

## RUFF: Mayor cites his economic development expertise

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Mount Zion, where there is considerable commercial and residential development. "That's one reason this job seemed to be a natural fit," Ruff said, noting that his first priority will be to get to know the village staff and the issues they believe need attention.

Ruff, who got his degree in finance at the University of Illinois, said he was also drawn to Mount Zion because it was relatively close to home.

While Ruff is eager to take on the challenges of Mount Zion, he was not eager to leave Paris. He said that there was a massive turnover on the city council after the last election — including the mayor. He said the council decided to hire a new city administrator and launched a search.

Ruff was invited to apply, and he did, but he didn't get the job. Elizabeth Patten, the deputy clerk and bookkeeper in Paris, worked with Ruff throughout his time there.

"There was nothing wrong with his work," she said. "It was just upsetting to most everyone when he left."

"I think (Mount Zion) is going to be very fortunate to have him."

Mount Zion Mayor Robert Flider said Ruff

was one of the more than 20 applicants who applied for the job in August and September when the board first began an effort to replace the departing Jamie Bowden, who left on Sept. 17 to accept a similar post with the village of East Dundee, in Kane County, northwest of Chicago.

However, in late September, the board chose not to hire any of the applicants and to restart the search in January — citing a need to redefine what skills are necessary for the job.

Flider said the board has always been impressed with Ruff's credentials but that Ruff was still waiting to find out if he would keep his job in Paris.

"We didn't think it would be prudent to extend an offer at that time," Flider said. "But when we found out he was available, we wanted him back to talk to us."

"We're extremely excited about Paul. Paris' loss is Mount Zion's gain."

Flider said the village's search consultant reassured board members by giving Ruff a thumbs-up.

"The consultant said 'Search no more, you've found your man,'" Flider said.

"Ruff's strength lies in his experience in the area of economic development," Flider said. "He's a precise, detail-oriented individual with very good administrative skills," he

said. Ruff, who will be paid \$52,000 a year, will initially be signed for six months so that his contract coincides with the fiscal year, Flider said. Thereafter, he will be re-signed annually. He starts Jan. 3.

"We decided on that amount based on his experience and the fact that he is the kind of person we need in the village," he said. Bowden, who was with the village for seven years, was making \$50,000 when he departed.

The Mount Zion Village Board's newest member, Bright, is a patrol captain with the Macon County Sheriff's Office. He was defeated by Sheriff Roger Walker in the 1998 Democratic primary.

Bright has served on several village commissions — including chairing the Parks and Recreation and Police and Fire commissions.

"I was very flattered when I was approached, and I look forward to working on the board," he said.

Bright will be sworn in on Dec. 20 and will serve until the 2001 election.

"He's served this community well and deserves this appointment," Flider said.

In other business, the board named member Don Robinson mayor pro tem. He will preside at meetings in Flider's absence.

## NAACP: Willing to discuss the situation

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taking a stand against or in favor of the expulsions," Swartz said.

In a prepared statement that day, Swartz said the Chamber was "committed to supporting the Decatur Public School Board in its efforts to make sure all students receive a quality education and have every opportunity to become productive citizens in the future."

That same day, Norman criticized city officials and the "lily-white Chamber of Commerce" for taking sides in the dispute.

Jeffrey Perkins, who served on the school board at the time the expulsions were handed out and is first vice president of the NAACP's local branch, disputes the Chamber's contention that the organization didn't take sides.

"It definitely wasn't neutral," said Perkins, the only school board member to vote against the original two-year expulsions.

"They definitely came out in support of the school board."

Moore said the NAACP may have misinterpreted the Chamber's position on the matter.

"Our stand was to support the school board as a body that is elected to make decisions," Moore said. "We did not take a side on the expulsion issue."

Norman said the NAACP's decision to publicly support the Rev. Jesse Jackson and his effort to have the expelled students promptly returned to the classroom should be viewed differently than a statement from the Chamber, which Norman said should be primarily concerned with promoting economic growth and development.

"We are a civil rights organization, an organization that is supposed to work for the good of the total community," Norman said.

"Every organization has a role."

However, Swartz said that education and business success are intertwined, and that the negative national publicity associated with the expulsions was having an effect on economic growth and development.

He said the Chamber was taking a leadership role in trying to resolve the dispute.

"Any time you have national attention on a negative issue of this nature, we believe that, as the voice of business in the community, we should go on the record rather than saying nothing."

Swartz said, "We believe we can play a role in the healing process of the community."

Moore said the situation will be discussed when the Chamber's board of directors meets on Monday.

"We'd much like to keep the NAACP as an active part of the business community," Moore said. "I'm sure we will be talking with their leadership in the coming weeks to try and see if we can get them back in. The NAACP is a vital part of our community, and we want to encourage minorities to be a part of the Chamber."

Norman said the NAACP would be willing to discuss the matter with the Chamber.

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