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Executive Director candidates narrowed to seven

A screening committee of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) today reviewed 39 applications for the position of executive director and narrowed down the list to seven candidates. They are (in alphabetical order): Joseph Centorino, Esther Jacobo, Richard Lober, Val Screen, David Weinstein, Erica Wright and David Young. The list will be further narrowed after telephone interviews next month and the final candidate will be selected during a future meeting of the full Ethics Commission.

During regular business this morning, the Ethics Commission dismissed a complaint that Miami Beach City Manager Jorge Gonzalez violated the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics ordinance by failing to report travel expenses for his wife that were paid by the city. The couple has been part of a delegation that has visited Art Basel Switzerland every June since the international art show began holding an exhibition in Miami Beach in 2002. The Florida State Ethics Commission, which has a different standard, previously issued an opinion that a companion's airfare must be reported as a gift, but Gonzalez failed to do so for trips taken with his wife in 2009 and 2010. Since being alerted to the Ethics Complaint (**C 11-14**), Gonzalez submitted the appropriate gift disclosure forms and the Ethics Commission decided to issue a general Letter of Instruction to all Miami Beach officials about gift disclosure requirements in this context.

Following their dismissal of the complaint (**C 09-11**) against South Miami City Commissioner Valerie Newman last month, Ethics Commissioners today issued a Letter of Instruction to the politician. The charges, which originated in 2009 and were based on South Miami's now-repealed Code of Conduct, accused Newman of bullying people inside and outside of city government. Even though the COE determined that proceeding with the case would not be a prudent use of resources, the Letter states that "Rude, boorish and tyrannical behavior by elected officials, while perhaps not actionable under an ethics code, is inexcusable nevertheless." The Ethics Commission also states that "ethical behavior is not simply the doing what is right, but doing it the right way," and hopes the Letter "impresses upon Commissioner Newman and all elected officials that they must be mindful that their behavior be at all times proper, honest, respectful, and professional..."

A County Parks employee has settled a complaint (**C 11-07**) that she misrepresented the hours she worked and used sick leave on days she was at an outside job. Carol Bernier, who is a Public Facilities Manager at Zoo Miami, also held a part time position at Baptist Health South Florida. COE investigators confirmed several dates during 2009 when the hours she worked at the hospital directly conflicted with the time she reported at her County job and made false claims for sick leave on two different days she worked at Baptist. As part of the agreement, Bernier will be issued a Public Reprimand. In addition, the Parks Department suspended her for 20 days and ordered her to resign from her second job.

The Ethics Commission found No Probable Cause to an allegation that a licensed roofer, Gregory Pierce, had a conflict of interest by serving as a member of the Miami-Dade County Board of Rules and Appeals while also being retained as an expert witness by several plaintiffs in civil litigation against a roofing company and utility. The investigation of the complaint (**C 11-13**) determined that Pierce did not participate in any board action relating to the roofing company and, therefore, had no conflict, and so the complaint was dismissed.

The Ethics Commission was created in 1996 as an independent agency with advisory and quasi-judicial powers. It is composed of five members, serving staggered terms of four years each. Through a program of education, outreach and enforcement, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

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