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anne m. gannon

Palm Beach County's tax collector looks to redefine government.

Anne M. Gannon may not have the most glamorous-sounding job, but that doesn't stop locals from treating the Delray resident like a celebrity. The constitutional tax collector for Palm Beach County is often approached—while dining at 32 East or Tramonti (she only dines at locally owned restaurants) or shopping at Home Depot or the grocery store—by people who have questions about property taxes or driver's licenses.

"Wherever I go, people know who I am," says Gannon, who is running for a third term as tax collector this year. "They go, 'I don't really mean to ask this, but ...'"

Gannon doesn't mind the impromptu face time with the million-plus taxpayers who live and work in the county. On the contrary: She's fostered an aura of accessibility by engaging with the community whenever possible. And, especially in an election year, she wants to be tuned in to public concerns. That formula led to her election in 2006 as she focused her campaign on client happiness, promising to streamline her agency's operations to provide the county's citizens with a speedy and pleasant experience.

"Just because we're a government agency doesn't mean we can't make it easier on our client base to access our services," Gannon says. "We look at every e-mail message we get and respond to every phone call." Her positive approach has paid off for Palm Beach County residents, who

routinely compliment her on their experiences in her offices. It's also led to recognition in the media and by civic organizations. In 2011, *Florida Weekly* christened Gannon one of the county's top 16 "Power Women."

Gannon is indeed powerful; she supervises nearly 300 employees across eight tax offices throughout the county. In the 2010-2011 fiscal year, her agency registered more than 1.16 million motor vehicles, collected \$3.1 billion in property tax payments and processed more than 2,000 hunting and fishing licenses.

There are some people who dread seeing Gannon's name on envelopes—and her agency sends a lot of envelopes. She's had to deny license renewals to elderly clients because of safety concerns (her offices have designated "crying rooms" for these clients to express their reactions). And part of Gannon's job is to catch potential fraud and tax evasion and report her suspicions to the property appraiser's office, the local police or the FBI.

But scofflaws are few and far between, Gannon says. "Most people in Palm Beach County understand that taxes are part of our way of life, and what you get in return are street lights that keep your community safe, roads you can drive on that don't have potholes, parks, all kinds of



Anne Gannon at her office in west Delray

AARON BRISTOL

things. We have a very high quality of life here."

Gannon's career in public life extends beyond her tenure as tax collector. From 1989 to 1999, she ran a public policy firm in Delray Beach, where she represented clients on a broad range of issues. Beginning in 2000, she served three terms as a Democrat on Florida's House of Representatives, District 86. During this time, she passed the bill that made human trafficking a crime and authored legislation that resulted in a groundbreaking brain tumor research center at the University of Florida's McKnight Brain Institute (Gannon's husband, Jim, died of a brain tumor in 2004, which led her to the cause). Gannon remains passionate about these issues, but she says her life as a legislator is probably behind her.

"I have been asked to run for Congress, and I'm really not interested," she says. "After my husband died, I really wanted to come home. ... I like being in Delray and Palm Beach County and living in my own house and not out of a suitcase."☀

STAYING CLOSE TO HOME

Anne Gannon moved to Delray Beach in 1983 and has watched, and participated in, its revitalization. Even if most of her business is in West Palm Beach, she is an ardent supporter of local Delray establishments and can be seen regularly at the Green Market and the shops in Pineapple Grove.

"The greatest strength that Delray has is the people who live here who care about our city and are involved in all its different aspects," she says. "Delray has become an entertainment center, our restaurants are fabulous and the activities for children and families in the city have really changed over the last 10 years."