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Business

Winter Springs' attorney named as Florida's best

By Abraham Aboraya | November 21, 2007

WINTER SPRINGS - The city listed as the 33rd greatest city in the country to live can now add another notch to its list of awards as the city's attorney was awarded the top honor possible by the Florida League of Cities.

Anthony Garganese, a partner in the firm Brown, Garganese, Weiss & D'Agresta, was awarded the City Attorney of the Year in the Florida Cities of Excellence Awards Program at the Nov. 9 luncheon. Garganese, who serves as the city attorney for Winter Springs, Cocoa, Cape Canaveral and Orchid, was a finalist last year for the award and took the top honor home this year.

"This year when they announced my name, it was just surreal," Garganese said. "It was a real pleasant surprise."

Garganese has been living in Winter Springs since 1993 and dedicated his entire practice to municipal law that same year.

"I am honored and flattered about getting the award," Garganese said. "Fourteen years ago I dedicated my practice solely to municipal law, and to get this award is very fulfilling in that regard. To get the respect from the League of Cities, whom I tremendously respect, is very fulfilling."

Garganese has defended Winter Springs in court numerous times, and has defended the city of Casselberry's adult entertainment ordinances. He's had a case before the Florida Supreme Court, and defended the city of Cocoa's ordinance that forbids non-residents from speaking at meetings.

"That was a big case," Garganese said.

Garganese was appointed by the City Commission as attorney in 1999 by then-mayor Paul Partyka.

Garganese was one of two appointees, and said the process is more like an interview than bidding for a contract out.

"It's very personal in nature," Garganese said. "You're so hands on you do become like another member of the staff."

Winter Springs Mayor John Bush described Garganese as a valuable member of the city's team who has saved thousands of taxpayer dollars by keeping the city out of court.

"He's extremely confident in his knowledge of the law as it relates to the city, and he has a way of explaining it to lay people," Bush said. "You ask him a direct question and you get a direct answer. He'll tell you what he thinks."

"We also like him because he's a fighter," Bush said. "He doesn't like to lose. He feels strongly about his recommendations and, if the commission is willing, he'll carry the fight."

Bush said he is proud that Garganese won the award and said that it was another indication that Winter Springs is a great place to live.

"We're really proud of him and thrilled to death for him," Bush said. "He's a good guy: good father, good husband, all around a good person - not just a good attorney. We were just thrilled to death that he won."

Garganese wasn't the only Winter Springs staff member up for an award. City Clerk Andrea Lorenzo-Luaces was also a finalist for the city clerk of the year award.

"My guess is she'll win it next year," Bush said. "She's very highly thought of too. She does a good job."

Garganese is certified by the Florida Bar as a specialist in city, county and local government law. He was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1993, and can argue before the U.S. District Court, Middle District of Florida, U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit, the Supreme Court of Colorado and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Garganese has been married to Erin O'Leary for fourteen years. They have three daughters, ages 2, 4 and 6, and O'Leary is a specialized appellate lawyer at the same firm as Garganese.

"We put a lot of stock in him," Bush said. "What's even nicer is he lives in Winter Springs. We like that."