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Wojcik keen on future as Douglas town administrator

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By Rod Lee

It might not have been readily apparent to those in attendance at the selectmen's meeting of August 1st that the town of Douglas has landed itself a capable administrator in Matthew J. Wojcik, who officially began work on July 24th.

For starters Mr. Wojcik (pronounced Wo-jik, with a silent c) was a barely conspicuous presence sitting on the left-hand side of the table (as viewed from the gallery) in the Resource Room of the Municipal Center because of the poor lighting that prevailed. A staffer explained before the start of proceedings, resulting from what was initially thought to be a community-wide blackout (the power outage wound up continuing for more than two hours, until after the group had adjourned, gone into executive session and then left the building entirely).

Secondly, Mr. Wojcik didn't say much in his first-ever selectmen's meeting in Douglas except for a brief town administrator's report during which he read a letter of commendation from Riverdale Mills President and CEO James M. Knott Jr. in appreciation of the Douglas Fire Department's response to a recent fire in that wire-manufacturing facility; and one other item.

He concluded those remarks by saying that he was "flattered and honored" to have been hired by the town of Douglas. He noted that he had "other options" but that he was sold on Douglas because "you have something special going here."

Douglas Selectmen Chair Kevin D. Morse in turn reaffirmed to Mr. Wojcik that "you were our top pick."

Mr. Wojcik's reticence in jumping into an extended dialogue involving how a gift of \$35,000 to the Douglas Public Library and the interest that would be accrued from those monies should be handled

would have led most observers to conclude that he is something of a wallflower. Nothing, as it turns out, could be further from the truth. In a subsequent conversation in his office last Thursday morning, Mr. Wojcik, now in his late forties, talked expansively, honestly and openly about his career. He even after some initial hesitation was willing to address his abrupt departure from Tiverton, Rhode Island, where his contract wasn't renewed. Tiverton, he said, was dealing with financial stresses. Also, the "political dynamic" in Tiverton was volatile (his predecessor in the position, James Goncalvo, resigned amid controversy, which in Mr. Wojcik's opinion was self-inflicted). In terms of his own situation in Tiverton, he said, "colleagues I worked with told me I got out just in time."

Also just in time to help the town of Douglas deal with its own financial circumstances, which, he said, are "a little tight. Municipal operating budgets are constrained because of personnel restraints and debt service. Douglas has a fair amount of debt service" to contend with. "More than 20% of our budget. You want it to be in single digits. But the public schools structure is in good shape."

Mr. Wojcik's experience in both the public and private sector bodes well for the impact he will be able to make in Douglas. In his early twenties, while attending Georgetown University, where he obtained a MB in International Business/Trade/Commerce and a J.D. (law degree) in International Law and Legal Studies, he interned for the late Sen. John Chaffee, for whom he had great respect. "I was Johnny-on-the-spot" for Sen. Chaffee during the Persian Gulf and credit-union crises, he said. He described Mr. Chaffee as "a lion of the Senate."

From there he went to work for the Monitor Co. in Cambridge, "a very intense job, I was travelling constantly and got to see the country. I will not go back to Texas or California unless forced to do so!" he said, with a twinkle in his blue eyes and a smile on his lips. "I wouldn't have left Monitor" if the company hadn't poured most of its resources into one firm, Merck, that rushed the drug Vioxx to market too soon, he said. "My team was billing \$1.5 million a month and we went to zero in a week. From that point Monitor shrank. I went off into business myself, a few of us, and we landed quite a few clients. Then the economy slowed down and I talked it over with my wife (Christi) and decided that being in business is not as great as it sounds."

He also did some work for the Republican Party.

Mr. Wojcik, a native of Cumberland, Rhode Island who now lives with his wife, son Arden and two foster children (both girls, both about thirteen months old, from different families) in Westport, was also director of economic development for the city of Woonsocket in the administration of Mayor Leo Fontaine. "We had a good run, three to four years, until the city went bankrupt," he said. "It was a total horror show when it all came home to roost. The state took over. That's where I cut my teeth on financial. We got shellacked in the re-election campaign."

The reception he has gotten in Douglas has been "excellent," he said. "It's a friendly town. Everyone seems to keep things in perspective. There is a budget deficit, but it is not all-consuming.

"I fit in here."

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WDBA & MAPFRE to host Disa...

Sep 26 2018 - 7:30am

Build your own scarecrow conte...

Sep 30 2018 - 11:00am

Apple Pie Social: Grafton Comm...

Sep 30 2018 - 12:00pm

Daniels Farmstead Apple Festiv...

Oct 7 2018 - 11:00am

WBDA Annual Meeting & Elec...

Oct 25 2018 - 6:30pm

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