



a visit with john klimm

BARNSTABLE TOWN MANAGER JOHN KLIMM HAS ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED in how government works. In 1981 at age 25, he was elected to Town Council and served four terms as a state representative. When he came back to his hometown as town manager, Klimm set out to repair the disconnect he felt existed between residents and government. Few towns competing for the National Civic League's All-American City Award reach the finals on their first try, let alone win. But in 2007, Barnstable found itself on top. "Civic engagement is really at the core of everything we've tried to do since I've been town manager," Klimm says.

BY MINDY TODD | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CUTRONA

MINDY TODD: You were elected as one of the youngest selectmen in the 1980s. What was that experience like?

JOHN KLIMM: I was the youngest selectman to ever hold office in Barnstable. We had a very popular board of selectmen and there was a tremendous can-do attitude in the 1980s. There was a lot of civic engagement. When I came back at the end of the 1990s, I could see and feel the difference, the disconnect. I came to understand it was really a national thing. Every year my staff and I do a citizen survey and are able to see trends. People are interested in their government and they care about their town and community; we just have to be more creative in terms of engaging them. So that's what we have been trying to do since 1999.

MT: What attracted you to the job of town manager? Many would think a state representative would be looking for a higher office.

JK: It was an honor being elected state representative. But the idea of coming back home and working on programs where you can start a project, see it to completion, and know the people that are being impacted by it is the greatest thrill in government. I am as excited today as when I started this job, and when that's over, it's over. People ask where will you be town manager next, and I never wanted to hold the position anywhere else. This is where my grandfather came from Denmark. It isn't about just being a



town manager; it's about being town manager in your home. This is my home.

MT: What would you say is your biggest accomplishment?

JK: If I left today, the thing I would be most proud of in terms of lasting impact is developing a management team that I know is the best in the state, if not in New England.

MT: Biggest regret?

JK: Not being able to deal effectively with the monumental issues, the 800-pound gorillas that are challenging every Cape community. Sewers, for example. It's going to cost a lot of money to solve the problem and those

resources don't appear to be there.

MT: Is that what you see as the biggest problem facing Barnstable?

JK: Facing the Cape. If we lose our coastal embayments and our waters become polluted, that's it. So, there's no doubt we are going to do it. We're either going to do it through the leadership in our communities or a federal court is going to do it like Boston Harbor.

MT: What are your hobbies?

JK: Golf, boating. I love sailing. I never sailed until about two years ago. It was just the most peaceful thing that I ever did. Now I own a sailboat.

MT: You were born, educated, and raised right here in Barnstable.

JK: We all wax nostalgic talking about how it was growing up. There was literally a change from night to day from

Labor Day to the day after. There has been such dramatic growth that it is fundamentally, in many ways, a different community. But sometimes we forget what makes Barnstable and Cape Cod special. Our beaches, our fun walks in the evening on Main Street; today many families are doing the same things I enjoyed doing as a kid. This still is a very special place. 🏠

Mindy Todd is the host of The Point, which can be heard Monday through Friday at 9:30 a.m. on the Cape and Islands National Public Radio stations, WCAI 90.1/ WNAN 91.1/ WZAI 94.3, a local service of WGBH Radio. Or, listen online at www.caiman.org.