

DeLand City, Florida

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Founded in 1882, the central Florida city of DeLand boasts a rich cultural and educational heritage, including Stetson University, the state's oldest private college, and a downtown area listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Although the city's old-fashioned Southern charm endears it to residents and tourists alike, DeLand's Director of Information Services, David Watson, wanted to ensure its time and attendance process was cutting-edge.

In 2004, Watson and his team determined the old paper-based process, including some worn out time clocks, needed updating, and looked to technology to address the issue.

After visiting a time and attendance symposium, Watson knew he had a challenge on his hands. As a city government, DeLand is beholden to taxpayers to run as efficiently and effectively as possible. And even though time and attendance software was an obvious tool to make this happen, Watson also realized that with only about 400 employees, the city would be competing with multinational organizations and their thousands of users when it came to customer service.

DeLand issued a request for proposals for a new time and attendance solution in June 2005. A selection committee consisting of representatives from a variety of departments, including police, public works, recreation, fire, payroll, information technology, finance and development, was established to review applicants.

The committee short-listed three vendors from a field of 23 total respondents. They included Qquest, Kronos, and Perryman and Associates, a local distributor of Unitime Systems.

In evaluating the finalists, the committee was looking for a variety of features and capabilities. The solution needed to offer both desktop and time clock entry options, reporting capabilities, and be able to interface with the city's out-of-state payroll vendor. The group also wanted a cost-effective solution from a well-established vendor that offered great technical support—even to smaller customers.

After conducting in-person interviews with each vendor, and checking references, the group unanimously selected Qquest Software System's TimeForce, a simple yet powerful software system to collect manage and process employee time. "We looked very hard at all the finalists," said Watson. "One of the vendors we did not select is located just 30 miles from DeLand. But the bottom line was we just felt more comfortable with Qquest, and the cost difference was significant. Plus, their references were great."

As with any new software solution, the implementation process presented both technical and cultural challenges. To head off as many problems as possible, Watson and his team decided on a "walk, not run" strategy. They visited each department separately, conducted a presentation, and answered questions. They also rolled out the software to just one department at a time, starting with City Hall. They allowed a full month of run-time—or two pay periods—before moving on to the next department, which allowed the IT team to resolve issues before undertaking another project.

Employing a more personal approach also helped alleviate concerns some employees had about using their thumbprints as an identification verification method. "Some people were a little nervous about this," he said. "Because we took the time to walk each person through the process and

answer their questions, we were able to resolve most of their concerns almost immediately."

The team encountered their first hiccup during the early rollout period when they had to install the TimeForce software and database. "After hearing implementation horror stories from other organizations, including the customers of some of our RFP finalists, I was prepared for the worst," said Watson. "However, the important thing was that everything that came up was resolved quickly and well. Qquest did a great job at that."

By July, DeLand had rolled out TimeForce to just about every employee and every department. With over 300 users and 13 time clocks, the city has made significant progress toward streamlining its payroll process. "Automating time and payroll is already saving our people time, and giving them better information to make better decisions," said Watson.

One of the most obvious early benefits is that managers can easily identify and address exceptions, instead of having to wade through mountains of data after the fact. "Now, if someone is showing up late or not clocking out, we can catch it early," said Watson. "By taking care of these kinds of issues immediately, our managers can be much more effective."

Watson anticipates even more payoffs in the future. "Our rollout of Qquest's TimeForce has been really smooth and is working out well," he said. "And as employees and managers discover all the features it offers, including reporting, our experience will only get better."