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By [Adam Benson](#) The Bulletin

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Retiring UCFS president 'a hard act to replace'

NORWICH - As president and CEO of United Community and Family Services for 20 years, there is still one glaring weakness in Chuck Seeman's management style.

He's not good at sitting still. It's why he has never employed a secretary, and is more frequently seen in the hallways of one of UCFS's 14 sites rather than behind his desk.

"The culture of the organization takes on how the CEO really wants to operate it," Seeman, who will retire Jan. 1, said Monday. "For me, I wanted to make sure that we had a culture that valued and rewarded people. I wanted to make sure that people had a voice in the decision-making process, and I wanted them to know what they're doing and why they're doing it."

The former furniture store executive shifted into the lead role at one of the region's largest nonprofits in the middle of his career, guiding it through changes large and small that have had a profound affect on UCFS's business model and market share.

In the two decades Seeman, 61, has run UCFS, its budget has increased fivefold to \$25 million in 2014. And executives have managed to flip its revenue stream away from a primarily grant-funded system to one that receives much of its income from Medicaid and other fees for services.

"We are performing well operationally. Better to go out when things are running well, great senior management team in place, passionate staff, it's a good time for somebody to come in and advance the situation even further," Seeman said.

Economically, it's also a big player as Norwich's seventh largest employer as of January, with 252 full-time employees.

"We diversified to a point where we could control our future, and that's the key," Seeman, who lives in Norwich, said. "We knew that an economy that was deteriorating was going to impact the state and that the grants that come from the state were going to become much more competitive, they were going to fund less and I think become less reliable in the sense there would be less loyalty between state and contractor. Where we thought the state of the state was going was accurate."

During his annual reports to stakeholders, Seeman developed a reputation for delivering honest assessments of the nonprofit's performance – a philosophy that has guided all his work.

"I think in the long run, transparency is very important. It's a community organization owned by the community, and the community should really know how it's doing, and the community should know what our challenges are, so I'm certainly not going to sugar coat anything just to make something look good when it's not," he said.

UCFS has had several major wins under Seeman's tenure. In 2002, it became a federally qualified health center look-alike, which allowed it to seek enhanced reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid.

Officials are hoping to finally shed that "look-alike" status and have submitted an application to become a fully qualified facility with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"He's one of a kind, and a hard act to replace," UCFS board of directors chairwoman Deb Kievits said. "One of the things he's always been compassionate about is the staff and the clients we serve."

UCFS also was able to enroll more than 1,000 people into the Affordable Care Act in 2013, the same year it opened a \$5.5 million expansion of its Edward & Mary Lord Family Health Center.

Seeman plans to stay active with UCFS even after he steps down. The nonprofit's board is keeping him on as a consultant and advisor, and he will be involved in the search for his replacement – a process that could keep him in the CEO's office for a bit longer than scheduled.

"If January 8 comes and there's no one in place, three more months, four more months, whatever it takes to find the right person," he said. Officials are accepting applications for Seeman's replacement until the end of May, when a search committee will be formed to winnow down a pool of finalists.

Pamela Allen Kinder, UCFS's vice president of marketing and facilities, said Seeman views himself as a sounding board for employees, and takes their feedback to heart when he returns from listening sessions.

"Every month, the staff are invited and he gives them an update of what's going on, the good, the bad and the ugly, and he listens to concerns," she said. "Not many CEOs spend hours each month going to each site and listening to the staff and not just listening, but taking back their considerations."



United Children and Family Services CEO Chuck Seeman will retire at the beginning of 2016. Aaron Flaum/
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