

Heroes of open government

Some of them learned how to burrow into government files and dig out essential information. And some of them are part of government, working tirelessly for the people's right to know. We're calling them all heroes, and you will, too. F2-4



Eight local "Heroes of open government" were profiled by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. They were people who used government records to effect change in their communities, as well as officials who worked toward greater openness and accessibility. The heroes were honored at a luncheon attended by notables that included the chief justice of the state supreme court, a U.S. Senator and a former governor of Georgia.

Sunshine Week

Keeping government open

Records fuel feud of UCF, resident

A neighbor and critic of growth relies on access to help in her battles with the school.

By DAVID DAMRON
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Shocked by how fast the University of Central Florida was growing near her home, semi-retired nurse Susan Eberle picked up the sword of Florida's open-meeting and records laws to challenge how the university expands.



EBERLE

In the years since, she has made herself a thorn in the side of university administrators, forcing them to document and justify their growth plans on paper and in public meetings. In the process, she also has demonstrated how "Government in the Sunshine" laws can enable one individual and her neighbors to make public officials take notice.

Eberle, 57, unearthed obscure

PLEASE SEE ACCESS, B7



When a local couple asked about the closing of a nearby fish hatchery, they found themselves stonewalled and overcharged, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Suspicious, they expanded their queries to salaries, benefits, and officials' travel, including an African safari, all of which are now under investigation. (left)



The Orlando Sentinel featured a former nurse who has been using public records laws to force administrators at the University of Central Florida to "document and justify their growth plans on paper and in public meetings."



Pudette and Lee Abright of Nelson County have collected stacks of documents in their struggle with the game department.

Fishing for answers

Facing resistance, a couple battles to open records

By GORDON HONEY
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

Lee and Pudette Abright didn't like how the state game department used \$1,000 dollars to keep a nearby fish hatchery open to visitors.

It seemed to them the department had squandered the money, and that made them suspicious.

So they made a simple request of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send us the salaries and benefits of all employees.

When they didn't get a straight answer, the Abrights started asking more questions.

Now, after two years and 80 e-mails, letters and Freedom of Information Act requests, the Abrights have shined some sunlight on expensive new programs and cuts in the department.

They also helped uncover an African safari that was partly funded by the state of \$22,000 by taxpayers, and they are raising more questions looking for more questionable expenses and policies.

Long careers in government are on the line, and

the game department is reeling. This is a story about a quiet, unassuming couple who incidentally took on a huge state government bureaucracy and won at every turn. It illustrates how the state's Freedom of Information Act is not just used by news reporters but also used by citizens who want to figure out what is going on in their governments.

The Abrights are unlikely opponents. He is a retired ornithologist from Richmond. She is a retired ecologist and sports psychologist who worked at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College of Virginia. They are a quiet couple who enjoy their retirement on Three Paddles Farm, a five-acre farm, a flock of guinea hens and about a half-dozen cats.

The farm is a 280-acre spread that backs up to the George Washington National Forest in the Blue

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