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PASSING THE TORCH

Turning The Page to Reveal a New Group of Professionals

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THE LEDGER

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The Ledger's group of 20 professionals to watch in the next decade have a few things in common. Among them: They are all younger than 40, they've all already achieved a great deal, and they all are just getting started.

The Ledger sought suggestions from the community and from members of a previous group of leaders profiled in 1999. After much discussion and debate, more than 60 names were narrowed down to the 20 you see here.

The final 20 represent practically every field one could think of: agriculture, financial services, education, politics, small business, real estate, nonprofits.

While each has his or her own unique vision for the future of Polk County, USF Polytechnic is a recurring theme. They agree it will forever change the face of this county.

They also see opportunities for the east side of the county to raise its profile and, perhaps most encouraging, they think economic recovery is on its way.

Read – and be inspired – by these leaders as they share their visions of Polk County in the year 2020 and their personal aspirations. These are the people we know you'll be hearing a lot more about in the coming years.



Photo Illustration by Laurie Lawrence
Clockwise, from top left: Ashley Miller, Lleana Kriss, Mike Potthast, Justin Troller, Terrie Lobb, and Anthony Troutman.

Todd Baylis | 26 | President of Cipher Integrations and Qgiv, both based in Lakeland. Cipher is a technology consulting firm and Qgiv is a third-party provider for online giving.

Personal history: Born and raised in Lakeland, Baylis was valedictorian of the Lakeland High School class of 2002. He graduated from Florida State University with a degree in computer science in 2004. He helped start Cipher and Qgiv while in college. He is not married.

Community involvement: Past president of Camp Fire USA Sunshine Council, served for three years on the board of the United Way of Central Florida, member of the board at the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce, member of steering committee of Lakeland Vision and Emerge Lakeland, Rotary.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think we're poised for growth in all parts of the county. The USF Polytechnic campus will only help us as we develop the I-4 technology corridors. We're poised to take advantage of that.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: As businesses grow, people will continue to need more technology and computer support for networking and other uses, Baylis said, which is where Cipher comes in. While Cipher is a more local service, Qgiv is nationwide, with clients in 42 states. Third-party provider service is a growing industry with plenty of advanced services that are as yet undeveloped, he said.

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'The sky's the limit. We will continue to grow and I don't anticipate technology going away. Technology will continue to drive businesses, helping them become more efficient.'

Larry Black | 36 | General manager at Peace River Packing in Fort Meade

Personal history: Black is a Fort Meade native who studied at Florida Southern College and earned a master's degree in business at the University of South Florida in Tampa. Afterward, he returned to Polk County to work at Peace River Packing, becoming the fifth generation to work at the family business. The company was established in 1928 and has dealings in growing, harvesting, packing and grove care. Black was named general manager a little more than a year ago. He is married and has two children.

Community involvements: Polk County Farm Bureau board of directors, Florida Citrus Mutual board of directors, Polk Citizens for Good Government Steering Committee, alternate for Polk County Planning Commission, Polk County Farm Labor Housing Steering Committee.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'We have a lot of good things to come, a lot of new business. With USF Polytechnic coming, that will be huge. A lot of people underestimate the potential that has.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'Agriculture will continue to be huge. Agriculture in general makes a \$4.5 billion economic contribution to the county.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'Greening (a bacterial disease that harms citrus trees) is the biggest challenge we're facing right now. We have a lot of money that is being spent on research right now ... Right now we're just in a management mode, trying to keep the infections down in the grove. This is challenge No. 1 and I think we'll have some good solutions in 10 years.'

Tracy Collins | 39 | Principal of Lakeland High School

Personal history: Collins was born in Pekin, Ill. Her family moved to Lakeland in 1978, but left not long afterward. The family returned in 1982. She attended Scott Lake Elementary School, Mulberry Middle School and Mulberry High School. She went to Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, earning a degree in biology and chemistry with a focus on molecular genetics. She worked as a cancer research scientist at Friends Medical Science Research at Bay Pines Veterans Administration Clinic. She and her husband lived briefly in North Carolina before settling in Lakeland in the mid-1990s. Her first job in education was as a science teacher at Lake Wales High School. She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of South Florida in Tampa, and in 2003 became assistant principal of curriculum at Lakeland High. She became principal in 2008. She is married and has two sons.

Community involvement: Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE)

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I hope what it brings is a group of kids who are ready to work in this new technical age, kids who can do all the things that will be required of them to be successful in the workplace, like the multitasking and technology. With USF Polytech, hopefully they can get educated here and stay here.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: 'Our field is going to supply the manpower. Part of what I want to do is make people feel good about schools and education, but I also want to make them feel good about Polk County. What I want is for the people who come through here to have good feelings about the area so they stay here.'

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'I think with the increased accountability by the state and federal government, and the decrease in funding that we're receiving, it makes our job more difficult than ever before. But I also think that as a county, our county office supports us more than ever before. There are more and more challenges. One of the challenges is finding qualified people to come in and teach our students.'

Ryan Gonzales | 32 | Creative director for the Florida headquarters of The American Legion in Orlando, commander of Web-based American Legion

Post 208.

Personal history: Gonzales was raised in New York, but moved to Lakeland after high school to be with his father. He served in the Marines for four years and in 2005 earned a degree in graphic design from Keiser University in Lakeland. He also works as a freelance artist for his company, Creative Genius, and is an adjunct instructor for Keiser University's graphic arts program. He now lives in Winter Haven. He is unmarried and a father of three.

Community involvements: His position as post commander is voluntary. He also serves on the advisory board for Keiser University and does work for American Legion's Heroes to Hometowns, a transition program for severely injured service members returning home.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think we're going to see some growth. I think Keiser University's Lakeland campus is being considered the No. 1 graphic arts program in the state. I think we'll see some good students coming out of that. I think we'll see an influx of creativity in the area. We will continue to help our veterans. We're going to see the (Department of Veterans Affairs) grow.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'I think me, personally, as a younger leader in an older organization, I've been able to refresh the organization through technology. That will help keep us more current, which is something it hasn't been.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'Everyone needs to have a graphic artist. I think that through the changes in technology, my field will become more and more demanding. We're going to continue to spread the word about my organization and it will continue to grow.'

Rachel Hollis | 31 | Principal manager of Dunson-Hollis Consulting, which handles events for corporate clients and nonprofit agencies. Hollis operates the business in partnership with Lisa Dunson.

Personal history: Hollis was born and raised in Lakeland. Her grandfather, Curtis Walker, served as mayor of Lakeland in 1978. A graduate of George Jenkins High School, she went on to graduate from the University of Florida with a degree in public relations. She worked for five years at Florida Southern College in the development office. She has also worked for the United Way of Central Florida and the Community Foundation of Greater Lakeland. She is married.

Community involvement: Junior League of Greater Lakeland, board member and volunteer for Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE), Kiwanis, steering committee of EMERGE Lakeland.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'Great things are happening in Polk County. The county is growing and expanding and with USF Polytechnic being

built, there will be lots of opportunities for everyone. It's a neat time to be here.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: Even with the slow economy, Hollis sees consulting firms such as hers as the wave of the future. Companies are being forced to be cost-conscious, and because of that they are interested in what companies such as Hollis's can provide, thus saving them overhead costs.

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'I see there being even more consultants. From our research we've found a lot come in from out the area. That's a high cost to businesses to bring them in. Lisa and I know the community, we live here. What we do affects quality of life here, and it affects us, too. People from out of the area are not as invested as we are.'

Deric Feacher | 33 | Assistant to the city manager of Winter Haven and director of support services, which oversees the city's fleet and facilities, marketing, internal and external communications and city-owned property.

Personal History: Born and raised in Winter Haven, Feacher graduated from Winter Haven High School in 1995 and then from Bethune Cookman College in 2000 with degrees in political science and public administration. Feacher, who is married and has one child, is planning to go to graduate school to study either public administration or education. His ultimate goal is to be a school teacher.

Community Involvement: Feacher sits on the board of directors for the Greater Winter Haven Area Chamber of Commerce, Polk Vision and the Corporate College at Polk State College. A graduate of the chamber's Leadership Winter Haven program, he is a member of Leadership Polk Class III. He is active in his church, Hurst Chapel AME. He hopes to begin a mentoring program for young people who are having difficulty in school but show potential.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: Feacher considers Polk County to be suburbs of Tampa and Orlando, and sees that as a positive thing. Polk is strategically placed to be a hub for the technology and medical fields, thanks in large part to USF Poly. 'What can be brought through the corridor will benefit us,' he said. 'People can work here and have access to major cities.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'Winter Haven has gone from a small retirement community to one that can provide many services,' Feacher said. But he warns that the city must have the necessary business components in place to keep it vibrant. Winter Haven needs to have the atmosphere of being a place where people can live and work. 'I think community-minded individuals realize there has to be a sense of place so your kids want to stay here.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: Feacher sees continued growth for East Polk and Winter Haven, with an expansion of the tax base through technology and medical field expansion. Much of this stimulus will come from the expansion of

Polk Community College into Polk State College and its expanded mission. 'I want to be a part of it in some form or fashion. As long as I live here, I will be part of a city moving forward.'

Jerome Ferson | 37 | Publisher of The Ledger

Personal history: Ferson graduated from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minn., with majors in management and organizational behavior. Ferson's career in newspapers began 21 years ago. In July 2007, he became the 11th publisher of The Ledger. He is married and has two daughters.

Community involvement: Director on the boards of the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Central Florida and Lakeland Economic Development Council; serves on the advisory boards for the Community Foundation of Greater Lakeland, Bartow Regional Medical Center and VISTE; graduate of Leadership Lakeland Class XXVI; Leadership Polk Class III.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'Education outcomes in Polk County will have improved substantially as a result of dedication and collaboration across the spectrum of public, private and nonprofit sectors. Health care and the broader life sciences cluster will flourish. We will establish a stronger presence in advancing technology, especially in logistics as USF Polytechnic hits its full stride. With improvements in education and economic developments, the poverty rate in Polk County will have improved and be better than the United States average. Mass transit, both for public and freight, issues will be mostly resolved and a comprehensive statewide plan will be in the process of being implemented.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'The media will continue to play an essential role in the ongoing development of the community, from giving a voice to under-represented populations to helping the community develop a broad, shared understanding of the decisions it will face along the way. As change in the community accelerates, we will be on the scene to chronicle developments as they happen and disseminate them in credible fashion to readers around the county and beyond.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'Like Polk County, the next 10 years will be a period of great transformation in the media industry. Fortunately, we're in the information business and information will continue to be in high demand, especially credible information consumers can trust in an increasingly splintered world. Our business model and products will evolve and adapt to changing market conditions.'

Sherry Kelley | 39 | Senior vice president and retail branch administrator for Citizens Bank & Trust

Community involvement: Auburndale Chamber of Commerce, Hartridge Academy Elementary, Auburndale Rotary.

Personal history: Kelley was born in Winter Haven and now lives in Auburndale. She attended Auburndale High School, Polk State College and the University of South Florida, earning a degree in business administration with a minor in management. She is married and has two sons.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'USF Polytechnic will make a big difference. I think we will see more industry move this way. Frostproof is a target on the east side of Polk County. There is a lot of land available and it is right in the center between the areas that need transportation. There's also easy access to U.S. 27. Certainly, in the next several years I hope we'll improve the economy.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: 'Certainly banking is a part of any industry. As a community bank, we're seeing more and more people as there are problems with the big banks. We're seeing more people put their trust in smaller banks that are locally owned and locally managed. Community banking will be even more intriguing for the consumer than it is today.'

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'In the last 10 years, we've grown tremendously with technology. I do think that we'll improve the ability to do more online and from home. You can do just about anything online now, but we'll get sharper as time goes by. Ten years from now, the folks who will be doing banking will be the kids who have grown up with nothing but the computer.'

Antionette Kirby | 30 z\ Assistant principal at Auburndale Central Elementary

Personal history: Kirby grew up in Miami. She received a bachelor's degree in marketing with a minor in sociology, and a master's degree in early childhood education from Florida State University. She came to Polk County five years ago, teaching first grade at Kathleen Elementary. This is her first year as an assistant principal. She is a doctoral candidate in early child hood education at the University of South Florida. She is married and has one daughter.

Community involvement: Harmony Baptist Church, Omicron Kappa Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, Polk County Panhellenic Council.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think Polk will continue to increase diversity. There will be increased growth because of the abundance of land and the improvements our school system has made. More people will escape from the bigger cities because of our small-town feel. There are a lot of business opportunities. If we look at other areas, we see how construction has decreased. If you drive around Polk County, there's still a lot of construction going on here. Big cities have run out of space.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: 'Within Polk, I think we do a great job of addressing diversity in our schools. As we see an increase in the number of kids coming to Polk, schools will grow and make people feel welcome.'

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'I see changes to the No Child Left Behind Act. We're going to have a refocusing on student achievement and increasing student achievement. No Child Left Behind says that in 2013-2014, 100 percent of students will be proficient in reading and math. That's something that may not happen. When we come to that deadline, I think we'll see some changes in the law to reflect more realistic goals.'

Lleana Kniss | 29 | Vice president of professional development, Community Foundation of Lakeland

Personal history: Born in Puerto Rico, Kniss moved to Lakeland at age 7. A graduate of Lakeland High School and the University of Central Florida, she is married and the mother of two children. Kniss has been with the Community Foundation for three years, serving in several positions before taking her current job. She also worked at the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce in public affairs and member relations before joining the foundation.

Community involvement: Member of the outreach and steering committees for Lakeland Vision, member of EMERGE Lakeland, served on the community investment team for United Way.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: When the new USF Polytechnic campus is up and running, there will be more opportunity for higher-paying technology jobs, which in turn will keep Polk's young professionals here, Kniss said. Meanwhile, the Lakeland visioning process will continue gathering information on ways to improve the quality of life here, which also will appeal to young professionals. With downtown Lakeland continuing to develop, 'there's lots of good things happening.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: Kniss works with professional financial advisers, certified public accountants and lawyers to encourage and promote philanthropy and using the Community Foundation is a means to do that. This work will continue, Kniss said.

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: The foundation's endowment will continue to grow, Kniss believes. 'Each year we fund from what we have, and more will donate as the economy gets better. Then, we will be giving out to the community.'

Terrie Lobb | 32 | Owner and president of Bartow-based Terrie Lobb Catering Inc.

Personal history: A graduate of Auburndale High School and the Culinary Academy of Lakeland, she has lived in Haines City and Lakeland, but moved to Bartow in 1998 when her husband moved his law practice there. That year she opened a cafe, The Docket. Two years later she started her catering business. It is located in what used to be the kitchen for Bartow Memorial Hospital.

Community involvement: Member of the Bartow Chamber of Commerce and past chairwoman of the Bartow Redevelopment Agency, has served on several local business panels such as the marketing partnership and the annual events committee.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I see us growing. I'm very excited about what's going on between Clear Springs and Mosaic. There are a lot of great opportunities here. Lakeland is always growing, too. There is so much going on, I don't plan on going away ever.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: The catering industry is very competitive in Polk, Lobb said, which indicates a need for the service. Having been able to grow her business to where it now employs 16 full-time and 20 part-time workers, she is able to cater events ranging from wedding receptions to corporate meetings.

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: As with nearly every industry, the economy has affected Lobb's business. While she expects a decline in business in 2010, in the long run she sees growth returning and business improving. 'We're in a prime spot to continue growing.'

Chris McLaughlin | 36 | Owner of four Keller Williams Realty offices in Lakeland, Winter Haven, New Tampa and Tampa's Channelside district.

Personal history: McLaughlin was born in Lakeland. He graduated from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he was student body president. He also earned a law degree and master's degree in business administration from Georgetown. He founded the Loss Mitigation Training Institute LLC, which focuses on short sales and pre-foreclosure training. Prior to real estate he was the founder and president of SmartPortfolio.com Inc., an online newsletter company. The company was sold in December 2000 to TheStreet.com. He is married and has three children.

Community involvement: Lakeland Downtown Development Authority, Peace River Center Advisory Board, Polk Museum of Art's board of trustees, Lakeland Association of Realtors board of directors, Polk County Charter Review Commission, Lakeland Advisory Board for Citizens Bank & Trust.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'It will be a continuation of our strengths: medical and distribution will dominate and we'll see more niche tech business begin to flourish with USF Polytechnic. I think our core strength will always be our location, with well north of 8 million people all within 100 miles of our area.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'Housing looks exceptional for the future. Our cost of living is much lower in Polk than it is around the state, so affordable housing will be a centerpiece of why industry wants to locate in our area. Because Polk's future is directly tied to its excellent location, our industry will benefit from

being close enough to all the fun and excitement without all the hassles of a big city.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'I see significant inflation in the next 5 to 10 years, which will hurt homeowners' ability to obtain financing nationwide and in Florida. You can't just print money and think that you don't have to pay it back, so overall the residential housing industry will have its challenges in the coming years just as it has now. With that said, it is always location, location and location and we in Polk County have an excellent location. So when interest rates are at 8 percent to 12 percent in 10 years, I think Polk County's more affordable housing will catch the eye of those thinking Tampa or Orlando. So we should benefit from that.'

Ashley Metts Miller | 27 | Volunteer coordinator for Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE), also handles the agency's marketing and public relations.

Personal history: Born and raised in Lakeland, this Lake Gibson High School graduate then went on to Florida Southern College, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in advertising in 2008. While at FSC, she interned at VISTE, which led to a job. She married in November.

Community involvement: Advisory board for Student Action Generates Awareness (SAGA) at FSC. She also sings in a band, The Rogues, which used to be called the Canadian Rogues and featured her late father as lead singer. He died in 1996 and she took his place. The band sings at parties and fundraisers.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I see a lot of growth. I see us being a place where people want to come. Growing up, people could hardly wait to get out of here. I was the odd person out, I always wanted to stay. Plus I think we're in the perfect location, between Tampa and Orlando. We're close to everything.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: 'People are living longer and as the population ages, needs continue to grow. Our average client's face is changing, and getting younger. Now people will come in on their 65th birthday just to get food assistance. They're signing up right away. I see us reaching out. There is a need for services in places like Lake Wales, Haines City and Lake Hamilton. We get calls from areas we don't serve.'

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'Growth. We're going to have to meet those needs. We've got to grow on the volunteer side, gathering more resources. We are so lucky to have the resources we have, but we're going to have to reach further into the community. We need more exposure to become a household name.'

Cory Petcoff | 31 | President of Baron Realty, a commercial, office and

retail real estate firm.

Personal history: Petcoff graduated from Lakeland High School in 1996. He earned a degree in business administration from Stetson University in 2002. He is married and a father of two.

Community involvement: Serves on the boards of the Peace River Center, Polk Theatre and the Lakeland Association of Realtors, also on the vestry at All Saints Episcopal Church in Lakeland.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'It's hard to talk about the future of Polk County without considering USF Polytechnic. That is the biggest thing for Polk in my lifetime just for its sheer economic impact. Students who graduate from there and keep their businesses here will change the base of Polk's economy.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: Commercial real estate falls in line with employment levels, Petcoff said. And while the industry is soft right now, Petcoff thinks the future is bright. USF Polytechnic will help provide Polk with an educated work force, which is what employers want. Population growth will spur growth in retailing.

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'The long term looks promising. The short term, the next 12 months, will be painful, and bring with it some challenges. But real estate always does well over the long term.'

Mike Potthast | 37 | Owner of Potthast Studios.

Personal history: Potthast was born and raised in Winter Haven. He graduated from Winter Haven High School and studied photography at Daytona State College. He also earned a business management degree at Warner University. He returned to Winter Haven in 1995, and took over the studio from his father, Bill, in 1999-2000. He is married and has two daughters.

Community involvement: Winter Haven Hospital Foundation, Save Our Homeless Pets, Main Street Winter Haven, city of Winter Haven Downtown CRA.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think there's a lot of development we're open to on the east side of the county. I think Central Florida is in a position to develop into the next generation of Florida's economy. I am uncertain of what industries that might be, but I think for the most part we have an open canvas. We can create what we want in many areas.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'I think the small businesses are the backbone for the community. I think the small businesses will be poised to help even bigger ones that come in and set up shop.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'I think our focus is going to be on maintaining the quality business that we've been for the last 40 years. We're going to continue the quality of work we've been doing. My goal would be to be able to continue to bring my studio up to the level of what the larger studios in bigger markets are able to handle. I would like to attract the agencies and companies that usually automatically look to the larger markets such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta for talented image makers. I already travel a bit to go to them, but would like to bring the studio work here. I will continue to learn the latest imaging technologies.'

Tamara Sakagawa | 36 | Title: Community Redevelopment Agency manager for the city of Lakeland. The city has four Community Redevelopment Areas and Sakagawa manages three of them, including Downtown, Mid Town and Dixieland.

Personal history: Sakagawa grew up in San Diego. She obtained a degree in environmental design with an emphasis on architecture from the University of California Berkeley and a master's degree in city planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was hired as Lakeland's CRA coordinator in 2002 and later was named manager of three CRAs in the city. She is married and has two children.

Community involvements: Member of the Downtown Kiwanis Club, active with the Florida Redevelopment Association, a trade association.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: As the name suggests, a Community Redevelopment Agency tends to concern itself with existing areas of the city, not new development. From this perspective, Sakagawa thinks the current economic downturn gives the city a 'great opportunity to promote and re-enforce the long-term value of being in the core of the city.' Sakagawa wants to focus on beefing up existing neighborhoods, stabilizing and then increasing overall value. Connectivity is a major issue for her. That encompasses using and improving sidewalks and streets linking different parts of the city to make walking and bicycling more attractive.

How her field will fit into Polk's future: Sakagawa said the strength of the county lies with the uniqueness of its cities. 'It's easy for Tampa and Orlando to be dismissive of us, but in reality we are in the middle of Central Florida and that in itself commands some degree of attention. We do not want to become Orlampa, we don't want to spread out. When visitors come into town they are stunned by the level of public and private investment and the quality of amenities we have. We have to keep that but we also need to provide additional opportunities for people who want to live downtown, to be in the core. And for that we need job and housing opportunities. '

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'The past performance of development and sprawl and the lack of growth management as perceived by the

public benefits the concept of redevelopment, which is using and capitalizing on existing infrastructure in the core of cities. How we improve what many complain about — traffic, cost of homes, etc. — all feed back into being more responsible in how we grow; redevelopment instead of sprawl.'

Kyle Story | 28 | Executive vice president of The Story Companies

Community involvement: Ducks Unlimited, American Farm Bureau, Citrus Advisory Committee, Lake Wales Family YMCA, graduate of Leadership Lake Wales, bank advisory committee at Citizens Bank & Trust, Polk County Farm Bureau board of directors, Scenic Highway Focus Group for the county commission, Southeast Polk Selected Area Study for the county commission

Personal history: Story was born in Lake Wales and attended Lake Wales High School. He went on to study at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville and Polk State College, though he didn't graduate. When he returned to Polk County, he worked for The Story Companies in the harvesting division and office. Previously, while in high school, he had worked in production. He is a third-generation commercial citrus grower. He is not married.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think that we're going to need to see more jobs in order for us to grow. We must see more jobs and more businesses either migrate into Polk or sprout out of Polk from individuals already here. From improving the job market, we can start to recover the housing market, but it has to happen in that order.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'The agriculture industry in Polk has a very long history. I think that's going to continue. I think our core values and beliefs in growing food for our country and others will continue. I think we'll be here for a very long time. I don't know if we're going to expand. There was a study recently that said we still basically have the same impact we had eight years ago. I think we're going to stay on that same track.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'I think we're going to see a more compact industry. We'll see a lot of smaller growers not be able to afford the production costs that we have. I think that we will be able to keep a significant amount of acreage in production, but I think it's going to be a less number of growers.'

Indira Sukhraj | 28 | Sukhraj teaches environmental science and honors biology at Lake Region High School in Eagle Lake.

Personal history: Born in Canada, Sukhraj moved to Polk County as a child and completed her education here. A graduate of the International Baccalaureate School in Bartow, she graduated from the University of North Florida in 2004 with degrees in psychology and biology. She currently is taking graduate courses at the University of South Florida. She is not married.

Community involvements: As befitting her occupation of teaching biology and environmental science, Sukhraj is active in various environmental organizations around Polk County. These include the Lakes Education/Action Drive and Keep Lakeland Clean and Beautiful organizations. She volunteers at the Discovery Center at the Circle B Bar Reserve and often takes students there to visit and conduct laboratories.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'We're making a lot of progress in Polk County. The county is working with the School Board to bring students out of the classroom to the environment where they can study it.'

How her field will fit into Polk's future: With Polk continuing to have a prominent stake in citrus, cattle and other agriculture, understanding how the county's ecosystem works is vital, Sukhraj said. As a new generation of owners take over the family agriculture business, they will be learning how to do things better.

What the next 10 years will mean for her field: 'In education, hopefully we'll increase the number of students interested in science. Students are always interested to hear what others are doing. So if we can get some students talking about science, it will pique the interest of others. We'll need to show them the impact science has on daily life. It isn't something you leave in the classroom.'

Name: Justin Troller | 32 | Lakeland city commissioner since 2008, teacher at Lakeland High School where he helps coach the wrestling team and the junior varsity football team.

Personal history: Born in Jersey City, N.J., Troller moved with his family to Lakeland when he was 11 years old. He graduated from Lakeland High School in 1995, from Polk State College in 1999 and from the University of South Florida in 2003 with a degree in political science. He is studying for his master's degree in educational leadership at USF. He is not married.

Community involvement: Graduate of the Lakeland Police Academy, former president of the academy's alumni association, member of Historic Lakeland, Polk Museum of Art and Read Lakeland.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: Troller sees Polk's population increasing and he envisions the east-west 'disconnect' being mended, referring to the rivalry between Lakeland in the west and municipalities in East Polk. 'Then we can work together as a region to benefit all citizens.' Troller sees Lakeland expanding its borders and improving the quality of life for its residents. 'We're a progressive city. And being that, we have to advance with the times. We have to get with the technology and use our resources wisely.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'The City Commission needs to be a leader. People lead busy lives and they elect representatives to do government work for them. It's our responsibility to go to the public and show what others are doing to

be more effective. Automated garbage collection is an example. We can reduce pick up to once a week, and reduce the staff through attrition. That's spending taxpayer money efficiently.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: Troller wants to stay in public life and serve 'in any capacity that people elect me to. I hope I'm still in elected office. If so, that means I'm doing a good job,' he said. Thanks to term limits, Troller thinks the face and outlook of the commission will change as new people with different perspectives get elected.

Anthony Troutman | 28 | Head junior varsity football coach, assistant track and field coach, and world history and special education teacher at Kathleen High School

Personal history: Troutman grew up in Lakeland, attending George Jenkins High School and graduating in 1999. He went on to study at Polk State College and the University of South Florida, where he earned a degree in interdisciplinary social science in 2005. He is soon to be married to Tuesday Murray and to become a stepfather. He has several nieces and nephews that he thinks of more as his own children.

Community involvement: Fellowship of Christian Athletes; Male 2 Men, a men's ministry; Clint Wright Foundation, a scholarship program; Education and Enlightenment, a group that organizes education events for youth in Lakeland; Gow Fields' mayoral campaign.

What the next 10 years will bring for Polk County: 'I think we're headed for a county where there's going to be a lot of opportunity for many different types of people in many areas.'

How his field will fit into Polk's future: 'I think education is going to make or break Polk County in the next 10 years. If you don't have it, you won't be involved in the opportunities that are out there.'

What the next 10 years will mean for his field: 'I think there's going to be a lot more state involvement in education, more than there is now. I think there are a lot more people not wanting to take responsibility for the education or lack thereof of individuals. I think the state feels it has to do certain things to ensure quality education. I think teachers are going to have to be more creative with how they help students on top of the state mandates that are going to take place.'

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