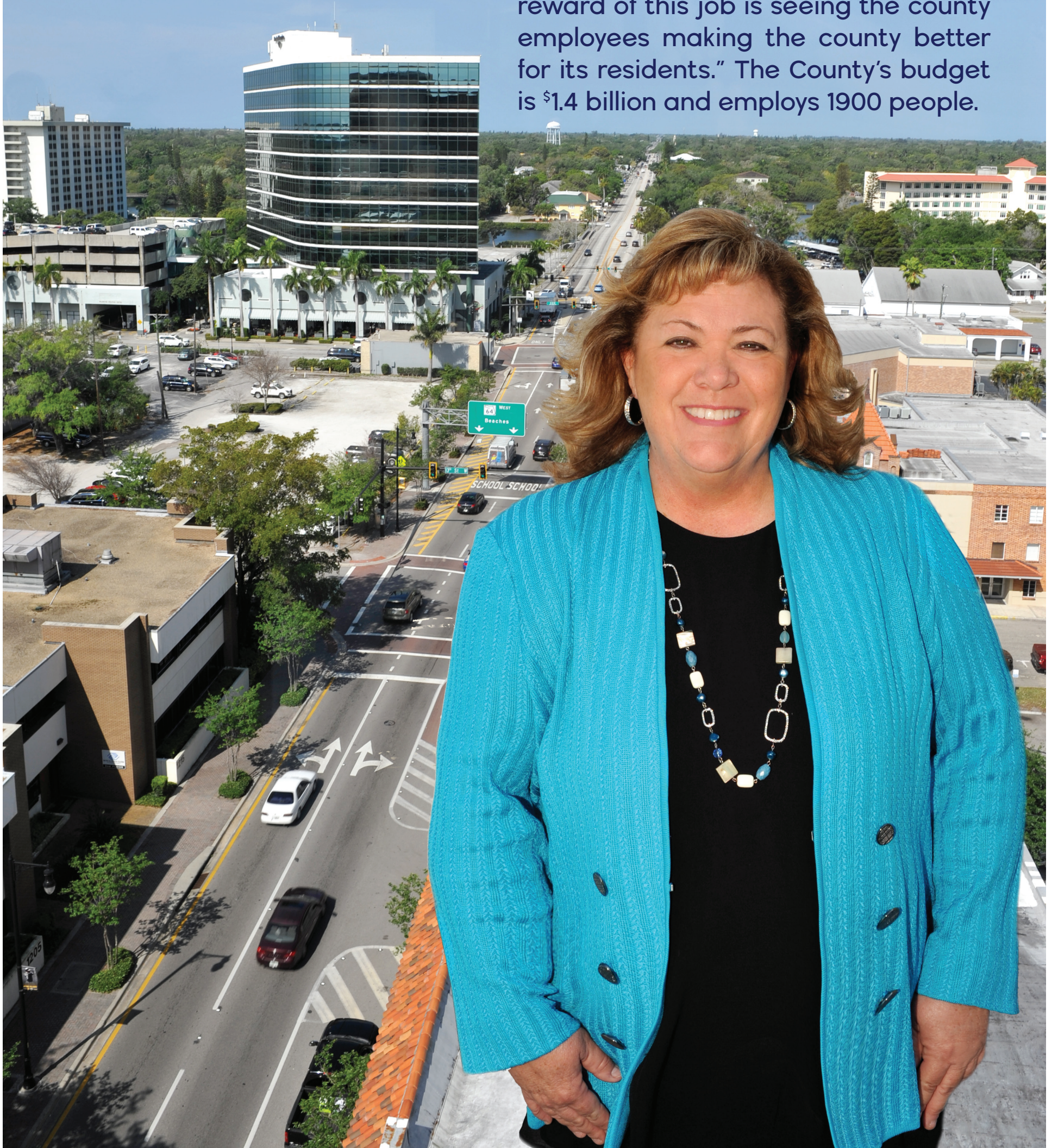


# Cheri Coryea

New Manatee County  
Administrator

After building relationships in Manatee County government for the past 28 years, Cheri was appointed acting County Administrator by the Board of County Commissioners on March 1. "Over the years, I've found that I'm a worker bee," she says. "I lead, but I don't expect the department heads to lead as I would. I lead them with a team approach and let them take the leadership of projects that instills pride in what they do. The reward of this job is seeing the county employees making the county better for its residents." The County's budget is \$1.4 billion and employs 1900 people.







fter building relationships in Manatee County government for the past 28 years, Cheri Coryea was appointed as acting County Administrator by the Board of County Commissioners on March 1. (The word “acting” gives the Commission up to one year to change her title.) With a sincere commitment to the people of Manatee County, Cheri assures that services relating to health, welfare, and safety meet the needs of the 388,000 residents. Coordinating these services, developing the County-wide budget, and assisting constitutional officers with their budgets are her major responsibilities.

Bradenton is the County seat and the largest municipality in Manatee County along with the City of Anna Maria, Bradenton Beach, Holmes Beach, the Town of Longboat Key, and Palmetto. The county is 734 square miles with 33 parks, 12 preserves, miles of beaches, three dog parks, nine boat ramps, and six libraries. The County’s 1,900 employees work in 12 departments including building and development services, financial management, human resources, neighborhood services, information technology, parks and natural resources, convention and visitor bureau, property management, public safety, public works, redevelopment and economic opportunity, and utilities. The County’s budget is \$1.4 billion and the capital improvement budget is \$1.4 billion.

Cheri says, “My short-term goal is to expand communication, especially on growth and transportation projects, with my office, the seven County Commissioners, and the community. The number of current and planned infrastructure projects requires updating on the status of each so the Commissioners and staff have answers when residents ask questions. One of the most important capital projects is the 44th Avenue connector west to Lakewood Ranch which requires coordination with Florida Department of Transportation and the communities of Sarasota, Longboat Key, and Palmetto.”

Another goal is innovation and technology for the better use of time and funds with automating some older manual procedures and making processes more user-friendly such as ADA-compliant website. A third goal is the alignment of revenue sources since most projects include planning, public input, bids, construction, opening, and maintenance of the facility. Regarding growth, the issues surrounding it, and developers, Cheri says every project has so many intricate parts that must fit appropriately and every project has an impact study.

“Over the years, I have found that I am a worker bee,” says Cheri. “I lead, but I don’t expect the department heads to lead as I would. I lead them with a team approach and let them take the leadership of projects that instills pride in what they do. The people I work with are the best. We roll up our sleeves and get dirty. I have the ability to observe people on their projects and know when things are impacting them. The reward of this job is seeing the county employees making the county better for its residents.”

“For years, Cheri Coryea has been an essential player in creating the kind of community that makes people proud to live and work in Manatee County. Her leadership has inspired professionals from every sector—government, business, nonprofit, and media—to be more strategic, more committed, and more innovative in their work,” says Susie Bowie, Executive Director of the Manatee Community Foundation. “A careful listener who is

adept at planting seeds where opportunities can thrive, Cheri knows how to get the right people to the table and to bring out their best. Her style of servant leadership is also marked by an innate ability to see the big picture and get things done—critical when timely results matter so much. On a personal level, like so many, I appreciate Cheri’s compassionate friendship, sense of humor, and dedication to always doing what is right. Somehow, despite the enormous pressures in her role, she always finds the time.”

The county is employing a “back to the future” process with timeline from 1990 to 2025 addressing growth in the northern and eastern parts of the county. The center of the county is now approximately east of Braden River near the Tropicana area while the projected center of the county will be just east of I-75 between Routes 64 and 70. The concept of visioning and planning ahead for services for the future where people are and will be living is foremost. Cheri says her predecessor Ed Hunzeker, who served as the county administrator for 12 years until his recent retirement, taught her astute planning for the larger issues such as landfill life, utilities, EMS, and other county services.

From her ninth floor office in downtown Bradenton, Cheri has a 180 degree view of commercial and residential buildings from one wall of windows and a beautiful water view from the other wall of windows. As she looks out the windows she says she prioritizes projects with respect to the use of people’s tax money. While it is frustrating at times to keep projects moving, she has meetings daily to keep the information flowing to appropriate County departments and outside partners. She says that the key to her success is the relationships she built over 28 years and a history of trust in decision-making with the County employees.

Cheri was the interim Deputy County Administrator and for the past two years she was the interim County Administrator and the 10-year Director of the Neighborhood Services Department with a budget of \$44 million. In 1991, she established the Children’s Services Fund and provided leadership to the Economic Development Incentive Program, health care for the medically needy, Children’s Services Tax, the Rubonia Community center renovations, the Norma Lloyd Park Development, and others.

Born and raised in Shelbyville, Indiana, Cheri spent a couple years in Huntsville, Alabama, before moving to Bradenton in 1989. Her husband Rick Slawson is a consultant, daughter Neely is a wedding caterer in Indiana, and daughter Shea works for a Bradenton financial advising company. Her leisure time is spent with the family horse, dogs, gardening, and bird watching. A piece of trivia: she was an extra in the movie “Hoosiers.”

Cheri learned as a youngster about accountability. Her father traveled for his work. If she did something wrong while he was away, her mother, a great influencer who was loved by all, told him about it when he returned. What he said remains with her: think about what you did wrong. Cheri says she still does a lot of thinking.

About lessons from her professional work, Cheri says, “I take responsibility for decisions and stand by them. I am very proud of my relationships with strong women in the community. I have a special working relationship with them. And I can always call on them for help.”

STORY: Carol Darling

IMAGES: Evelyn England