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Business Management Principles Help Lance Olive ('13) Lead his Town

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Office of University
Communications

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Job of Mayor Requires Practical Knowledge and Interpersonal Skills

When Lance Olive ('13) decided to run for mayor of his hometown, Apex, N.C., he promised to be a leader that people could trust. Since his election in 2015, he has worked to provide vision and direction for the city council and represent the interests of residents. "I want to be an example of an elected official with strong ethics, deep knowledge and solid leadership," he reflected.

photo of Lance Olive

The job requires practical knowledge and interpersonal skills—from crunching numbers to being a good listener. Earning his Master's in Business Administration degree from Gardner-Webb University prepared him for these and other facets of the job. "Accounting was my weakest area coming into the MBA, and those classes gave me the tools I needed to understand fairly intimidating budgets," he observed. "Being mayor also means understanding people, and studying the basics of human motivation, psychological factors and individual interests enables me to meet people where they are."

Olive believes Apex is positioned for growth and needs a strong leader who can manage development while preserving the charm of the small town. On Money Magazine's 2015 list of best small towns in America, Apex was rated the No. 1 place to live. As a part-time mayor with several goals, Olive's top priorities are fiscal responsibility, preserving the downtown area, improving transportation, keeping jobs local, improving outdoor life and family safety.

Mayor Lance Olive and city officials celebrate

Apex, N.C., Mayor Lance Olive and city officials celebrate the town being named to Money Magazine's 2015 list of best small towns in America. Apex was rated the No. 1 place to live.

Olive also works full-time with Better Boards Inc. As the business operations director, he makes sure every project is incrementally profitable to the company. He began his career in the late '80s as a software engineer and moved into a management role. After managing engineers for five years, he decided to earn his MBA. "I wanted to build a textbook foundation to prop up my experience so I could understand the abstract principles of good management," he assessed. "My MBA classes also helped me to realize that being a leader means taking extra time to understand the roots of problems in order to discover the best solutions that may be outside the sphere of historical or traditional thinking."