

*Note: Greg Kisela was selected City Manager of the Year in 2008 by the Florida League of Cities.*

## **Destin Log**

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### **After five years, Greg Kisela reflects on Destin**

By Fraser Sherman,

Five years ago, Greg Kisela took a \$45,000 pay cut to move to Destin.

“We visited Destin two years ago and fell in love with the place,” Kisela told The Log in 2003. “When this came up, my wife and I said ‘let’s go for it’ ... Even though there’s a salary cut, with the size of the city budget and the number of people, that’s the appropriate range.”

Kisela’s salary went from \$140,000 as Assistant City Manager at Fort Lauderdale to \$95,000 in Destin, and has risen since 2003 to \$103,000. He’s survived one City Council motion to fire him; applied for one job in Tampa last year; and is now poised to pass the five-year mark, the average length of time a Florida city manager stays in one job, according to the International City/County Management Association.

To mark the anniversary, The Log asked Kisela to look back over his tenure, and look at the future:

**•After five years experience here, what do you see as the biggest difference in city government from Fort Lauderdale?**

After five years of experience here, I am actually surprised by the similarities that exist both in Destin and Fort Lauderdale. While Destin is much smaller, the challenges and issues facing both organizations are growth-management concerns, looking for innovative traffic solutions, vying for affordable housing and in general, making the communities a better place to live.

**•What would you say is your biggest accomplishment in your tenure at City Hall so far?**

The biggest accomplishment of my tenure in Destin so far is getting everybody working toward a common direction. This does not mean that everyone is completely satisfied with the pace or completely embraces a project. Everything we are doing is aligned to our three strategic goals of enhanced quality of life, preservation of heritage and environment and organizational excellence.

**•What challenges or problems from the first five years remain unresolved today?**

I believe the greatest unresolved challenge the city faces is beach restoration. While we have a plan in place, the remainder of Destin’s beaches need to be restored to provide storm protection.

**•What are the three biggest challenges for the next five years?**

If by the year 2014 we have a roadway connector between Beach Drive and Benning Drive giving Destinians an alternate to Highway 98 from the-Mid Bay Bridge to the Marler Bridge; the Harbor 4 Redevelopment Plan is completed — that means the boardwalk, Mountain Drive,

parking on the north side of Harbor Boulevard and Royal Melvin Heritage Park — and the remainder of the Destin beaches have been restored then I would be very satisfied.

**•After Tampa Bay turned you down, you said you were happy to stay in Destin — what is the appeal of the city for you?**

Destin has really become home to my wife Lucy and I. The overall quality of life in Destin is great. In addition, the friendships and relationships that we have developed over the last five years make Destin special to us.

**•What do you get the most criticism for from the public?**

The most criticism I receive from the public is about the frustration of balancing individual property rights with their neighbors' or the community's expectations.

**•If you had the authority and the funding to carry out one major project of your choice in Destin, what would it be?**

The one major project I would chose to carry out in Destin is the Harbor Redevelopment Plan. It is critically needed to allow Destin to compete with its neighbors to the east and west. This consists of the boardwalk along the harbor connecting the Emerald Grande to the Destin Yacht Club; Royal Melvin Heritage Park, offering a gateway to the harbor: Mountain Drive, with renovated multi-use pathways, bike paths and storm drains; and last but not least, parking facilities on the north side of Harbor Boulevard to accommodate the thousands of visitors who will frequent the harbor for its many things to see and do.

**•What is the best thing about your job?**

The best thing I like about my job is working with community members, the policy makers and city staff who all deeply care about making Destin a better place to live.

**•What changes in the city over the past five years stand out?**

The biggest changes in the city during the past five years have been the completion of the beach restoration project Phase I; finishing the Town Center Roadway improvements (Main Street, Legion Drive and Airport Road); and the quality-improvement program staff has initiated to enhance internal and external customer satisfaction. Despite several hurricane seasons that blew us temporarily off course, our progress has been very satisfying. Also our progress can be attributed to the continuity of council leadership over three municipal election periods during my tenure.

**• So was it worth the pay cut?**

Absolutely. We have never for one second had any regrets.