

Mayoral candidate motivated by duty

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MADEIRA BEACH - Miller Newton, once the guiding hand behind the Straight Inc. drug treatment program and an unsuccessful candidate for Congress, is aiming at a new public job - mayor of Madeira Beach.

Newton, 49, dropped out of local public affairs more than four years ago when he resigned as head of the Straight program in St. Petersburg. Since then he has been living in Madeira Beach and commuting to offices from New Jersey to California as the president and clinical director of a national chain of children's treatment programs known as Kids Centers of America.

Although Newton also has served on this city's Board of Adjustment for six years, he has kept a low profile in town politics.

That changed Monday. Mayor J. Kenneth Jacobsen called reporters to announce that he won't seek re-election after eight years as mayor and four additional years as a commissioner. Instead, Jacobsen announced that Newton, a man he has known from his work in the city, will run in the March 8 election.

Jacobsen said he chose not to run because he wants to spend more time with his family.

Reached at his office in New Jersey, Newton said he was urged to seek the job by Jacobsen and others and did so somewhat ``reluctantly.''

``The main reason I'm doing it is a sense of civic duty,''

 Newton said. ``We really have a quality government in Madeira Beach . . . and it is based upon having a city government that really supports the full-time professionals.''

Newton's only declared opponent to date is Hugh Lamont. The mayor's job is part-time and pays \$300 a month.

Newton admitted Monday that he has probably been to no more than one City Commission meeting since moving to the city in 1982. If elected, Newton said he will arrange to be present for commission meetings.

However, he said that in the city's present manager-commission form of government, he plans to fulfill his policy-making role as a member of the commission and allow the city administration to run the city on a daily basis.

``I'm not running against anybody,''

 said Newton. ``I want to stress again that (running for mayor) is not something I would have chosen to do for political reasons.'' He said he agreed to run for mayor only as a form of ``community service.''

A native of Tampa, Newton is an ordained Methodist minister and a former associate professor of education at the University of South Florida. He was appointed by Gov. Reubin Askew as Clerk of the Circuit Court in Pasco County in 1973, but left that post in 1976 to run for the U.S. House of Representatives.

He joined the Straight program in 1980 and rose to national clinical director before he resigned 1983 to work in the New York City area.

Kid Centers of America have three treatment centers across the nation and plans to open two more soon, said Newton. The centers treat youngsters for problems that range from drugs and alcohol abuse to eating disorders, he said.

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