

NOMINATION OF  
LOU ANN R. PALMER  
FOR THE 2008  
E. HARRIS DREW MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

This year Lou Ann Palmer is celebrating 35 years in public service to the citizens of the City of Sarasota. Mayor Palmer is not only a pillar of the community – she was involved in the creation of the buildings and foundations on which the pillar stands.

Mayor Palmer's years of dedication and community service will forever be embedded in the history of the City of Sarasota - its changes, development, and growth - having lived, worked, and been an active member and leader in the community since 1948.

Mayor Palmer's career in public service has evolved as follows:

1973 – 1981	Appointed by City Commission to Planning Board
1982 – 1991	Elected to Sarasota City Commission Served 3 one-year terms as Mayor
1995 – 1996	Appointed to City of Sarasota Charter Review Committee
1995 - 2000	Appointed to Planning Board
2001	Elected to At-Large City Commission seat Served as Mayor for one year term
2005	Re-elected to At-Large City Commission seat Served as Mayor April 2003 – April 2004 Served as Mayor April 2007 – April 2008 Selected as Mayor in April 2008 for another one year term

After considerable thought, Mayor Palmer has announced that she will not run for re-election to the City Commission when her term expires in April 2009. She has spent a lifetime in public service and has decided it is time to pursue some personal endeavors that have, at times, taken a back seat to her beloved work with the City of Sarasota.

**Background**

Mayor Palmer began her career as a high school teacher in Sarasota in 1961. She retired in 1992 after spending 31 years with the Sarasota Public School system. Mayor Palmer was a high school teacher to many of the current elected officials and community leaders and was a role model and inspiration to all.

During her teaching career, she was a Social Studies Department Chair, worked in Curriculum Development for the State of Florida Department of Education and as a Surveyor for the Florida Learning Resources System where she performed a study of local job opportunities for physically and mentally challenged youth. She was also a member of the Superintendent of Schools Instructional Council, Committee for Flexible Instructional Organization, and the Florida Commission on Secondary Schools. Mayor Palmer served as a Mediator in Family Court for the 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and as a real estate salesperson. In keeping with an active lifestyle, in 1995 she received her Water Aerobics Certification and teaches a class in water aerobics.

Mayor Palmer's education credentials include the following:

- 1955 Sarasota High School - graduated
- 1958 University of Michigan - B.A. (Communications)
- 1964 University of Michigan - M.A. (Education)  
Manatee Jr. College - Post B.A. (Social Studies Certification courses)  
University of South Florida - Post M.A. (K-12 administration/Supervision Certification)
- 1979 Real Estate Licensure Course - Sarasota, FL
- 1995 Family Mediation Training - Tallahassee, FL
- 1995 Water Aerobics Certification - Sarasota, FL

She serves or has served on numerous community boards, including:

- Doctor's Hospital Board of Directors
- Tourist Development Council
- Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Sarasota High School New Life Initiative Steering Committee
- Sarasota Chamber of Commerce Leadership Program
- Past President and member of Sarasota Keys Rotary Club
- Board of Trustees of Hospice of Southwest Florida

Sarasota is well known as an arts and cultural community, and Mayor Palmer has worked to keep that aspect of Sarasota alive. She has served on the Asolo Theater Festival Association, the Ringling Museum Members Council, the Community Goals Council – Performing Arts Committee, and the Symphony Women's Association.

Mayor Palmer has also participated in the cultural and performing arts programs in the City - starting as a performer in high school for the Sarasota High School Sailor Circus, for which she received national recognition; a performer at Sarasota Players Theatre; a musician playing the French horn in the Florida West Coast Symphony Orchestra; a choreographer for the Sarasota Players Theater and the Sarasota High School Drama Department; a stage director for Miss Sarasota preliminary to Miss America Pageant and Miss Florida Pageant, and a judge for the Miss Florida preliminary pageants throughout Florida.

### **Service to the City of Sarasota**

During Mayor Palmer's terms on the Planning Board and the City Commission, she was involved in establishing Sarasota's Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) and other important growth and development matters in the City.

The City experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, and she has worked on bringing to fruition development projects such as: the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, revitalization of the Main Street downtown area, the Main Street Plaza (movie theaters that bring hundreds of people into downtown nightly), and the Payne Park recreation area which includes a long-awaited skateboard park downtown.

Mayor Palmer was also involved in a complete revision of the City's Zoning Code and the creation of a Downtown Master Plan, a Parks Master Plan, a Cultural Center Plan, a "Walk to Downtown" neighborhood project, and initiation of a Neighborhood Department, all of which have resulted in an enormous interest in development in the City. As a result of this work, living in the downtown area is desirable once again, and numerous projects are underway and planned for residences in the downtown and cultural areas of the City, including plans for a Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Other notable accomplishments are as follows:

- 1) Realizing the importance of engaging the youth of the community, she was instrumental in establishing the City's first Youth Advisory Board and initiated the County's Students Taking an Active Role (STAR) program in the City, whereby students are appointed by the City Commission to sit on City Advisory Boards.
- 2) Took a lead role in successfully lobbying to secure State funding for upgrading the City's Ed Smith Stadium to keep professional baseball and spring training in the community and the State.
- 3) Traveled abroad to visit Sarasota Sister Cities in Russia and China (at her own expense) to develop friendships and economic connections that will be advantageous to all parties.
- 4) Founded the Keep Sarasota Beautiful program and the Florida Jaycee Auxiliary.

Mayor Palmer is part of a City Commission that is proactive, and who addressed discrimination by adopting an ordinance which prohibits discrimination in the City of Sarasota on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or veteran status in areas of housing, employment and public accommodations. This ordinance will help to afford a better life for those living in the City by providing a means to address discrimination through a City Commission-appointed Human Relations Board.

In addition, she has served on the Charter Review Committee, Economic Development Committee, and the City's Police Officers', Firefighters' and General Employees' Pension Boards.

During Mayor Palmer's time in public service, her efforts, in conjunction with many others, have earned the City of Sarasota the following recognitions:

- Number 1 Place in Florida for Business and Careers – #44 nationwide: Forbes Magazine
- Best place to visit and live - AARP Magazine 2003
- Top 8 Best Places to Retire - CNN/Money Magazine 2002
- Top 20 Best Places to Work & Live - Employment Review 2001
- Best Small City of the Year - CNN/Money Magazine 2000
- 8<sup>th</sup> Best Medium-sized City in the South for Small Business – Entrepreneur Magazine
- Expansion Magazine chose Sarasota-Bradenton its only Five-star community in Florida

Not many cities can boast of such accolades from so many different sources. It is clear that the dedicated work and efforts by Mayor Palmer and many others, who are devoted to making Sarasota a great place to live, have not gone unnoticed.

### **Service to the Manasota League of Cities**

Upon first being elected as a City Commissioner, Mayor Palmer became active in the Sarasota County League of Cities and was elected Chairman in 1991. Recognizing an opportunity to gain strength in lobbying, she led a successful effort of combining the Manatee and Sarasota League of Cities – thus co-founding the Manasota League of Cities (MSLC), consisting of municipalities in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. She was appointed to the MSLC as the City of Sarasota representative when she was re-elected to the City Commission in 2001, and served as President from September 2001 until September 2003.

Recognizing her enthusiasm and the effectiveness of her lobbying efforts, the 2003 incoming President of the MSLC, Mayor Wayne Poston, appointed her to a newly created position of Legislative Liaison, a position to which she has been reappointed each year by MSLC Presidents.

Mayor Palmer was instrumental in establishing a communication system by group e-mail to keep MSLC members abreast of issues that require immediate attention. Further, she developed a model lobbying program that was recognized by the Florida League of Cities (FLC). The MSLC lobbying program was the subject of an article in an issue of Quality Cities magazine. The MSLC has been recognized for its lobbying efforts several times at the FLC Annual Conference. Through exceptional leadership, and the ability to unify efforts and build participation, she revitalized the lobbying efforts of the MSLC, making it well known to the local legislative delegation.

### **Service to the Florida League of Cities**

Mayor Palmer has worked closely with the Florida League of Cities throughout her years in City government as follows:

- Intergovernmental Relations Committee - Chair
- Advocacy Committee
- FLC Board of Directors, District 10 – 2005-2007
- Board Liaison to the Municipal Services Delivery Council
- Candidate for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the FLC - 2007

Always a home rule advocate, in the early 1990s she led the local initiative, on behalf of the FLC, that resulted in the passage of Constitutional Amendment No. 3, which limited unfunded mandates by the Legislature.

In 2005 Mayor Palmer was recommended by the FLC for a gubernatorial appointment, and was appointed by Governor Jeb Bush to the Legislative Committee on Inter-Governmental Relations (LCIR).

Once appointed to the LCIR, she immediately began to fight for funding for red tide research and for regulations on fertilizer usage because of the possible relationship between fertilizers and the growth of red tide. These efforts were successful in that additional governmental funds were allocated for red tide research. She also began a campaign of obtaining letters and resolutions addressed to legislators from local agencies, hospitals, businesses and organizations in support of allocating additional funds from the William C. Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund to affordable housing programs in the budget for 2006-07. The support from the community was overwhelming. The fight for dollars for affordable housing for Florida communities continues to this day.

Mayor Palmer is an active lobbyist, traveling to Tallahassee each session to meet with legislators and working at FLC offices at the request of its legislative team. Desiring to become even more active in support of municipalities, she launched a campaign for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Florida League of Cities in 2007 wherein preservation of home rule authority of local governments was her number one priority.

### **Recognitions**

Mayor Palmer has received many awards throughout the years, and ones that are particularly special to her include those from the Sarasota County Committee of 100 for her outstanding leadership and commitment to the future of Sarasota; an award of appreciation for her continuing contribution to the Black Culture Heritage and Achievement from the Heritage Foundation; and recognition for her work with Hospice of Southwest Florida.

In summary, an editorial from the Sarasota Herald Tribune Venice AM dated November 26, 1990, had the following to say about her public service career, which is as true today as it was then:

“...respect her forthrightness opinions, integrity and sincerity. No hint of scandal or impropriety ever has tainted her service or administration, and her constituents have always benefited from her sincere interest in their concerns. These are not inconsequential qualities and values, for in this era or eroding public confidence in government and politicians, a leader who consistently builds constituents’ trust is one to be applauded, honored and valued...”

Mayor Palmer’s career in public service and volunteerism has been extraordinary, and it is clear that she has been involved in local government for 35 years in every aspect, and continues to be an active and positive force. She has been recognized by one member of the FLC legislative team as a “tireless and zealous advocate for municipal home rule.”

The E. Harris Drew Municipal Official Lifetime Achievement Award would serve to recognize Mayor Palmer’s outstanding achievements and encourage others to follow her lead and devote their lives to public service for the betterment of our communities.