

Tampa Bay Times

WINNER OF 12 PULITZER PRIZES

Henderson: Belden's office runs smoothly even as he endures pain from surgeries

By Joe Henderson, Special to the Times

Wednesday, March 8, 2017 11:16am

Hillsborough County Tax Collector Doug Belden is a physical mess and he doesn't try to pretend otherwise. It's the result of four major operations, including three on his spine.

"I wake up in pain. I go all day in pain. And I go to sleep in pain," he said. "But I also know there are people in much worse shape than I am."

I mention this for two reasons.

First, while all you have to do is look at Belden to realize he's not kidding about the pain, don't get any ideas that he plans to hang it up. Frankly, one of the first things I thought of when we had lunch recently at one of his favorite hole-in-the-wall joints in the Channel District was how long can this guy go on.

His quick answer: "I have no intention of quitting."

To emphasize that point, he regularly endures tough physical therapy sessions. That's not easy on a surgery-ravaged 62-year-old body, but he keeps coming back for more.

That's also the approach he takes to work, and voters must like him because he keeps getting re-elected. He has held the job of tax collector since 1998 and his latest term won't expire until 2021. He will be 66 by then, which brings us to the second reason for bringing this up — yes, Belden could well be looking to do something else at that point.



"I would have an interest in doing maybe some consulting or something like that," he said. "Maybe I'd want to do something as an entrepreneur, too."

Mayor? That job will be open in a couple of years.

"I would have no interest in running for mayor," he said. "But there are a lot of things that intrigue me going forward and I might be looking in that direction. The first thing I would make sure of, though, is that I left this office in good shape."

Belden's longevity as the leader of a major Hillsborough public office is noteworthy because he is a Republican. There are, after all, about 50,000 more registered Democrats in the county than Republicans, which helps explain why Sheriff David Gee is the only GOP member besides Belden to lead an elected county department.

It says a lot that people don't think party affiliation when they think of Belden. That label doesn't seem to matter much to him, either. He counts many prominent local Democrats among his friends. He does like Donald Trump, but no one is perfect.

"Well, my grandfather always told me to get along with everyone," he said. "I take pride in the fact that I get along as well with Democrats as I do Republicans."

More importantly, the tax collector's office has run smoothly on his watch and he has avoided any semblance of a scandal. Voters tend to reward that by continuing to keep the person in charge. Belden rewards that trust by stressing customer service. He has won several industry awards in that area.

All I can go by is the fact that when I need to take care of something at the tax office, it is handled smoothly. My phone also hasn't been melting with people calling to complain about the way they have been treated there, so there is that.

Maybe he doesn't move as fast as he once did, but that's true about most of us. It doesn't stop this genuinely affable, self-professed "people person" (his words) from doing his job and making the rounds, though. He likes to be involved.

Whatever he decides to do going forward, staying involved will be a big part of the plan.

Henderson: Belden's office runs smoothly even as he endures pain from surgeries 03/08/17
Photo reprints | Article reprints

© 2017 Tampa Bay Times

0 Tweet 0



Commenting Guidelines



Abuse Policy

SPONSORED CONTENT



Need a Family Car Fast? These Are the 10 Best Under \$15,000

Kelley Blue Book



Tiger Woods' Daughter Was a Cute Kid, But What She Looks Like Now is Incredible

Greeningz



Enter Name, Wait 7 Seconds, Brace Yourself

TruthFinder



American Residents Born Between 1936 and 1966 Wish They Knew This Earlier

EverQuote



Best-Kept Secrets of Professional Painters

The Family Handyman



Vets could receive up to \$42k with these VA benefits

LendingTree

Recommended by