

**Florida League of Cities
Cities of Excellence
City Citizen of the Year**

Name: Kabe Woods
Jurisdiction: City of Fort Walton Beach

Many residents claim to be informed and active in City government. Some attend meetings, others serve on boards, but few take the time to form an organization to assist local government and to curb their spending habits, but that is exactly what Kabe Woods has done.

Mr. Woods started working in the telephone industry in 1973 in the stock room. His tireless work ethic moved him up the ladder to Director of Lucent Technologies when he left the industry in 1997. Following his time in the telephone industry, Mr. Woods served as Senior Vice President of ADVO, Inc. in Windsor, Connecticut until he retired in 2003. In these positions, he was responsible for several aspects of business, including multi-million dollar budgets.

Upon retiring, Mr. Woods decided he had moved around enough (12 times in 24 years) with corporate life and wanted to settle into a community and contribute in some way. So when he moved to Fort Walton Beach to begin a new life in a new community, he felt his expertise in managing large organizations with big budgets might be an asset to the City. That, along with his frustration in the lack of citizen participation in government, helped start a local citizens group to inform and to involve residents in government spending and priorities. In 2007, Mr. Woods, along with two other

influential residents in the community, created Okaloosa Citizens Alliance, Inc. (OCA), a group that serves, not as a “watch dog” or “gotcha” group, but in partnership with local governments. The group contends the major issue in local budgets is not the millage rate, but spending. The group feels local governments need to be more accountable for how they spend their funds.

One of the main goals of the OCA is for its members to be informed. To accomplish this, OCA members attend local government meetings and offer their insight on the issues. They feel able to do this after spending countless hours reviewing all the backup documents that go along with meeting agenda items. Mr. Woods knows anyone can come to a meeting to complain, but unfortunately, the complainer can have inaccurate information. If a resident is informed and engaged in the process, however, they can offer more assistance and insight to the governing body on the issue. Research is vitally important to the members of OCA. The Okaloosa Citizens Alliance also has their own website, www.ocal787.org.

In addition to attending the meetings, Mr. Woods routinely meets with elected officials to discuss City business. City Council members see these meetings as helpful and insightful, offering another opinion on issues. He feels the local level is where most issues affecting residents happen, and citizens should be very involved with what is going on at their City Hall.

Mr. Wood's goal to hold government accountable for their spending extends past the borders of Okaloosa County. Over the past year, he traveled all over the state, from Tampa to Jacksonville to Orlando and back again, speaking to the Taxation and Budget Reform Committee more than 30 times in support of Amendment 5, and other issues. At most of these meetings, he was the only citizen in attendance, even though he lives hundreds of miles away from the meeting.

Along with his work with the OCA, Mr. Woods is also a member of the Fort Walton Beach Vision Plan Stewardship Committee, and Co-Chairman of the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors Public Policy Committee. In addition, he was one of the first to step forward and to donate to the City of Fort Walton Beach Police Department's K-9 fundraiser in early 2007. The department raised money to pay for the purchase, training and equipping of two new canine officers. The department was able to reach their goal, thanks to residents like Mr. Woods.

Kabe Woods has made a remarkable impact in only a few years as a resident of Fort Walton Beach. He has become involved with local government by providing support, leadership and desire to make an impact in the City. His skills as a past leader of business have successfully evolved to the local government level. His participation in the founding of the Okaloosa Citizens Alliance has brought him credibility in the community, and his desire to bring other residents up to speed on issues has led to over 100 members joining the group to date. The positive influence of Mr. Woods and his organization on our community is evident by this unanimous vote from the Fort Walton

Beach City Council to be nominated as the Florida League of Cities "Citizen of the Year".