

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned in to another
edition of The Break Room, a

weekly conversation about how
the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the
work everyday. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's
Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a
closer look at the different

City departments and provides
updates on current and upcoming

projects. And events and now
your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Welcome to The Break Room. We
are back and this is our 5th

of 5 interviews with City
Commissioners, which means

there's only one left to be
interviewed, so it shouldn't be

too hard to figure out. This

Commissioner came to St Johns

County in 1989, where he started

out as owner and operator of a

local Italian restaurant called

Pete's On Vilano. He also began

his 30-year career in teaching

and school administration. He's

done a little bit of everything

from teaching high school

science, to Dean of Students,

Middle School, and High School

Principal. He even coordinated

the School District Science

Fair and produced the first

Gamble Rogers Folk Festival.

Before retiring, he also served

as the Chief Human Resources

Officer for Flagler College.

You may recognize his voice if

you listen to Flagler College

Radio, because he has his own

radio show here on WFCF. Allow

me to introduce Commissioner

Jim Springfield, otherwise known

to our listeners as Grandpa

Jim. JIM: That's right. You listen

to Grandpa Jim on WFCF. MELISSA: Okay,

you get to have your turn after

me. On your show. We're

going to hear you talk about you as

our City Commissioner. But we're

really glad to have you on The

Break Room. JIM: I'm glad to be

here. MELISSA: Looking forward to having

you on the Commission. And of

course, there'll be lots of fun

stuff to talk over the next

several years, so this will not
be your only appearance as

Commissioner Jim Springfield. JIM: Oh
that's great. MELISSA: So, educator,

administrator, turned City
Commissioner, tell us about you.

Those of us who don't know you,
as well. JIM: Well, I I have, I'm old

so I have a lot of history.
I grew up in Gainesville and I

loved it. And I started out
teaching over there. And I

taught science for a couple of
years. And then I got a job as

the Director of an outdoor
education center, which was Camp

Crystal Lake, just like Friday
the 13th, the movie. Which is a

whole another story. And
I did that for 11 years. And

after 11 years of 24
hours, 7 days a week, I

said, okay, I'm going to make
it rich and buy a restaurant.

My family had always owned
property in St Johns County.

We had a beach house in South
Ponte Vedra, so that was where I

was going to retire. So,
at thirty-five, I said, oh,

let's just move over there and
we bought a restaurant. I had

it for a year. And that
was enough. And... MELISSA: Still

more 24/7 on that.

JIM: That's right. Still more

24/7. And luckily,
somebody, the broker that we

bought it from, came to us and

said, they have a young couple

that wants to buy you the
restaurant. We didn't have it

for sale. MELISSA: And that was... JIM: 1990. MELISSA: And
those of us locals, it's

not, the spot isn't even
there anymore, but it's over

there where the Publix is. JIM:
Correct. This is when the old

bridge was still functioning
and you had to go around the

corner to the Pete's. Now it's
right at the base of where the

new bridge goes across and it's
long gone. So after that, I

went and started teaching at
Nease. Became a Dean, became an

Assistant Principal at Murray
and Sebastian, and then

principal at Gamble Rogers. And
then I got to open Bartram Trail,

which was a thrill, and I got to
pick the bears and the colors. MELISSA: Oh fun.

JIM: And then I became the Chief
Human Resource Officer as

Assistant Superintendent. I did
that for 11 years. MELISSA: At Flagler.

JIM: At the School District. And
then I retired in '11 and

Joe Joyner became the President
of Flagler and he brought me

over. They didn't have an HR
department at Flagler. MELISSA: Really?

JIM: Right. So we started one.

MELISSA: Excellent. Those are

critical departments in today's
today's world. JIM: Correct. MELISSA: And so

you do this for a while. You
retire. You're living a quiet,

retired life in St Augustine..

Kinda doing your thing with

Patty, doing your radio show?

JIM: Yeah, we travel for a while. We

had a motor home. We did the
Maine, and we still go to Maine

every year. We love it and we
travel for a while and we said,

no, okay, we're done with that.

MELISSA: And you didn't have anything

else to do, so you thought, oh,
let me just run for City

Commission because you know,
that's that's not a 24/7 job. JIM: Well, being on one
side, being an employee of a

political organization, you see
one side of it, you know. And

so I always work with School
Board Members. I did the

training when they got new members and all that. So, I was

always curious about what it would be like. And I got

encouraged by a variety of different groups. I served on

the the Fireman's Fund for 10 years with the City and I was

encouraged by that group to consider it. And of course, I

had to resign from that to even run. And so I did resign

December last year and the year before, so that I could run. And

then I got encouraged by some people to to run. MELISSA: It's not

something for those with faint of heart. JIM: No, not really.

MELISSA: Even in the campaign, it's kind of tough. JIM: It was tough

in the campaign, but nothing
like I, people had warned me or

or dreaded. We had, I ran
against Melinda Rakoncay, and we

we ran a pretty clean campaign.

And I wanted to make sure

that my side was going to be
that way, absolutely. And if I

lost, I lost, if, I didn't, I
didn't want to run a dirty

campaign. And the people that I
met were pleasant. I only had the

door slammed in my face twice.

MELISSA: Excellent. Okay. That's pretty good. JIM: Out of a

couple thousand. That's, that's
pretty good. And I don't even

think they lived here. I think
they were working on the house

at the time. But anyways, that's

another story. I was very

impressed with how well people
received me and asked questions.

And they most people didn't
understand the process. They

didn't understand what a
Commission was. They didn't

even know who ran the city. MELISSA: And
you know, that's an interesting

conundrum, I guess. I can't
think of the right word. I

think one of our in the
Communications Department is

just that. It's communicating
with residents or even the

people who are living here part
time about what's happening in

the community, educating our
community, and so sometimes, at

least in my job, it's as much
educating. JIM: Correct. MELISSA: Residents

and connecting with them, that
they feel like they have

someone representing them.

What did you find was your most..

Were there any particular
challenging topics that people

were challenging you on, like, oh
are you going to fix this?

JIM: Well, no, the same ones that we
all are dealing with today. And

that's the homeless and flooding and
potholes. MELISSA: Right. JIM: You know.

Yeah. Same things that we're
going to deal with for a long

time to come, because they don't
get resolved. And as soon as all

the roads are fixed, they start
regaining potholes, so.

None of them were
dramatically different than

anything I wasn't prepared
for. And they all were current

and and necessary things to
talk about. There

were some good ideas. I mean,
we've had some, and we had some

wild ideas of things that I
should do if I'm a Commissioner.

And we'll try some of them.

MELISSA: Alright. If you're just now

tuning in, you're listening to
The Break Room. I'm Melissa

Wissel and I have the pleasure
of speaking with Commissioner

Jim Springfield in The Break
Room this week. We're talking

about going from private life

to public life. Anything

jumping out at you? The
commission has boards and other

community entities that they're
involved with. You've been

tasked with Sister Cities.

JIM: Right. Right. MELISSA: That's

something that we haven't been
doing much in a while.

Anything you can tell us about
what's happening with that, or

coming? JIM: It's back it's back
operating after COVID.

They're having monthly meetings
now and that's that's kind of

exciting. And they have a board
and they have a group of

members. They're looking for
more people to get involved

with Sister City. Right. So,
it's a non-City committee.

That I'll be sitting
with to help design thing. I

know next year is the hundredth
year of the anniversary of the

first visit, first.... MELISSA: Aviles.

JIM: Aviles. MELISSA: Yes. JIM: And so there's

going to be some celebrations,
which people enjoy and it'd be

fun. It's going to be fun to to
work on. MELISSA: Yeah we had, and I sat

on that with you. It's funny you
mentioned the that it's not a

City thing, because any thing
that we start getting too

involved with. We get sunshine
and all that. We don't want to

have to get involved with all
that. But it is

exciting to see some of that
relationship come back up. And I

am looking forward to the 100th
anniversary. You're right.

We've been talking about that,
so next year will be 100 years.

At Sister City.

JIM: And Len Weeks is Chairman of that

Committee for us and that's
really good. He's been around

and for a long time. MELISSA: What did
you feel like when you were

running, or in the community,
people are looking for from us?

Is there anything you can put your
finger on that you feel like

we're doing well? We need to do
better? JIM: Well, I think

education's one of them, because

the education of how the City

works. And why we need the
businesses here, and why there's

so much traffic. Right?

So, the residents feel like all

the businesses should leave so
that traffic doesn't come and

they can just live a peaceful
life. And we all know

that it won't work that way, and
so that we gotta find the

balance. And that was one of the
things I had in my campaign was

trying to find the balance
between voices. Of the

businesses, the residents, and the
visitors. Because if we

don't listen to the visitors,
we don't really know how we're

being viewed from an innocent
eye. MELISSA: Right. JIM: And those, that's

important. MELISSA: We also talked about
communications from the

standpoint of how do we get the
word out. That's something that

we're being challenged with. And
so if you're listening to to us

today, keep listening.

Cuz we have to find more

creative ways of communicating
and getting the word out. Do

you feel like people know how
to find us? JIM: I think, I think

when they have a problem, they
find us. MELISSA: True. JIM: Right? So yeah

it's sort of like. MELISSA: They got
your number. JIM: Yeah I think

during hurricanes people
probably really paid attention

to what was going on the
website, and all your Twitter

and your Facebook. And but when
there's everything's good.

People just sort of go
into their own communication

world, you know, and they
read whatever they're normally

reading. And without The
Record, we're really at a loss.

Because that used to be,
you know, 20 years ago that was

the hub of information. And so,
I wish we could saw that

conundrum right away, you know,
of getting information to

people. People don't even get
water bills anymore.

Right? I don't ever read the

water bill. MELISSA: Right. Digital. Yeah. JIM: So, we

don't even, we can't put it in
mail. MELISSA: Well, and even on our

utility bills, we do have a
little box that we put

announcements in. But like you
just said, well, first of all,

I've gone paperless.

So, even in that sense, and if I

did get the paper one, it's
automatically deducted on my

bank account, so I get the bill,
I've glanced at it. Yup,

that looks right and I throw it
out. JIM: Exactly me. Yeah. Yeah.

So, and I think that's most
people nowadays. So, it's

going to, it's gotten tougher
even though we have more venues.

And of course I have my
favorite, my next door neighbor

has their favorite, and they're
not always the same, so it's...

MELISSA: Well, and I I think our
frustration, because we try to

get digital in our department,
specifically. You still get the

folks that say, well, I don't
have social media, so how

are you going to get to me?

Right and we do technically

still have The Record, but most
people say I don't even read it,

a yeah. And I hate to be putting
down The Record, but it's hard,

because it doesn't have the
quantity and the quality that

we're used to by having local
coverage. JIM: Right. They have some

local coverage, but it's also
not timely. You know and

so I don't think they put
anything about the meetings

anymore in there. MELISSA: Well, we
have to put some, we have to

publicly notice. You
know, legally. But right.

We don't have the coverage
where Sheldon used to come and

sit in on the meeting and she'd
listen to the the meeting, then

she'd take a couple of days and
report on what the controversy

or what challenge was and what
the vote was and why and

interview people... Yeah, we
don't have that. JIM: Yeah and

that's a shame. But we have more

communication than we had with

The Record. Now, people
just need to get on a site.

Well, so I'm going to, I'm
going to plug our

communications venues, or our
our platforms. We've got

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.
If you're not subscribed to our

News and Notes newsletter, you
can go to the website and

there's a menu across the top
that says, 'How Can I?', and you

click underneath it on 'Sign Up
for News and Notes'. Right. It's

a Friday newsletter. We can
put anybody on a press release

list if you want to get all of
our press releases. But

generally it's it's all in News
and Notes and NextDoor. Do you

find NextDoor to be helpful?

JIM: I didn't when I was

campaigning and I'm not on NextDoor now. MELISSA: Next door is a tough

one because a lot of people,
it's a valuable resource

because the neighbors are
watching it. But I know a lot of

feedback we get is that there's
a lot of criticism and a lot of

negativity, so. We are on NextDoor, but you have to find us

when we post. Because
it's not like Facebook where

it's just comes to your feed.
You get everything.

JIM: Well, I put a plug in for our
neighbor. I live in Fullerwood

and we have a Fullerwood

Neighborhood Association and

Patricia Ponder is

completely active on the

website and she repost all the
things that you put out, almost

all the time, so that people who
don't normally get it, get it.

So, the associations are
really good about helping to

communicate. MELISSA: Well, before we
wrap up, you're absolutely

right. That's a really good
point, because we do have

neighborhood associations
within their local City limit

neighborhoods. You've got
everything from Old City South,

Lincolnvill, Fullerwood,

Flagler Model Land, North City.

I'm sure I'm leaving one
out. But if you live in

the City limits, chances are
you've got some form... JIM: Yeah,

there's some, there's some that
we're missing. But that, we need

to work on getting an
association together. I know

that the Fountain of Youth area
doesn't have one. MELISSA: Right.

Specifically, sure.

Right. So that's the

neighborhood council. If you're
tuning in and you want to look

for that, we do have that on
our website. There is a

neighborhood council. So, if
you're not sure about your own

neighborhood, check it out. And
look for those meetings, because

our commissioners and our staff
are going to be getting out

this year. Again, finding an
alternative way to reach our

neighbors. and we look forward
to seeing... JIM: Reuben Franklin's

coming to ours in February.

MELISSA: Okay. And we're going to look

forward to you coming to some
of our local neighborhoods.

JIM: Right. Yes. MELISSA: Well, thank you for
listening. Thanks for coming

Commissioner Springfield, we'll
have you back. If you missed

part of this broadcast and
want to go back and listen from

the beginning, you can find us
on Spotify, Apple Podcast,

Spreaker, and more. All those
platforms are available on CityStAugRadio.com. You can

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Twitter, and Instagram @CityStAug. Until next time,
thanks for tuning in. ANNOUNCER: You've

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Break Room, a weekly program

addressing projects and
programs by the City of St

Augustine. Join us each week as
the City's Communications

Director, Melissa Wissel, has
in-depth conversations with the

people who make our town work
to meet the needs of our

community. The Break Room is
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Specialist for the City of
St Augustine, Cindy Walker.

See you at this time next week
for another edition of The

Break Room.