

Proud Veteran Serves His Community

By Kerry Ashline

In the early 1970's the United States was up to its throat in a military conflict halfway around the world. The Vietnam War was one of America's most bitter and divisive wars in the nation's history.

America was struggling with an enemy they couldn't always see, and were not sure if in fact who was friend and who was foe. Military strategists had their hands full, assigning troops to different campaigns in varying locations, advancing in one region, retreating in another.

War is like that: Calculating, strategizing, moving troops and resources forward, back and sideways. Generals and commanders must constantly seek the next best move that hopefully brings them the victorious end-game. Strategy is not always linear.



U.S. Army Sgt. Goodman in South Vietnam circa 1970
(Photo provided)



Goodman studying his makeshift chess board (Photo provided)

One young American soldier, at the time a ranked tank commander, was teaching himself the game of chess when he wasn't ducking for cover.

From 1969 thru 1972, Sergeant Charles Goodman proudly served his country, earning several medals, including the Bronze Star, awarded for heroic achievement in the course of service.

The Vietnam Service Medal (self explanatory) and the National Defense Service Medal, awarded for honorable service, not to mention honor graduate in tank commander school.

Sergeant Goodman, even back in the 1970's was an innovator; using whatever he had available in whatever situation he was in. He utilized spent and live ammunition rounds as chess pieces.

His analytic skills during wartime would lend themselves well to challenges ahead.

Today, Sergeant Charles Goodman is now the City Mayor, and the residents of Williston can certainly be glad of that. The 70-something retired veteran is currently knee deep in a strategic battle, courtesy of his involvement in the construction of the proposed Williston Animal Shelter. It's out by the airport, across from Monterey Boats and adjacent to WAG – Williston Animal Group, no relation.

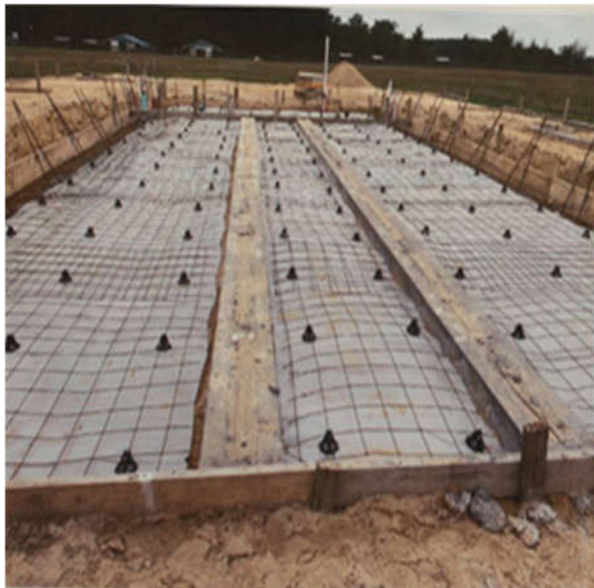
Mayor Goodman seems the obvious choice, when you consider he's an experienced general contractor and builder, celebrating 50 years in the construction industry this year. His latest mission: construct a nearly 9,000 sq. ft. cinder block facility that will shelter up to 16 dogs and 20 cats at a time. Extra square footage will be provided in event of natural disasters.

This build presents itself with unique engineering challenges, but nothing Goodman can't handle. We

met up with the mayor and his wife Sue Ellen recently at the construction site and found the mayor sweating bullets in the early morning mid-July humidity that only Floridian's know.

One of the first things we were impressed with was how clean and organized the site was.

Goodman greeted me with a firm handshake and a smile, clearly happy and comfortable at the job site. “I get up at four a.m. and I’m here (at the site) everyday.” he boasted. He works several hours on the building before he heads over to City Hall to put in a day’s work, he said.



Specially designed sloping foundation for Williston Animal Shelter (Photo provided)

We spoke of engineering challenges with the build. This is no ordinary flat-slab foundation project. The mayor explained, proper drainage needs to be maintained as animal cages are routinely hosed down. The air conditioning ductwork must be separate and independent; dogs on one system, cats on the other. Felines can spread disease airborne and through their feces, explained Goodman.

The shelter has a room specifically for an x-ray machine. Goodman designed that room.

Another challenge was ensuring the building’s square footage came in just under 9,000 square feet. “Otherwise we would have to put in a retaining pond.” He said. The mayor’s solution? Lay a gravel driveway instead concrete, keeping the property footprint under the retaining pond requirements, while also saving a few bucks. Goodman’s innovation skills are sharp as a drywall knife.



Mayor Charles Goodman with wife Sue Ellen. They met on a motorcycle trip she organized.

Sue Ellen Goodman, partnering with her husband on this ambitious project, gladly told the story of how she and Charles first met.

“In 1995, I organized a motorcycle ride from Gainesville to Lake Butler. Charles rode his Harley-Davidson. Everyone was paired with someone else, except for the two of us, so we ended up sitting together and getting acquainted.” “One of the first questions he asked me is if I believed in God, and I told him that, yes, I am a Christian, so we started going to church together. We are currently members of First Baptist Church of Williston.”

Charles and Sue Ellen have been married for 27 years, with 4 children between them, ranging in age from 40-50 years old. They have two dogs, Ladybug and Sassy that they rescued as puppies 15 years ago. They also have a pet squirrel named

Homeboy although Sue Ellen was quick to clarify the relationship. “We love Homeboy, and he is very friendly to us, but he is a wild animal and lives a free life.” She said. The Goodman’s feed the hungry squirrel whenever he comes around their home.

“After Charles and I began Goodman Construction Company in Gainesville, we bought some building property in Williston and liked the town so much we ended up building our own home here.” said Sue Ellen.

The First Lady of Williston sits on the Board of Directors for the Williston Community Animal Shelter Inc. a non-profit corporation that is currently funding the project. “About 5 years ago, Bob Echols, owner of For Our Friends, The Animals (FOFTA), decided to form a non-profit group to tackle building a much-needed animal shelter in Williston.” said Sue Ellen. “The Williston Community Animal Shelter, Inc. took this project over from Levy Animal Friends, Inc. to build the new shelter. No one on the Board of Directors had any construction experience. I was retired. It was a good cause, and greatly needed in our area, so my wife and I joined in the efforts to make it a reality after 5 years of planning.” added Mayor Goodman.



Back view of the Williston Animal Shelter as of July 2022, slated for December 2022 opening (Photo Kerry Ashline)

After approximately five years from initial planning and approval, “The Williston Community Animal Shelter Inc. (a non-profit 503(c) (3) corporation) has completed about 75% of the construction of the shelter.” said the mayor, who also sits on the (WCAS) Board of Directors.

So the obvious question: What’s the mayor’s endgame strategy?

“Currently, we are entering what I call the finishing phase. We have managed to overcome all technical challenges. During this phase there are hundreds of items to bring this project to completion.”

“There are no major challenges, other than being worn out and our funds dwindling for the driveway and landscaping, both of which can be overcome.” he said.

Goodman even solved the funding issue (at least in part) by agreeing to grow a beard in exchange for donations.

At last count he raised over \$500.

“We are trying to get the word out so people know about our efforts to help. The plight of abandoned and lost or abused dogs and cats in the Williston area is a shame.” said Goodman.

So, does the x-ray machine room mean a veterinarian will be available? Will the shelter create local jobs?

Yes and no.

“We are hoping to get the (University of Florida) College of Veterinarian Medicine in Gainesville to have their students help in that area as a way of completing their education, by working in a rural area.

And yes, the project should create some jobs, he said.

Does this mean the Williston Animal Group will incorporate into the new building?



Mayor Goodman feeds Homeboy, his wild pet squirrel

“WAG has an entirely different mission statement.” the mayor explained. “We have hopes of having a good relationship with WAG and helping each other as we can. However, WAG will not, at this time, be part of operations of this facility.”

When are we looking at completion?

“We have hopes, with the supply chain cooperating, of having this done before Christmas 2022.

Now a retired Vietnam War veteran, Charles Goodman is a lifetime member of Disabled American Veterans. He was also injured during the war and still wears the shrapnel to this day, said wife Sue Ellen.



Mayor Goodman helps lift a roof truss at the Williston Animal Shelter construction site

The mayor laughing refused my request to strap on a pair of drywall stilts for a photo op, saying he tried wearing them a few times “and never quite got off the ground.”

Back in the day, a young Charles Goodman played tournament chess and even competed in several nationwide chess tournaments. “He still enjoys playing, and keeps a chess board set up in his mayor's office in city hall, just in case anyone wants to stop by for a game.” said Sue Ellen.

He proudly served his country then, and now continuing to serve the people of Williston.

Indeed, we collectively say “Thank you for your service Mr. Mayor.”



Mayor Goodman instructing a young chess player at his City Hall office (Photo provided)

SOURCES: Wikipedia.com
Bisprofiles.com