

# More to Fulton County taxman than meets the eye

By Kristen Ristino

Northside Neighbor Staff Writer

In the evening, he likes to have a cigar and retire to his computer to work on several books he is writing.

By day, Arthur Ferdinand is the Tax Commissioner of Fulton County.

He defines his responsibilities as ensuring the revenue base to support the county. Before he took the position in 1997, Ferdinand described the county tax office as going through difficult times in the eyes of the public and producing a low tax collection rate.

Now, he said he is pleased that tax collections are up, the county reserve fund is fully funded and the bond rating is up. He said he also is pleased he convinced the county commissioners to take garbage collection fees off property tax bills so low income and senior citizens can more easily pay their property taxes.

"When I got here, sanitary fees were a danger to seniors when they couldn't pay a property tax bill that was primary sanitary fees," said Ferdinand. "In America, nobody loses a home if they can't pay a utility bill, and yet we had people here whose liens



Staff photo by Jonathan Curren

Fulton County Tax Commissioner Arthur Ferdinand has been appointed to a second term as the county's tax chief.

were sold and properties were sold because they couldn't pay garbage fees."

While pending legislation on the state and county levels swirls around the tax commissioner's powers, Ferdinand is business as

usual.

"I go home in the evenings feeling comfortable I have done the best I could for all of the people and that I treat everyone fairly and compassionately," said Ferdinand.

Ferdinand speaks from behind an executive desk in his office at the Fulton County Government Building on Pryor Street. The office is business-like with few personal artifacts, other than a mini-refrigerator that sits

behind his desk.

The refrigerator was a gift from his wife, Betty Jean, so he could eat healthy food from home, he explained. In the refrigerator were low calorie yogurts made with artificial sweeteners. Ferdinand, who was born on the island of Trinidad and still speaks with a West Indies accent, said he prefers real sugar like he used to eat on the cane as a child.

Ferdinand was a gifted student. He excelled in mathematics and physics at the London University system in the West Indies, and went on scholarship to the London University in England where he received a doctorate degree in theoretical physics.

He was brought to the United States by a professor and continued post-doctoral studies at Cornell University before accepting a position at IBM in New York State. He spent 25 years at IBM as a scientist, developer and a manager.

Having traveled the world for IBM, he was eventually transferred to Atlanta in 1987. Following early retirement and the publication of a graduate-level science textbook, his wife encouraged him to apply for the vacant tax commissioner position.

Ferdinand, now 62, and his

wife have been married for 34 years and have two grown children. Former Sandy Springs residents, Mrs. Ferdinand was the president of the High Point Civic Association and both were active in zoning issues. They now live in south Fulton County off Cascade Road.

Last autumn, County Manager Tom Andrews appointed Ferdinand to a second term as tax commissioner. The Fulton County Board of Commissioners approved his contract.

He is not opposed to legislation in the state Senate that would make his job an elected position, nor is he opposed to the challenge. Ferdinand said he would absolutely run for the office if the job of tax commissioner becomes an elected position.

"If I was elected I would do [the job] exactly the same because the responsibility would be the same, it's just who puts me in the position would be different," said Ferdinand.

Outside of the office, Ferdinand likes to travel to historic countries and has visited Greece, Rome, the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Mexico.

When his tax commissioner days are over, he plans to publish more books.