

## **Honoring Public Employees**

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Dedicated workers provide invaluable services

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, our thoughts will go to those in public service who gave their lives that day.

It also is worth pausing to consider the contributions made by those who are involved in our local public services. As one with substantial experience in public administration and management, I would like to offer a perspective on the topic.

First, we should always attempt to encourage and support the individuals who comprise our public service workforce. Those in public safety are perhaps the most recognizable.

Others range from teachers and hospital workers to those in parks and recreation, in streets and in utilities. They include the individuals who document the revenues and expenditures, who inspect buildings and who undertake planning and decision making for public programs.

Secondly, we can recognize that public service is an honorable cause. It is respectable employment, providing essential services and products.

Most of the 800-plus full-time employees at the city of Melbourne are career individuals. Slightly more than half have already served the public for more than 20 years. The vast majority of their work requires specialized training and expertise, and they must be available 24/7. The community also benefits from the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and dozens of part-time employees.

Thirdly, unlike most work, public service is undertaken within full view. It is subject to scrutiny by regulatory agencies of the state and federal governments as well as the courts, along with other reviews such as internal evaluations and external audits.

Most decisions and services are subject to the wishes of citizens, reflecting their unique perspectives as residents, property owners, parents, business owners and taxpayers.

Scrutiny by the press also is a constant, as Florida is the most transparent state in the country with respect to government meetings and records through its Sunshine Law.

Fourth, public-service employees must deal with social and financial circumstances that seem to be changing faster than most of us can easily comprehend. Yet, public services tend to change slowly.

These realities can result in conflict, and even the efforts to evolve services can create unanticipated problems. All citizens can participate in this process by offering support as well as guidance.

Public employees are honorable, energetic, creative and dedicated. We should applaud their service and try to support them with competitive pay and benefits, and recognize exemplary service. These are people who willingly serve the public day in and day out, sometimes through difficult and challenging circumstances.

As you think about the 9/11 tragedy, please also consider how you regard those in public service, whether it is the public servant who lives down the block, the person next to you in church, a family member, or someone you encounter when you are out and about.

Regarding those people with kindness has no out-of-pocket cost to you, and can offer benefits to them that are priceless.

*Schluckebier is city manager of Melbourne. This article was reprinted with permission from FloridaToday newspaper.*