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Chamber of Commerce begins search for CEO

Carlton Proctor
cproctor@pnj.com

The Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce's national search for a new leader got off to a running start Thursday when its search committee agreed on an ambitious new job description.

Chamber Chairman Blaise Adams said the committee is looking for a top executive with extensive experience in economic development to be the next chief executive officer.

Adams said he hopes to have a short list of candidates for the search committee to consider within the next six to eight weeks.

"We're looking for someone with especially strong recruiting skills," Adams, a Pensacola banker, said.

The new CEO will replace Evon Emerson who resigned last month after eight years at the Chamber's helm.

To find a new CEO, the Chamber has hired Palm Beach-based Jorgensen Consulting, an executive search firm specializing in economic development.

Joan Jorgensen, who founded the firm more than 20 years ago, met with the search committee for several hours last week, and said she came away with a clear definition of what kind of CEO the Chamber wants.

"The search committee was unanimous in wanting someone who has previous experience, has demonstrated strong economic development skills, has accomplished much and understands the industry where it is now and where it is going," she said. "In other words they want a person with a track record."

Search committee member Donnie McMahon, a Pensacola insurance executive, said the consensus was the successful candidate would have to be someone "who has a bunch of national contacts and a lot of success stories."

Jorgensen said her firm would fine-tune the search committee's job description over the next week and, after approval, begin advertising it nationally.

To that end, Jorgensen will take a look at the full list of community assets, including the University of West Florida, its military presence, tourism and health care industries.

"Pensacola has a lot of great assets and a terrific downtown," she said. "And it's a very affordable city."

McMahon said the search committee has not put a cap on the salary range for the new CEO, saying only that it will be competitive and include "incentives" based on performance.