

Ted Morton, longtime Sarasota resident and founder of Morton's Market, approached me a few weeks ago with a large envelope stuffed with newspaper articles. "I thought you would get a kick out of these," Ted promised. I carried them back to my office and stacked them on the paper mountain known as my desk.

One day, in an attempt to find missing meeting notes, I unburied Ted's envelope and started reading. What I found was very interesting. Most of the articles were interviews with elected officials of Sarasota from 30 years ago and the sage city manager, Ken Thompson, from 35 years ago. In sharing their thoughts, no commentary is needed from me, other than to say that we had some pretty thoughtful people running our government back then, and their words should be remembered today.

Let's start with Thompson, from an interview titled "The Charmed Life of Ken Thompson" in Florida Accent, the Sunday magazine of The Tampa Tribune, **May 13, 1973**.

Thompson's motto: "**Maximum municipal services for the least tax dollar.**"

"Prudent fiscal management will produce a very good program. It eliminates waste and overpayment that sometimes result from being short of funds. You also avoid high interest rates that are charged when the City is not a good risk. Unless public officials are made to scrounge, and find money, in all probability they are going to waste money."

The title of city manager itself, Thompson says, has become outmoded. "We should change our name to urban administrators. The city limit line is becoming a nebulous thing with the movement towards consolidation and regional councils. If there is not a thing called a city, then the city manager has nothing to manage."

Ted Sperling, former city commissioner and the father of Herald-Tribune editorial writer Laura Sperling, shared these thoughts with a reporter of the Sarasota Town & Country Weekly Monitor, on March 2, 1979: "The City is overgenerous in pension and deferred benefits. Combined with prevailing wage rates we must realize the benefits represent real tax dollars as do direct wages and we may be providing more than we should."

Today the city has an unfunded pension liability of \$130 million!

Former Mayor Rita Roehr, in the same issue of the newspaper, commented on how there was an attempt to separate those in the city who are pro-tourism and those who are pro-industry: "If we ever presume not to be a tourist town, we're cutting off the goose that lays the golden egg. Sarasota is unique on the entire west coast. There is nowhere else you are so close to the beaches; there is no other city where you can get to the beaches from the mainland in five minutes. Our city is the hub of the service industry and **everything starts with the independent businessman. He is not necessarily the 'money grabbing' type people often visualize.**"

Finally there was an article by John Hielscher, who is still a reporter at the Herald-Tribune, reporting on the Sarasota County budget Dec. 30, 1978: "A \$48.8 million total spending budget was approved, including about \$37.6 million in actual county government spending. And that was one of the most streamlined budgets in recent years that resulted in rolling back the millage to reflect skyrocketed property valuations in 1978. County officials are most proud of that effort and plan to continue it so the property tax will not be an overburdened revenue source for government operations."

It all goes to show that there truly were some good ol' days and good ol' politicians here in Sarasota! Maybe we can even learn from them today.

Sarasotan Kerry Kirschner is executive director of the Argus Foundation, a business advocacy group. (Herald-Tribune Editorial Writer Laura Sperling recused herself in regard to the handling of this guest column.)