

# MELVIN P. "MEL" PONDER

## QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

### LEADERSHIP ■ EMPOWERMENT ■ COMMUNICATION ■ COMMUNITY OUTREACH ■ STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Accomplished leader with demonstrated success in establishing, building, growing, and managing team relationships across various sectors, including government, education, tourism, finance, economic development, and non-profit.

I have 10+ years of finance, marketing, sales, and management experience with Fortune 500 companies having achieved national and regional honors, and 13+ years in local and state government having held several leadership positions.

I am committed to advocating for and championing institutional excellence and individual success with the skill to build consensus and support among community leaders and members, key local and regional stakeholders, and the local, regional and statewide academic and professional community. I believe my skill set and experience will yield results that will honor the leadership and opportunities in others.

## CORE COMPETENCIES

- Staff Leadership/Development
- State Appropriation Process
- Economic Development
- Policy Development/Implementation
- Revenue Generation/Cost Reductions
- Administrative/Operations Oversight
- Relationship Management
- Budget Development
- Financial Management

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### **EMERALD COAST ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS – Fort Walton Beach and Santa Rosa Beach, Florida** 2020 – Present *Association Executive*

Responsible for managing, staffing, budgeting, and administering all aspects of a 5,400 Member Association supporting the real estate industry within Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Coordinates with both the National Association of REALTORS® and the state association, Florida Realtors. Serves as Liaison to Association Board of 15 for guidance, direction and recommendations on policies, procedures, and budget. Also ensures that Association recordkeeping is up to date according to the bylaws, and that spending stays within the annual budget. Works with Association Treasurer on Association financials and budget forecasting. Works with Association President on all aspects of Association leadership and operation as well as preparation for Member Meetings.

#### KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:

- Was called upon to lead Association through transition of leadership
- Support role in 2022 Association Bylaws update and changes and 2023 Policies and Procedures updates
- Assisted in improvements to both our Leadership Development Program and other programs
- Onboarded new CFO, Staff Accountant, new Bookkeeping System, Government Affairs Director, and Marketing & Communications Director
- Helped strengthen relationships throughout northwest Florida and state
- Working with new Government Affairs Director on NAR grants options to partner with local governments
- Oversight of 20+ Committees and Staff Liaisons
- As Association Executive, attended both Florida Realtors and National Association of Realtors Leadership Summit, Education Summit and Legislative Summit (Tallahassee and Washington, DC)

### **EMERALD COAST ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS**

#### *Government Affairs Director*

Responsible for managing and administering local governmental affairs activities for the association in support of the real estate industry within Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Liaison for Association Public Policy and Realtor PAC Committees. Coordinated with both the National Association of REALTORS® and the state association on fundraising and policy efforts.

- Helped lead successful record-breaking local fundraising campaign as part of Florida Realtors PAC
- Helped screen local candidates for multiple local elections – city and county within both Okaloosa and Walton Counties
- Built and maintained relationships with all local and state elected officials
- Advocated for local and state Realtor priority policies on private property rights and home ownership

**COUNTY COMMISSIONER, OKALOOSA COUNTY – Okaloosa County, Florida**

2020 – Present

***Commissioner, District 5***

Elected to serve as an Okaloosa County Commissioner in November 2020. I have the honor to serve as 1 of 5 Commissioners providing oversight to the various areas within Okaloosa County, including:

- Adopting an annual budget (over \$500 Million) to control County fiscal year expenditures, levies taxes and issues bonds
- Adopts County ordinances, resolutions, and rules of procedure
- Works with staff leadership on comprehensive plans for development of the County
- Works with staff on zoning and business regulations necessary for public protection
- Provides services related to the health, safety and welfare of citizens, parks and recreation, and waste collection/disposal
- Appoints members to and creates Boards, Authorities, Committees and Commissions as required by law

**KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Established and launched "BEST" – Benefitting Exceptional Students in Transition – 2021-Present
- Established and launched the Youth Leadership Council (partnership with the Okaloosa County School District) – 2021-Present
- Established and launched an Annual Commissioner's Prayer Breakfast (3 years)
- Advocated for state appropriations for County projects including infrastructure, special needs park, multi-purpose paths, mental health treatment, stormwater projects – all successful
- As Chair, we passed a 40-year Joint Use Agreement with the Department of Defense for our airport's joint use with the military at VPS – Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport

**LEADERSHIP ROLES AS A COUNTY COMMISSIONER:**

- Served as Chairman for the Board – 2022, and Vice Chair - 2021
- Served as Vice Chair of the Transportation Planning Organization 2021-2022
- County Liaison on Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition – 2021-2022, 2024
- Tourism Development Department Board Member – 2021
- County Liaison for Building Industry Association of Okaloosa and Walton – 2021-Present
- County Liaison for CareerSource Okaloosa Walton – 2021-2022
- County Liaison for the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee – 2024
- Served on Canvassing Board as part of the fall 2022 election cycle
- Board Member (Ex Officio and only county representative) – Northwest Florida League of Cities – 2021-Present

**FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES – Okaloosa County and Tallahassee, Florida**

2016 – 2020

***State Representative, District 4***

Elected to the Florida House in November 2016 and served 2 terms. The Florida House is the Legislative branch of Florida's government, and I served in a chamber of 120 Representatives. I served on multiple Committees including Chair of Children, Families and Seniors, Vice Chair of Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Education Committee, Post Secondary Education Subcommittee, Health and Human Services Committee, Ways and Means Committee, Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, and Energy and Utilities Subcommittee.

**KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- 13 Bills signed by the Governor - including multiple bills benefiting veterans/military, including advocating for and championing HB75 authorizing Florida's State Colleges to waive fees for active-duty military. Others included: standing up a mental health diversion pilot in Okaloosa; reauthorization bill to keep VISIT FLORIDA as our state's tourism organization; setting up a statewide standard for those 14–21-year-old students with unique needs within Vocational Rehabilitation; enhancing key areas within our Child Welfare/Dept of Children and Families; and new policy for the state Tax Collectors to align heavy truck owners tag renewals with their birthdays.

- 7 Resolutions Passed off the House Floor - including protecting the Gulf Test Range; honoring the Okaloosa County SRO Program; bring awareness to abdominal injuries in youth football (in partnership with the Taylor Haugen Foundation); and honoring our Hidden Heroes (military spouses)
- 4 Road Naming Accomplishments for Okaloosa County - including General Bud Day, Mayor Randall Wise
- 16 Appropriations - including Northwest Florida State College (\$5.7 million) for building remodeling and Utilities Plant Upgrade; University of West Florida Cybersecurity Program (\$2.1 million), a new Okaloosa Mental Health Diversion Treatment Program, Okaloosa Technical College Welding Program expansion; Okaloosa County Overbrook Flooding; Okaloosa County School District Jump Start Program; Alternative Treatment Options for Veterans through University of South Florida (included Northwest Florida State as a potential recipient as part of funds); and Bridgeway Center – Mobile Access Teams and Telehealth.
- Triumph Gulf Coast – worked with the Northwest Florida House Delegation (now Senator Trumbull) and Senate Delegation to secure Northwest Florida's share of the \$2 Billion state award from the BP Oil Spill.

**LEADERSHIP ROLES WHILE IN THE FLORIDA HOUSE:**

- In my first term in the Florida House (2<sup>nd</sup> year), I was appointed Vice Chair of the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee which oversaw a budget of over \$8 billion.
- In my 2<sup>nd</sup> Term, I was appointed by House Leadership to be Chair of the Children, Families and Seniors Subcommittee, as well as a Deputy Whip
- Had the honor to serve as Chair of the Legislative Prayer Caucus all 4 years in the House

**RECOGNITIONS / HONORS:**

- Florida College Presidents Legislator of the Year
- Florida League of Cities Defender of Home Rule (Legislator of the Year)
- Northwest Florida League of Cities Legislator of the Year – 3 years
- Conservative Excellence Recognition
- Small Counties Coalition Support Recognition
- Florida Tax Collectors Legislator of the Year
- Florida Chamber of Commerce and Associated Industries of Florida "A" Rating

**MAYOR, CITY OF DESTIN – Destin, Florida**

2014 – 2016

***Mayor***

Elected to serve as Mayor of the City of Destin in spring 2014. Won election by being unopposed. The City of Destin operates under a council-manager form of government with seven at-large, elected Councilors and a Mayor. As Mayor, I approved the agenda, led and managed every Council meeting, and helped carry the vision of the city.

**KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- As Mayor, was able to institute a storyboard concept to memorialize annual accomplishments the city and Council achieved so not to forget them in later years

**RECOGNITIONS / HONORS:**

- Florida League of Cities – Florida League of Mayors Board (2 years)
- Previously - City Councilman, City of Destin: March 2002 – March 2006
- Honorary Commander: Air Force Research Laboratory, Eglin AFB (2015)
- 62nd National Security Forum Attendee - Air War College (2015)

**BUSINESS EMPOWERED – Destin, Florida**

2010 – Present

***CEO/President***

Established to build, connect, and encourage business leaders and individuals in their workplace and their community, and to equip them with tools and principles to excel in the marketplace. Responsibilities include membership and leadership growth and development; consulting, coaching and mentoring members; community outreach efforts; member visits; monthly meeting oversight, planning and coordination; and the day-to-day operations.

**KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Leadership luncheons hosted monthly with speakers, which have included Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis, Florida's Lt. Governor, Jeanette Nunez, Florida Supreme Court Justice (retired), Alan Lawson, and former Northwest Florida State College President, Dr. Devin Stephenson, among others
- Expanded with new chapters in Niceville, Florida and Canton, Mississippi
- Partnered with Fortune 500 firm, Thrivent Financial, to help work with local Account Executives in Savannah, GA, Tallahassee, FL and Ocala, FL to consider chapters in each of those locations
- Monthly recognition and honor of local elected officials, Okaloosa Sheriff's Department, Ocean City-Wright Fire Department, Fort Walton Beach Fire Department, Destin High School, and Rocky Bayou Christian School
- Have partnered and served to meet local needs of community at Destin Elementary School and Destin Middle School

**THE FLORIDA RESTAURANT & LODGING ASSOCIATION – Destin, Florida**

2010

***Director of Regional Marketing Programs***

Served as liaison and conducted meetings with VISIT Florida, BP's Gulf Coast C.O.O., legal counsel, State of Florida Emergency Management, and several marketing teams – as a result of the April, 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Result was strong teamwork approach and thought process in navigating through often tense situations.

**COASTAL VISION 3000/THE BEACH – Northwest Florida**

2008 – 2010

***Executive Director***

Responsible for all aspects of growing, managing, and budget oversight of a private, non-profit, regional organization. Hired and managed a staff of 2, volunteer network of 30+, and working with over 145 separate members.

**KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Part of support role to team which brought Southwest Airlines to Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport
- Started with 6 counties (Escambia to Gulf Counties) and was able to expand to 7 in order to include Franklin County
- Grew website to reflect regional tourism and highlights from each county
- Strong focus on unity within Northwest Florida and what united us and shifting mindsets of working with each other and not against each other
- Served as an Executive Committee Member as part of my role as Executive Director

**FINANCE, BANKING AND MORTGAGE EXPERIENCE – Destin, Florida**

1990 – 2008

**The Bank of Bonifay – Destin, Florida****Vice President – Relationship Banking and Mortgage Lending**

- Responsible for business development and managed, originated, and helped oversee and expand all operational and budget aspects of mortgage division.

**Countrywide Financial Corporation – Destin/Sandestin, Florida****Sales Manager**

- Originated, managed, grew, and oversaw all aspects of a retail satellite mortgage branch.

**RECOGNITION:**

- Mortgage production – Top 1% in nation in production volume – 2004 "Circle of Excellence Platinum"

**Morgan Stanley / Dean Witter – Pensacola and Destin, Florida****Financial Advisor**

- Investments, retirement planning, and business cultivation and development.

**RECOGNITION:**

- #1 in Southeast in new accounts and top 1% nationally in production (in my class)

**NON-PROFIT EXPERIENCE – Destin, Florida**

2012 – 2013

**Destin United Methodist Church and Life Center – Destin, Florida****Director of Facilities and Campus Activities**

Oversaw and managed all aspects of running a "Family Life Center" as part of the overall vision and mission of a local church. Managed a staff of 7 and volunteer network of 30+.

**SALES AND RETAIL EXPERIENCE**

1992 - 2002

**Destin Gift & Trading Company (Classic Cargo) – Destin/Pensacola, Florida  
CEO/President/Owner Operator**

Oversaw and managed all aspects of a privately held business – hiring, managing employees (up to 20), staff team building, marketing, cash flow, and purchasing and managing inventory.

**Hershey Foods – West Central Florida/Southern Alabama  
Headquarter & Territory Representative – Grocery Division**

Responsible for product sales, marketing, and retail placement at Headquarter and Route levels. Recognized nationally and consistently met and exceeded goals.

**EDUCATION**

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY – Tallahassee, Florida  
*Bachelor of Science in Finance*

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY – Lynchburg, Virginia  
*Masters of Arts in Executive Leadership (M.A.) – Accepted and Enrolling Soon*

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS & ENGAGEMENTS**

Florida Governor's Appointee: CareerSource Florida Board of Directors (*Present*) • Florida House Speaker Appointee: Florida Faith and Community Advisory Council (*Present*) • Florida Association of Counties Board of Directors (At Large - *Present*) • Florida League of Cities - Florida League of Mayors (*Previous*) • Florida House Speaker Appointee - Florida Defense Support Task Force (*Previous*)

*Member*: Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors (Ex Officio 2021-2024) • *Member* - Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce (2016-Present) • *Member*: Crestview Chamber of Commerce (2016-Present) • *Member*: Destin Chamber of Commerce (2016-Present)

Okaloosa Sheriff Task Force – Inaugural Destin Fishing Hall of Fame, Harvest House – Destin (*Previous Board and Board Chair*) • Thrivent Financial Community Board (Local - *Previous*) • Others, Inc /Hope Medical Clinic (*Previous*)

Co-Founder – Destin's Week of Blessings – 2024 was the 21<sup>st</sup> Year of Event

Event brings together area pastors and marketplace leaders to come together in an annual tradition of receiving the "Blessing" spoken over the city, marketplace, elected leaders, civic leaders, first responders, local businesses, and fishing community.

**PRESENTATIONS & PUBLIC SPEAKING**

*Keynote Speaker: Northwest Florida State College Fall Commencement 2022, Destin Chamber of Commerce, Crestview Chamber of Commerce, Walton Chamber of Commerce Leadership Walton Program, NWFSC - Leadership Okaloosa, Niceville Chamber of Commerce, Exchange Club Day of Valor, Tatissa Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Hospitality and Tourism Day in Tallahassee, BE "Best of Mississippi" Awards, Business Edge New Zealand, Business Empowered Niceville, Plew Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Destin Elementary, Destin Middle School Graduation, Okaloosa Veterans Treatment Court Graduation, Niceville Young at Heart, Crestview Chamber Board Installation – Charge to the Board, Okaloosa Republican Club, Niceville Chamber YPN, Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women Mental Health Summit*

*Other Speaking: Florida Chamber Military Defense and Veterans Opportunities Summit, Florida Department of Children and Families Annual Conference, Florida Coalition for Children, Florida Tourism Days*

*Panelist: Hope Squad – Niceville High School; Niceville Strong; Florida Association of Counties - Annual Conference, NWF LOC – Annual Meeting in Destin – Panelist with Mayor Wagner and Mayor Campbell*

*Ministering / Speaking: Multiple churches including Hope City Community Church, Oceans Church, Vision Church at Christian International, Immanuel Anglican, Destin United Methodist, First Baptist Destin, Shoreline Church, Impact Life Church, Destin Church of Christ, Ocala First United Methodist Church, Daytona Kingdom Family Church, Kingdom Life Worship and Training Center, Summit Church*

*Governor's Inaugural Prayer Breakfast, Legislative Prayer Breakfast Keynote Speaker (2 times), Florida Legislator Joint Session Opening Prayer (5 times)*

*Florida Realtors Spokesperson Training – March 2023*