



VILLAGER BACKSTORY



You may know Laura McLaughlin as the Early Voting Adopt-A-Precinct Chair for Hometown Civitan, but what you may not know is the former realtor and property investor once started her own business from the ground up in Jacksonville.



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

GETTING TO KNOW LAURA MCLAUGHLIN

Age: 72

Village: Collier

Spouse/Partner: None

Family: A brother, sister, niece, grand-niece and grand-nephew in West Virginia. A nephew in Kentucky.

Moved Here in: 2016

Moved Here From: Jacksonville

Favorite Villages Activities: Any social activity with her neighbors, including shared meals and card games.



Leah Schwarting



The Villages Daily Sun

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Laura McLaughlin is the kind of woman who leaps into the unknown.

McLaughlin's work ethic and strong organizational skills helped her lead Hometown Civitan volunteer teams to staff a Sumter County early voting location in the midst of a pandemic. The effort raised thousands for charity. But, before she came to The Villages, that work ethic and analytical mind helped her step out and create her own business as a Realtor and property investor.

McLaughlin, of the Village of Collier, was born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, where several members of her immediate family still live. She didn't start out in the property business, though.

Instead, she was hired by an industrial distributor that sold industrial products and had its home office in Charleston. While working for the company, she moved twice: first to Ohio and then to Jacksonville.

But it was then that she decided she'd had enough.

"I decided that I wanted to own my own business and that corporate life didn't suit me as well as I thought it would," she said.

McLaughlin, a self-described self-starter, never liked some of the policies and rules she had to follow. She didn't feel as motivated as she should have been to work in corporate life, and she wanted to become her own boss.

Leaving corporate America wasn't without risks, though — big ones. McLaughlin had to figure out her own insurance and, without a company contributing to her 401K, her retirement, too.

But, she decided, life was just too short not to take that risk, not to see what she could do on her own.

She didn't want to return to industrial distribution though.

So, McLaughlin set up shop as a Realtor and property investor.

"I had always innately had an interest in real estate," she said. "I couldn't wait to buy my first home."

By the time she branched out on her own, McLaughlin had bought and sold four homes one after the other. It was always a challenge to find the right home in the right neighborhood for her personally, and investing really became a passion.

When you own your own business you have to develop organizational skills, McLaughlin said. You have set loosely defined, if not finitely designed, goals.

You have to figure out how to solve problems, how to deal with tenants and contractors. You have to learn about tax law and budgeting, the whole 9 yards.

And if you don't develop those skills, or learn to deal with those things, you run into trouble.

But McLaughlin persevered. She bought homes on the edge of areas she thought were up and coming, and that included the Historic District.

Over time, Historic District homes increased in value because the area was quite

desirable.

"I tried to buy homes that I thought were well-priced of course, and most of those, because they were well-priced, needed help," McLaughlin said. "Big help, some of them."

Part of her work involved renovating homes, getting them to a place where people wanted to live in them. She was a general contractor, and hired subcontractors as needed.

The most difficult home she ever faced came to her after she bought it at a tax sale on the court house steps.

Saying that the home needed help was a bit of an understatement.

The home was boarded up. The city's homeless population was living in it, as well as under it. To stay warm, they lit fires, which damaged the home.

When McLaughlin came in, she had to renovate it from top to bottom or, more accurately, bottom to top, starting with its understructure.

It took her about a year and a half to get it ready, but, over the course of about 20 years, it

became one of her more valuable properties.

There were good days and bad days. She adored her job, and Jacksonville, channelling her passion into an active career.

"I got to the point, however, after being in real estate since 1996, in 2016, once again I decided I would like a change," McLaughlin said.

She was at the point where she could afford to hire a property manager in Jacksonville to manage her properties, so she did so and came to The Villages.

Anything you can think of that you might want to do is available here, she said.

And one of the things she wanted to do was join Hometown Civitan, which once more brought her hard-earned ski into play.

But while many of her old skills are staying sharp, she can't say which occupation is more difficult. One was a career, and the other is a volunteer position, two things McLaughlin said "you can't compare."