had worked on so many major issues over the years," he said. "We had put together plans and executed plans before so when this came down we knew

that we could do this and do it very well."

At the same time Long was keeping pace with how the county's healthcare facilities were handling the pandemic. However, his involvement started years before, said Jeanne Freeman, CEO of Neighborhood Medical Center.

Long made the effectiveness of Federally Qualified Health Centers a priority, she said.

"He definitely understands the value of FQHC and the partnership," she said. "He has embraced that and set the tone for everyone else."

Hearing from Long or his staff a few times each week isn't unusual, she said. The demographics that the health center serves is an obvious concern for Long, she said.

"His compassion knows no boundaries. Vince is a person who understands that what's good for one is good for the other and there should be no separation depending on what side of town you live on," she said. "He doesn't see that so he

has made it his mission, as it relates to healthcare, that everyone has equitable access to those quality services.

"He understands that FQHC are integral part of making sure that happens in our community so he has made sure that we provide access to that population of patients who need us the most. He's never wavered in supporting us."

Long's concern for the wellbeing of Leon County residents also includes putting together an effective hurricane preparedness plans each year. The county had executed its hurricane readiness plan so well, that FEMA took note and made it a model for the rest of the country to use. Long suspects that FEMA saw more to his hurricane plan than the front end.

"All counties and cities respond well to hurricanes," he said, "but we try to do after-action after every hurricane."