

Health department head out

Steven Mitnick resigns for unspecified reasons

By JOSH SALMAN, STAFF WRITER

Charlotte County Health Department Administrator Steven Mitnick has resigned for unspecified reasons. The longtime organization head had come under recent fire from Charlotte County commissioners because of what they said was his inflexibility with the health department's budget and a proposal to end primary care at the satellite office in Englewood. Some commissioners even wrote letters last month to the Surgeon General's Office in Tallahassee requesting his dismissal.

Mitnick could not be reached for direct comment Monday. The resignation took effect Nov. 12. "The staff and I have always viewed the public as our investors and customers, and we strived everyday to exceed your expectations," Mitnick said in an e-mail he sent to the Sun. "I am very proud of the accomplishments your health department has achieved over the past five years, and I leave knowing you have a superior health department."

Mitnick had been serving as administrator of the Charlotte County Health Department since October 2005, moving into the permanent post a year later. During that time, he expanded primary care to all parts of the county, developed a low-cost dentist clinic, and helped the organization move into a new 47,500-square-foot home facility on Loveland Boulevard in Port Charlotte.

Mitnick worked for the Lee County Health Department before joining Charlotte. He was given an 85 percent on his evaluation in 2009, according to the most recent records available. He earned about \$89,125 annually, according to public records.

The Florida Department of Health has appointed longtime DeSoto County Health Department Administrator Mary Kay Burns to the interim position Monday.

"My disagreement with Mitnick was when he was playing politics with health care, but I was shocked to see him resign," Commissioner Robert Skidmore said. "I think this will be a positive change. The advantage I see here is we can really begin to foster a relationship with the new administrator."

Commissioners have expressed concern with Mitnick's leadership of the health department, and said the position is better suited for a physician. Mitnick is a nurse practitioner with a master's degree in business administration. They also believe the health department could have sought further cuts to its budget, which is partly funded through property taxes.

Some commissioners even criticized Mitnick's decision earlier this month to force the department's environmental health administrator to retire after he reduced septic inspection fees for a handful of struggling residents who couldn't afford the levy.

"I was hoping we would see a change," Commission Chairman Bob Starr said. "I have worked with Mr. Mitnick on several areas I thought we needed improvement, and I don't think we were making the progress we needed to make. I think this will be beneficial for the county."

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