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Clay selects firm to find new manager

The position became vacant in the wake of the illegal dumping scandal.

By BRAD SCHMIDT, The Times-Union

GREEN COVE SPRINGS -- The Clay County Commission on Tuesday hired a search firm to help fill the county manager position that became vacant in the wake of an illegal dumping scandal.

Colin Baenziger & Associates, based in West Palm Beach, will begin a nationwide search to fill the position, which became open April 8 when Bob Wilson resigned. Rich O'Connell, the county's human resources director, has been acting county manager since Wilson's departure.

Commissioners unanimously selected **Baenziger** from a group of eight firms vying for the job. Baenziger's flat-rate fee for the search is \$18,000.

That cost will be in addition to the \$3,000 already spent by the county this spring when commissioners decided to advertise the open position. The county received more than 50 applications as a result of the advertisements, O'Connell said.

The decision to hire a firm came at the urging of Commissioner Harold Rutledge, who thought it would help bring legitimacy to the beleaguered county, which also saw Public Works Director Arthur Ivey resign this year.

"We think we have an extraordinary talent for finding the right person," **Baenziger** told commissioners during a 10-minute presentation.

During the past three years, **Baenziger & Associates** has placed 25 executives in similar positions throughout Florida, **Baenziger** said. Of those, three have left within two years.

Commission Chairman George Bush, who in May voted against seeking a search firm, acknowledged that **Baenziger's** services will be helpful.

"I do think there will be some value added ... over what we would have chosen," Bush said.

Baenziger told commissioners he would review the applications that have been received by the county in addition to conducting his own search.

"It doesn't matter if the county has issues," he said. "They'll put their hat in the ring."

Baenziger & Associates will provide the county with a list of about 10 candidates, at which point commissioners will whittle the list down before selecting finalists. The total process should take about 60 days.

Once the selection of **Baenziger** was clear, Bush asked O'Connell how it would sound to be out of his acting county manager role by mid-October.

O'Connell replied, "I love it."