Woman on a mission
Revenue specialist is rich in faith

She came to Volusia County from Columbus, Ohio, where she raised her daughter, welcomed two granddaughters and shoveled too much snow. A visitor to Volusia County during several Bike Weeks, Marsh Fenstermaker decided to make Daytona Beach her home in 2004 after recovering from a life-threatening infection that almost took her leg. Upon recovery, she decided she needed a life change.

Fenstermaker, now a Volusia County revenue specialist, moved to Florida soon thereafter with three goals in mind: to get a motorcycle license, become a volunteer guardian ad litem and get involved in church.

Within a year, she had accomplished all three. She helps abused and neglected children through Florida's guardian ad litem program, is a church elder and mission team member at the First Presbyterian Church in New Smyrna Beach, and she bought a Harley (which she has since sold to fund mission trips).

Opportunities to share her faith through mission work have been her most treasured gift since she began anew, she said.

Fenstermaker's first taste of mission work was in 2005 when she attended a 12-day mission to Londrina, Brazil, with a Presbyterian church group from Tennessee. She stayed with a young couple and their son while she worked in a preschool, helped to paint the family's church, and visited and worshipped at a primitive Indian village. (See Mission page 8)
We begin 2010 with cautious optimism. Even though 2009 was a difficult year for many of our citizens, we still have much of which we can be proud. During these tough times, I believe the leadership and stability of county government became even more evident as public and private entities struggle with the current financial environment.

As I have noted previously in this employee column, early on we recognized the rough financial seas we are in. As a result, we started steering this organization toward change and fiscal austerity earlier than many other local governments. Because of this foresight, we turned our ship gradually, rather than having to make a dramatic turn.

As you all know, this organization is considerably leaner today than it was when I arrived as county manager. Thanks to the willingness of this organization – from top to bottom – to embrace change and deal with current realities, we have been able to downsize without as much pain as is being felt by other governments in Florida.

While I am proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish by working together, I must say that I, and our financial leadership, are very concerned about what lies ahead. The fiscal problems of state government are very real and very severe. The governor and legislature face a daunting task as they deal with a revenue shortfall in the billions of dollars.

Meanwhile, the flailing economy has caused our property values to fall considerably. The net effect of this to county government is that the base upon which we levy property taxes has declined. This leaves our County Council in the position of having to reduce budgets or raise rates to keep revenues constant.

In anticipation of another decline in our tax base this year, we are going through a process to identify budget cuts – service by service. We won’t know until mid-summer how much our tax base will drop, but we’re planning for 15 percent. This could mean a cut to our general fund in the range of $17 million, depending on a number of things we may do.

All county employees should recognize it has been no small feat to avoid layoffs. I cannot stress enough how much work it took to accomplish this. Although we were not able to award a salary increase this year, we have been able to retain jobs and benefits. Our goal remains to avoid layoffs. Salary savings are being achieved throughout the organization by not filling vacancies.

Each meeting of the County Council throughout the year will address possible budget reductions. We’re not waiting to the year-end budget hearings to continue our budget course corrections.

As you know all too well from the citizens you deal with every day, these are trying times for the public we serve. When they come through our doors, our citizen customers may be dealing with the loss of a job, a mortgage foreclosure, or a failed business. We must be mindful these times require the utmost patience and understanding. An unemployed citizen is likely to have zero tolerance for an employed public worker who isn’t performing at his or her best.

Now is the time to shine. Now is the time to stay focused. Now is the time for collective problem solving. I encourage you to be informed and share your thoughts on how we can best weather the difficult challenges that lie ahead. — Jim Dinneen, county manager
Celebrate our diversity at Feb. 26 luncheon

The county’s 12th annual diversity luncheon, “Celebrating the Dimensions of Diversity: Past, Present and Beyond,” will be from 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 26, in the first-floor training rooms of the Thomas C. Kelly Administration Center. All county employees are welcome to attend, volunteer, participate and/or visit the rotunda displays that will begin at 10 a.m.

Each year, the organizers of the diversity luncheon encourage employees to learn about the many diverse cultures represented in county government and appreciate our differences.

The free event will feature educational displays from county staff and community organizations, entertainment, and cultural dishes. Employees may bring their favorite cultural dish and or dessert to share, plus its history and recipe. Employees also may wear cultural/heritage attire, though it is not required for attendance.

If you have a unique hobby in which you create, design or craft interesting gadgets, trinkets, artwork, etc., please consider donating them as door prizes!

This diversity luncheon is sponsored by the Personnel Division and the Cultural Diversity Luncheon Committee. Ocean Center Director Don Poor will serve as master of ceremonies.

To donate cultural dishes or desserts, please contact Ruth Osteen, Risk Management, at 736-5963 ext. 2441, or Shelley Szafraniec, Community Information, at 822-5062, ext. 2871. To donate door prizes, please contact Chandra Gordon, Personnel, at 736-5951, ext. 2607. To participate as a vendor or set up a table display in the rotunda, please contact Shirley Ellison, University of Florida/Volusia County Extension, at 822-5778. To volunteer for the Feb. 26 event, please contact Tammy W. King, Personnel, at 736-5951 ext.

Are you tired of starting New Year’s resolutions and figuring out how to keep them? When it comes to health, nutrition and fitness, you may need a few tips to keep you going for 2010.

The most powerful thing you can do to boost your resolutions is to set goals. The most successful athletes and business people know the power of setting goals and focus. Why not apply this incredible knowledge to your health? Let’s create a game plan.

First, have a complete physical examination with your primary care physician and get the scoop on your health. Work with your doctor. Second, know your numbers for cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, blood sugar and your BMI. Next, write down specifically what you want in your goals. When you write the goals, you will be more successful throughout the process. Then, make sure your goals are measurable and help you to move forward.

Are your goals set and achievable? Make small steps to reach attainable ones. For example, if you want to walk a mile, start with 15 minutes for the first week. Add another five minutes the second week, and so on. Can you achieve your goals realistically with good resources? These goals should be related to other goals in your life. Example: I am walking and eating right to reduce my blood pressure and cholesterol.

You want to achieve your goal in a set time. Link your goal to a time frame so you can plan to complete it. Post your goals where you can see them every day. It takes 21 days to make a habit and six months for it to become part of your daily life. Reward yourself for accomplishments, but not with food. For example, give yourself a massage. Keep a journal to see the progress and help you stay on track. Don’t forget to ask for assistance – it could improve your chance of meeting your goals.

You owe it to yourself and your well-being to take care of your body. Don’t just make a decision, take action! — Celene Cone, Wellness Coordinator

SERVING UP DIVERSITY – Volusia County Council members and other county leaders are ready to dish out another tasty luncheon Feb. 26 at the county’s annual diversity celebration.
Five firefighters from Volusia County Fire Services pushed, pulled, ran and hoisted their way to first place at a national competition in Texas recently. Bassel Ibrahim, Chris McNary, Brett Pittman, Alex Klepper and Dave Kuypers (pictured right) began their quest for the championship last April. As Team Daytona Harley-Davidson, they practiced daily for the grueling competition that ESPN has dubbed the toughest two minutes in sports.

According to Ibrahim, the Firefighter Combat Challenge is an extreme event that pushes even the best athletes to their limit. Five stations are approached in three elements – individual/team, relay and tandem. Competitors wear about 60 pounds of gear while completing a series of tasks.

Competitors begin with an ascent of a 45-foot tower while carrying a 45-pound hose pack. At the top of the tower, they drop the hose pack and hoist another 45-pound hose from the ground. Competitors next must sprint down the tower stairs making sure they hit every step before running over to pick up a mallet and drive a 175-pound beam five feet. The final task is to drag a 175-pound mannequin backward 100 feet to cross the finish line.

Volusia County formed its first team in 2000, but this was this team's second year of competition.

"We are pretty much new team members and everyone broke their personal best this year," Ibrahim said.

Competing against more than 200 competitors from fire agencies, military installations, and teams from Canada and New Zealand, the firefighters placed first against other fire agencies and fourth when factoring in the military teams, which, according to Ibrahim, always put up a good fight.

"Competing in the final relay, which was a single elimination tournament, we were paired against Sam's Squad, Department of Defense team," he said. "This team was last year's world champion and we were able to best them with a one-minute, 17-second run – the best run time in the nine years Volusia County has had a team."

According to Ibrahim, this competition does more than encourage camaraderie among the firefighters. It hones and sharpens their skills. "It brings a lot to our daily job," he said. "What we do in the competition are tasks we may need to do on any fire scene on any given day." — Shelley Szafraniec, Community Information

RIDING THE HIGH OF GIVING TO KIDS – The county’s Corrections Division fixed and donated 60 bikes for Christmas in a bike-refurbishing project. The donation was part of the 2009 “Operation Santa” project of the Sorosis Club of Orange City. Corrections staff also collected and donated food, toys, clothes, baby items, and $1,100 to the club. The collection was spearheaded by the Division’s Heart and Hands Committee. Corrections Recreation Supervisor James Bailey, right, supervised the inmate crew that refurbished the bikes.
Volusia County wins Drive $marter Challenge

Fifty counties from 23 states participated in one or both of NACo's green county competitions. Through the Change the World, Start with ENERGY STAR Campaign, 4,560 county employees and residents throughout the country pledged to replace 46,050 light bulbs in their homes with ENERGY STAR qualified compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). For the Drive $marter Challenge, 3,636 county employees and residents nationwide took the challenge to improve fuel mileage and reduce carbon emissions.

The campaign winners each will receive a $5,000 grant, courtesy of Wal-Mart. The winners of the Drive $marter Challenge each will receive a $3,000 grant, courtesy of AutoZone.

Volusia County won the large county category of the Drive $marter Challenge with .20 percent (or 889 people) of the population taking the pledge.

"We are thrilled to win and will put the grant to good use," said Ginger Adair, chair of the Green Volusia Committee. "Volusia County staff is working hard to go green." — Ginger Adair, Environmental Management

DESIGNING WOMAN – When she isn’t handling real estate transactions for the Volusia Forever program, Vicky Wise is cruising thrift shops and yard sales looking for unique glassware. She buys plates, bowls, vases, perfume bottles and Christmas ornaments, takes them home and starts arranging them. When she finds the perfect composition, she pulls out her silicone glue and finalizes her design. Wise sells her creations at the Famers Market in DeLand.

In the spotlight

Name: Vlad Opreanu
Birthplace: Bucharest, Romania
Job: Procurement Analyst, Purchasing and Contracts Division
Number of years with the County: almost two years
What you might not know: He was an F-16 avionics technician during his five-year tenure in the Air Force. He also worked on H-60 and C-130 aircraft. He is involved in the entertainment field and has produced several different types of music groups and worked on several independent movie scores. He’s also a motorcycle enthusiast and rides every chance he gets.
Family: He and his wife, Katerina, have a son, Alexzander, 2.
Laura Stiwinter and Toni Contarino, pictured above, recently were named Employees of the Year for the Animal Control Division. Congratulations for a job well done!

Rick Karl has been appointed Economic Development Department director of a newly organized department that includes Daytona Beach International Airport, Economic Development and the Coastal Division.

Jeaniene Jennings has been named Purchasing and Contracts Division director.

Dona DeMarsh has been named Community Assistance Division director.

Phil Ehlinger has been named Economic Development director.

Do you know a mover and shaker? Please contact Michelle Coats in Community Information at MCoats@co.volusia.fl.us with the details.

For more county event information, visit www.volusia.org and click on “News Releases” at the bottom of the homepage.

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Jan. 27 - Feb. 1  American Gull Conference (Marine Science Center)
Feb. 6   Lemonade Lecture – Pat High (DeBary Hall)
Feb. 20  Scrub Jay Festival (Lyonia Environmental Center)
Feb. 20  Lemonade Lecture – Joseph Marcial (DeBary Hall)
Feb. 23   Harlem Globetrotters (Ocean Center)
March 6  Artist of the Month Reception – Bill Moran (DeBary Hall)
March 6  Lemonade Lecture – Paul Lachelier (DeBary Hall)
March 17  Jeff Dunham's "Identity Crisis Tour" (Ocean Center)
March 18  Sea Turtle Lighting Extravaganza (Environmental Management)
March 20  Lemonade Lecture – Walter Johnson (DeBary Hall)
Ray Almodovar, a 26-year law enforcement veteran and graduate of the prestigious FBI National Academy, has been tapped to become the Sheriff's Office's newest captain.

Sheriff Ben Johnson formally promoted Almodovar, 49, during a recent ceremony. Also rising in the supervisory ranks were Lt. Paul Adkins and Sgt. Mike Hattaway. Sheriff Johnson told the crowd assembled at the Deputy Stephen Saboda Training Center in Daytona Beach that all three rose above strong competition to earn their new ranks. The vacancies were created after Capt. Mike Coffin recently left the Sheriff's Office to become the county's Public Protection Department director.

"I want to congratulate all three of you for a job well done," Sheriff Johnson told the trio in front of a large gathering of friends, family and co-workers. "Each of you has earned this."

A graduate of the 208th session of the FBI National Academy, Almodovar started with the Sheriff's Office in 1983. Along the way, he has excelled in assignments in road patrol, court services, crime suppression and investigations. After his promotion to lieutenant in 2003, Almodovar served as assistant commander in Deltona – the Sheriff's Office's most populous law enforcement district. Meanwhile, Almodovar has been preparing himself for his new assignment for several years, having worked as second-in-command of the Communications Section since May 2006. As Captain, Almodovar now heads communications, a $14.9-million operation that encompasses two dispatch centers, the county's E-911 system and 137 employees.

"You've worked hard for this and have done us a great job," Sheriff Johnson told Almodovar. "We look forward to many more years of service from you."

Following his promotion, Adkins was assigned to serve as assistant commander of communications. Adkins, 38, has been with the Sheriff's Office for 13 years and was named the agency's Deputy of the Year in 1997. He has served in patrol, narcotics investigations, court services and traffic. Adkins also serves on the Sheriff's Office's SWAT Team and supervised the agency's Deltona Street Crimes Unit before his promotion.

Sgt. Hattaway, 37, the agency's newest line-level supervisor, has been with the Sheriff's Office for seven years. He has served in road patrol and court services and also as a field training officer. He is undergoing inhouse training before being given his permanent assignment. — Gary Davidson, Sheriff’s Office
"Some of the depressed areas in Londrina were populated with drug dealers, alcoholics and prostitutes," said Fenstermaker. "The Presbyterian church asked the families there to let them have their preschool age children from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. so they could feed them, educate them and give them clothes. Soon after, the church built a huge facility in this area for the preschool."

Fenstermaker said the preschool, which is a permanent church outreach program, has changed lives. "The children have become role models to their parents," she said. "We went door to door to talk to people in different areas and also had a women's day ministry. There's no language barrier when God's work is being done."

She feels the impact of her mission work long after she returns home. "When you get back home, you realize it wasn't about you helping others; you were the one being helped, enriched and blessed," she said.

Other mission trips Fenstermaker has attended with teams from her church include trips to Gauthier, Miss. in 2007 to help victims of Hurricane Katrina, and Esteli, Nicaragua, in 2009, where she helped to build a house for a local family, participated in a vacation Bible school, and a one-day worship service in a local prison.

"I feel so enriched!" said Fenstermaker. "God has blessed me so that I'm able to go on missions and I have a job that allows me the time off. I can tell you there is definitely the presence of God when you are doing his work, and that is the joy I want to continue feeling."

She encourages others to explore how also they can help. "People don't have to go out of our country to help others," she said. "There is such a need even here in Central Florida. And, you don't have to commit all of your free time. An hour a month where there is a need gives you back so much more than you imagine."

— Pat Kuehn, Community Information