



Building Beautiful Families



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me an accounting job.
Observer: What was that first day in 1972 like?
Ramsey: My formal education was a long-time coming because I had a couple of years without priorities. My friends had gone into the military, and so did I, which straightened me out [he laughs]. That span was 7-8 years.
 I remember driving home from work that first day with such pride that I was holding such a professional job. I knew I wanted to be in business or finance but hadn't focused on whether that would be in government or the private sector. Very early, I knew that local government was what I wanted to do.
 There were plenty of challenges following the annexation by Richmond. We were trying to rebound from the significant loss of population and tax base. We lost the annexation battle

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because we weren't providing services to our urbanized population. So our priority was avoiding future annexations. There were about 500 employees in the county then and about 4,000 now. The staff was small enough then that you could get to know people quickly.
Observer: Any humorous incident that you remember fondly?
Ramsey: Sometime back, Supervisor Garland Dodd had been pressing our staff to take down a street light that was shining in the bedroom of one of his constituents. We knew how to put up a street light but hadn't any experience taking one down. Anyway, we weren't working fast enough for him, so I'm told Garland and a friend went out one night and implemented their own solution with a shotgun.
Observer: Out of 20 years, what are a couple of your favorite highlights?
Ramsey: I've seen the county change from almost anything goes in development to well-planned standards to ensure that quality development is occurring. That's been born out by our citizen surveys, including how safe they feel and their feelings about our quality of life. That success crosses a number of areas for our staff, various county boards and planning commissions.
 Chesterfield is unique in the way it brings business practices to local government. Our Total Quality concept puts the emphasis on customer service, and we set standards and do training that encourages decisions at the lowest level. Employees are empowered to help citizens or put them in contact with someone who can. I think we're further along in customer service and accountability than other governments.
 Because of our tenacity at times, we're providing more infrastructure even as the state is not participating as fully as it used to. Completing Route 288 was a delicate balance of the business community and county government working together. The Walthall interchange has stimulated business development. The financial strength of the county with its triple A bond rating has allowed us to build more schools.

Observer: And a not so good memory?
Ramsey: The most difficult era was shrink-swell soils. We discovered we had a number of homes inadequately built. While we met all the legal tests, we could have gone further to ensure that property owners were protected.
 The airplane flight last year was difficult for me. It didn't have anything to do with taking anything for me personally. In fact, I didn't even have a Coke on the flight, but certain media were openly out to punish me. I can't talk about all of my reasons for having to return quickly to Chesterfield, but I've evaluated and reevaluated my reasons for having to be back here despite the expense.
Observer: What will your retirement be like?
Ramsey: I'm going to take a few months off and get some perspective. After 20 years of working a 24/7 job, I'll be doing more than just restoring old cars. There's a possibility of sitting on some boards.
 In the past I've used working on my classic Mustangs as a stress release. I like restoring them, but I don't do major engine work and let someone else paint them. I've told my wife they are a good investment [Ramsey smiles]. And I enjoy skiing in the mountains in Europe, Canada and the U.S. The views are breathtaking.
 I've been approached about consulting and offered the opportunity to do some teaching at some universities, which sounds appealing. There is a demand out there for practitioners of government to teach the reality, not the textbook. Local government is rewarding, but some people become very dissatisfied – not because of the organization but rather from pressures and unrealistic expectations. The political process can be discouraging, but I approached it as an opportunity to bring professional and administrative analysis into the equation. Good decisions are a blend.
Observer: Are you going to be able to let go and retire?
Ramsey: [Laughs] No. Paula thinks she might get two weeks out of me at home. That's about twice as much as she is getting now.

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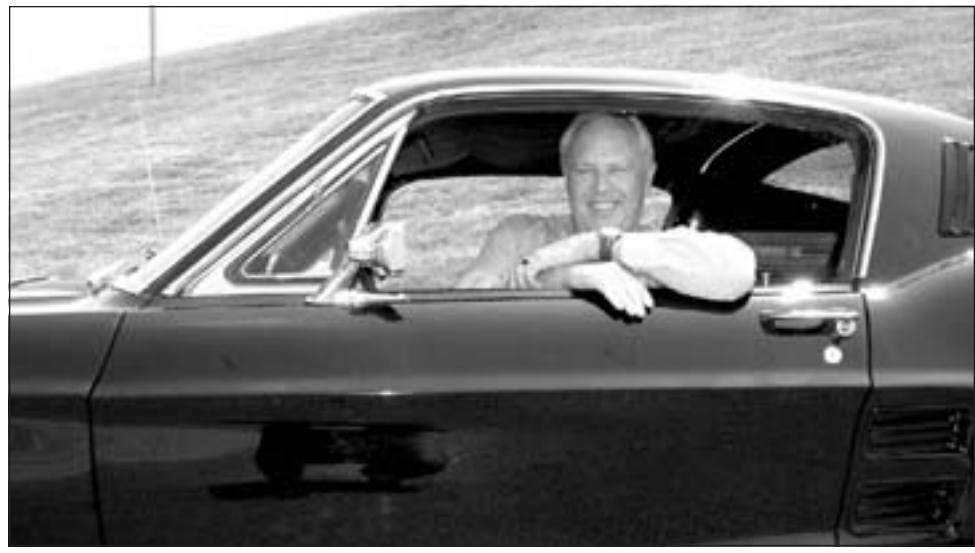


Photo courtesy of Chesterfield County

County Administrator Lane Ramsey still owns the same 1967 Ford Mustang that he drove to his first day of work with the county in 1972. After he retires on Aug. 13, he'll spend some of his time restoring his collection of classic Mustangs.



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